

Sociocultural, Linguistic and Literary Perspectives on Heavy Metal Lyrics

Edited by
RIITTA-LIISA VALIJÄRVI
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Metal Music and Culture

Multilingual Metal Music

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Multilingual Metal Music: Sociocultural, Linguistic and Literary Perspectives on Heavy Metal Lyrics

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Contents

List of Tables and Figures	ix
Author Biographies	xi
List of Contributors	xv
Acknowledgements	xvii

Introduction to Multilingual Metal

<i>Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi, Charlotte Doesburg, and Amanda DiGioia</i>	1
---	---

Part I: Texts and Intertextuality

Chapter 1 Yiddish Metal as a Manifestation of Postvernacularity

<i>Lily Kahn</i>	9
------------------	---

Chapter 2 Baudelaire and Black Metal: Performing Poetry under *Perestroika*

<i>Caroline Ardrey</i>	27
------------------------	----

Part II: National, Cultural and Minority Identity

Chapter 3 *Større enn tid, tyngre enn natt* – The Interplay of Language and Cultural Identity in the Lyrics of Norwegian Metal Bands

<i>Imke von Helden</i>	49
------------------------	----

Chapter 4 Spanish and Non-Spanish Perspectives on El Cid in Heavy Metal: Identity Vindication, Cultural Appropriation and Islamophobia

<i>Amaranta Saguar García</i>	61
-------------------------------	----

Chapter 5 At the Crossroads of Nordic Traditions and Languages: The Representation of the Swedish-Speaking Finn Community in Finnish Heavy Metal	
<i>Lise Vigier</i>	79

Part III: Processing Oppression, War, and Bereavement

Chapter 6 Poetic Analysis of the Anti-war Song <i>Muerte en Mostar</i> by the Spanish Heavy Metal Band Desafío	
<i>Elena-Carolina Hewitt</i>	97

Chapter 7 Vocalising a Troubled Past: A Case Study of Political Activism in Taiwanese Metal	
<i>Kevin Kai-wen Chiu</i>	113

Chapter 8 <i>Til Opalsøens Dyb</i> ‘To the Depths of Opal Lake’: On Bereavement, Locality, and Intimacy in Danish Black Metal Lyrics by Orm	
<i>Tore Tvarnø Lind</i>	133

Part IV: Local, Global, Authentic, and Funny

Chapter 9 <i>I Custodi dell’Accaio Inox</i>: Language as an Interface Between the Global and the Local in Italian ‘Heavy Metal Demenziale’	
<i>Karl Farrugia</i>	153

Chapter 10 The Paradoxical Usage of Austrian Dialects of German in Metal Music	
<i>Peter Pichler</i>	171

Chapter 11 Delusions of Grandeur? Producing Authentic Metal Music in the Soviet Union	
<i>Dawn Hazle</i>	185

Chapter 12 Is <i>Kawaii</i> Metal? Exploring <i>Aidorul</i> Metal Fusion Through the Lyrics of Babymetal	
<i>Lewis F. Kennedy</i>	201

Part V: Ancient Languages and Mythology

Chapter 13 <i>Nata vimpi curmi da: Dead Languages and Primordial Nationalisms in Folk Metal Music</i> <i>Simon Trafford</i>	223
Chapter 14 <i>Verba Bestiae: How Latin Conquered Heavy Metal</i> <i>Flavio M. Cecchini, Greta H. Franzini and Marco C. Passarotti</i>	241
Chapter 15 <i>Local Folk Tales, Legends, and Slavic Mythology in Slovenian Heavy Metal Lyrics: A Quantitative Analysis</i> <i>Anamarija Šporčič and Gašper Pesek</i>	263
 Index	 283

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List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Chapter 5

Table 1.	Linguistic Choices of Finland Swedish Metal Bands.	83
----------	--	----

Chapter 14

Table 1.	Number of Metal Bands Per Country Represented by at Least Two Bands in the <i>Verba Bestiae</i> (VB) Corpus as Compared to EM, Ordered by Ratio.	246
Table 2.	In Metal Lyrics, Latin is Mostly Found Alongside English, followed by Italian and French.	247
Table 3.	Representation of Metal Subgenres in Our Corpus of Lyrics and in EM, Ordered by Ratio.	248
Table 4.	Number of Manually Identified Reuses in the <i>Verba Bestiae</i> Corpus.	249
Table 5.	Distribution of Latin Text and Reuse across Metal Subgenres.	251

Figures

Chapter 7

Figure 1.	The First Block of <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i>	118
Figure 2.	Structure of <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i>	121
Figure 3.	Block 1 in <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i> .	122
Figure 4.	Blocks 2–4 and 7–10 Repeating and Varying a Metal-Erhu Pattern in <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i> .	122
Figure 5.	Timings of the Piano, the Pipa, and the Erhu in Block 5 in <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i> .	122
Figure 6.	The Erhu and the Pipa in Blocks 3 and 8 in <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i> .	123

Figure 7.	Times and Connotations of the Piano, the Pipa, and the Erhu during the Conversation (block 5) in <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i> .	123
Figure 8.	End Shot of <i>Just Not Meant to Be</i> (Crescent Lament, 2015).	125
Chapter 8		
Figure 1.	Orm (2019) <i>Ir</i> , Album Cover. Used with Permission.	138
Figure 2.	Orm: <i>s/t</i> , Note the Burning Castle, Hammershus, and the Worm Approaching the Coast. Used with Permission.	141
Chapter 14		
Figure 1.	The 20 Most Frequent Words in the <i>Verba Bestiae</i> Corpus.	255
Figure 2.	The 20 Most Present Words in the <i>Verba Bestiae</i> Corpus.	256
Figure 3.	Word Cloud of the Most Frequent Words in English Metal Lyrics. (Iain, 2016)	257
Figure 4.	Most Metal Words in English Lyrics According to the <i>Degenerate State</i> Blog (Iain, 2016).	258
Chapter 15		
Figure 1.	Number of Slovenian Metal Bands in Terms of Availability of Lyrics. bc, Bandcamp; MA, The Metal Archives; YT, YouTube..	268
Figure 2.	Number of Slovenian Bands with English Lyrics.	269
Figure 3.	Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Lyrics in Slovenian.	269
Figure 4.	Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Lyrics Both in English and Slovenian. En, English; Sl, Slovenian.	270
Figure 5.	Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Slavic Content.	271
Figure 6.	Number of Bands with Slavic Content Based on the Language of Their Lyrics. En, English; Sl, Slovenian.	272
Figure 7.	Number of Slavic Elements within Larger Motif Categories in Slovene Metal Lyrics.	273

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Introduction to Multilingual Metal

*Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi, Charlotte Doesburg,
and Amanda DiGioia*

Weinstein (2000, pp. 5–7) describes the heavy metal genre as made up of three essential aspects: the sonic, the visual, and the verbal dimension. Relatively little attention has been paid exclusively to the verbal aspect, that is metal lyrics, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Sellheim, 2016; Spracklen, 2015). Many early studies of metal music were Anglo-centric, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom or the United States (e.g. Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000). There have been some recent studies on heavy metal practices and lyrics in individual countries and cultures, e.g. Islamic societies (Hecker, 2012; Levine, 2008), Puerto Rico (Varas-Díaz & Rivera-Segarra, 2014), Aboriginal Australia (Mansfield, 2014), Finland (e.g. Karjalainen & Sipilä, 2016), and Norway (von Helden, 2017). The edited volume about global heavy metal culture by Wallach, Berger, and Greene (2011) features chapters on the Easter Islands, China, Japan, Israel, Nepal, and Malta, among others.

The present volume will build on the growing body of literature on the global metal scene by focusing on the textual analysis of heavy metal lyrics written in languages other than English, or English lyrics which make use of loans or elements from other languages. Analysing the lyrics written in languages other than English can help to gain a deeper understanding of the specific cultures and trends in global heavy metal, as well as the function of lyrical choices in metal. In addition to the lyrics, the visuals as well as the cultural and political context of the various bands are discussed in the chapters. The contributions in this volume cover a wide geographical range from Norway and Russia to East Asia. Even the use of Latin is included, as is Yiddish, another language that transcends human-made borders.

We have divided the book in five thematic sub-sections based on the primary use and function of lyrics. This division is more helpful for the reader than a geographical division as there are parallels between very different cultures and areas in the use of the lyrics. The first part *Texts and Intertextuality* is about the repurposing of texts in metal lyrics. Lily Kahn writes about two bands that sing in Yiddish, Gevolt (Israel) and Dibbukim (Sweden). The bands have chosen classic Yiddish song texts and melodies. Kahn analyses this choice in the light of the concept postvernacularity. Kahn shows that Yiddish has an important symbolic

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and iconic role in Jewish life and heavy metal lyrics. Caroline Ardrey analyses the way in which Baudelaire's poetry is used in Russian translation by the Soviet black metal band Chernyi Obelisk. She sees this intertextual and interlingual dialogue with Baudelaire as a dark aesthetic and transgressive response to social and political uncertainty. Baudelaire's poems were used to create authenticity at an uncertain time.

The second part of the volume *National, Cultural, and Minority Identity* contains three chapters. Imke von Helden analyses the language choices and lyrical themes of three Norwegian bands, Enslaved, Solefald, and Wardruna. Norse themes, such as the Viking Age, Norse mythology, and nature are related to the use of different types of Norwegian, namely Bokmål, Nynorsk, Høgnorsk, and various dialects. She analyses the notion of cultural identity and how the lyrics and aesthetics of metal bands contribute to the creation of a collective national identity. Amaranta Saguar García, on the other hand, focuses on Spanish cultural identity and cultural appropriation by investigating lyrics about the Castilian lord Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, also known as El Cid. She finds a noted difference in the treatment of this character between Spanish and non-Spanish heavy metal bands. She argues that for Spanish and Spanish-American bands, El Cid serves the purpose of a stereotypical heavy-metal medieval knight and, thus, functions as a celebration of Hispanic cultural heritage within a musical scene that is mostly dominated by Anglo-American, Germanic, and Nordic cultures. Saguar García also examines the use of El Cid as the defender of Western Christian ideology and identity. Identity also plays a role in Lise Vigier's chapter. She focuses on the linguistic choices of the bands Finntroll, Turisas, and Ondfödt, whose members belong to the Swedish-speaking Finn (also known as Finland-Swedish) minority community. Vigier demonstrates that due to their minority identity, these bands are more inclined to incorporate a wider array of cultural influences from both Finland and Scandinavia into their music. She shows how these bands and their lyrical output are at the crossroads between Scandinavian and Finnic influences.

The third part of the volume titled *Processing Oppression, War, and Bereavement* contains chapters where one of the functions of the lyrics or songs is to process negative events and experiences. Elena-Carolina Hewitt analyses the Spanish metal band Desafío's song *Muerte en Mostar*. Her literary poetic analysis shows that the song is about the events that took place during the war of Bosnia–Herzegovina. The usual battle metaphors are not there to incite further violence. Instead, the song is about the futility of war and suffering, and is linked to the empathy shown and humanitarian aid provided by Spanish UN soldiers. Kevin Kai-wen Chiu discusses the political activism of various Taiwanese metal artists whilst also investigating the politically charged song *Just not meant to be* (2015) by the Taiwanese metal band Crescent Lament. Chiu's case study reveals a complex picture. The hybrid, incomplete, and split identity in the song is not only a comment on Taiwanese identity and independence struggles but also on Taiwanese metal. Chiu concludes by critically stating that Taiwanese metal culture is elitist and Han Chinese. Tore Tvarnø Lind's chapter is about trauma on a more individual level. He analyses the concepts of cultural intimacy and bereavement by suicide

in the production of the Danish black metal band Orm, especially their 2019 album *Ir* 'verdigris'. He entangles the complex emotional and personal relations to the local, natural surroundings of the island Bornholm, local folklore, and Norse mythology. Lind's chapter suggests that black metal music such as Orm's *Ir* facilitates and supports important pain work, offering listeners the means of processing trauma and embarrassment.

The fourth part *Local, Global, Authentic, and Ironic* contains four chapters. Karl Farrugia has chosen to focus his analysis on the Italian comedic music genre known as *rock demenziale* that employs nonsense and surrealism, turning the conventions of metal upside down. The most famous representative of the Italian comedic genre is the Roman band Nanowar of Steel that makes fun of the grandiose style and imagery of power metal. Rock demenziale is a prime example of localisation of metal where language, wordplay, puns, and local cultural knowledge are vital for understanding the songs, a topic that has received little attention in metal studies so far. Farrugia's chapter helps to decode the parody of and local references made by Nanowar of Steel. Peter Pichler's chapter is also about the localisation of metal, this time in Austria and the use of Austrian dialects in the sonic landscape of the country's metal scene. Pichler writes about the use of irony in the lyrics of Austrian band Alkbottle that deconstructively ridicules Austrian identity. Pichler also analyses the nationalist use of language by another Austrian metal band, Varulv. According to Picher, these two different approaches to localisation in the Austrian metal scene is caused by the frictions in Austria's twentieth century history. Dawn Hazle's chapter takes us back to the Soviet Union and the localisation of its metal scene in the 1980. Her chapter shows that access to Western metal music was limited in Soviet Russia. This resulted in the fact that bands, such as the Soviet metal band Aria, stayed close to the metal music available to them, whilst at the same time negotiating this with Russia's literary heritage through lyrics written in Russian. Hazle also analyses the concept of commercialism in relation to authenticity in the latter years of Soviet Union. Lewis Kennedy's chapter is about the Japanese female-fronted band Babymetal and how it relates to its idol culture. In this quite extreme form of localisation, metal is mixed with *kawaii*, that is, cuteness. Kennedy analyses Eastern and Western influences of Babymetal, their reception in Anglophone press and media, and the lyrical themes of childishness and adolescence in the first two albums of the band.

The last part of this edited volume, *Ancient Languages and Mythology* contains three chapters. Simon Trafford analyses the use of dead or ancient languages in folk metal. His case studies include the use of Old Norse in Viking metal by bands such as the Norwegian Enslaved and the use of the partially made-up Gaulish by the Swiss Eluveitie. This choice of language is motivated not only by the rejection of an Anglophone neoliberal cultural hegemony but also by a desire to be more extreme and transgressive. Flavio Cecchini, Greta Franzini, and Marco Passarotti focus on the wide-spread use of Latin in metal music. They have compiled a *Verba Bestiae* corpus. Through a thorough analysis of this corpus they provide quantitative data on specific Latin words and correlate that, for example, to sub-genres of metal. The writers conclude that the use of Latin in metal music is pervasive

due to its religious, epic, and mystical connotations, therefore, adding an air of authenticity to the lyrics. This quantitative discussion on the use of Latin in various metal genres and by a great number of artists complements Trafford's qualitative and critical chapter. The book concludes with Anamarja Šporčič and Gašper Pesek's analysis of the use of local folk tales, legends, and Slavic mythology in Slovenian heavy metal lyrics. Their approach is quantitative and includes invaluable data in the understudied field of Slovenian metal.

The themes and functions of non-English lyrics or elements in the sub-sections of this volume described above are, naturally, interconnected and the division into thematic parts could have been done differently. For example, the experience of trauma is relevant also in Kahn's chapter: the use of Yiddish lyrics as the choice of language is a type of celebration and act of processing an oppressed identity and traumatic history. Pichler's chapter could also be related to national trauma because of the troubled history of Austria. Authenticity is relevant in any choice of lyrical themes and language, and it is discussed also in Ardrey's, Trafford's, and von Helden's chapters. The choice of language can also have to do with sounding extreme, as pointed out not only by Trafford but also by Pichler. Globalisation, mixing of musical styles, and switching to English are relevant in von Helden's analysis of Enslaved and Solefald. The use of non-English lyrics in metal and adding inspiration from folk poetry, mythology, or local culture could, in fact, be seen as an example of glocalisation of metal rather than of intertextuality (cf. Stenglin, 2012). A study of glocalisation is the study of the impact of global discourses and social practices on local practices. One could view it in negative terms as a McDonaldisation of metal where the same product is adapted to local markets (cf. Ritzer, 1993/2004), or one could see it in terms of diversification of metal music where local instruments, concerns and texts are added to the genre (cf. Wallach et al., 2011).

Finally, this volume goes beyond typical discussions of ethnic revival and identity in metal, which, as Spracklen (2017) states, are often focussed around elitist narratives of imperial, white, masculinity. The minority perspectives included in our volume are Yiddish metal, Taiwanese metal activism, Finland-Swedish minority metal, and Spanish-medium metal. In the future, we would like to see not only more detailed analyses of metal lyrics but also further studies on the function of metal lyrics in minority languages and in minority-culture contexts, and in countries outside Europe and the United States.

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Part I

Texts and Intertextuality

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Chapter 1

Yiddish Metal as a Manifestation of Postvernacularity

Lily Kahn

Abstract

This chapter investigates Yiddish-language heavy metal music as a manifestation of postvernacularity. Yiddish, the traditional language of Ashkenazic Jews, is now endangered with a geographically dispersed speaker base and a low rate of transmission to younger generations outside of strictly Orthodox communities. However, as the heritage language of most Ashkenazic Jews, Yiddish continues to play an important symbolic role in contemporary Jewish life even among those who do not speak or understand it. This phenomenon has been termed ‘postvernacularity’ (Shandler, 2006).

Yiddish is associated with a rich tradition of folk songs, popular songs, and ballads. Recent decades have seen a growing interest among younger generations in Yiddish language and culture, including its musical tradition. In addition to musicians specialising in traditional Yiddish song, there are also currently two bands worldwide who have produced a metal album in Yiddish: *Gevolt* (Israel) and *Dibbukim* (Sweden). The repertoire of both bands is comprised largely of classic Yiddish songs interpreted in a metal style but retaining the traditional lyrics and melodies.

The fact that these metal bands often choose to reinterpret traditional staples rather than composing original Yiddish songs can be seen as a reflection of the predominantly postvernacular status of Yiddish. The language plays an iconic role for band members and audiences. Concurrently, the fusion of familiar Yiddish songs with metal style reinterprets a musical tradition often associated with pre-Holocaust Ashkenazic society for the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Yiddish; Jewish; postvernacular; heavy metal; klezmer; folksongs

Introduction

This chapter investigates Yiddish-language heavy metal music as a manifestation of postvernacularity. Yiddish is the traditional language of Ashkenazic (Central and East European) Jewry. It likely emerged sometime around 1000 CE in the Germanic-speaking regions of Central Europe, either the Rhineland or Bavaria (see Kahn, 2017). Yiddish is a Germanic language with significant Semitic and Slavic lexical and grammatical components. It was the main language of Eastern European Jews until the mid-twentieth century, with approximately 11–12 million speakers worldwide on the eve of the Second World War.

Yiddish had an established literary tradition which first emerged in the medieval period. Beginning in the nineteenth century, it developed into a modern literary language, and, by the interwar period, it was the vehicle of a flourishing press, original and translated fiction, a vibrant theatrical scene, and a popular film industry (see Kahn, 2017). This flourishing Yiddish-speaking cultural activity was cut short by the Holocaust, which decimated the Eastern European Jewish population. Combined with other major historical factors such as mass emigration from Eastern Europe, which had started in the late nineteenth century and led to widespread linguistic assimilation among subsequent generations; Stalinist repression of Yiddish in the Soviet Union from the late 1930s onwards; and the establishment of Hebrew as the vernacular in Ottoman and Mandate Palestine and later the State of Israel, Yiddish language and culture suffered a severe decline from the mid-twentieth century onwards (Harshav, 1990, pp. 84–88). As a result, in the twenty-first century, it is classified by UNESCO as a ‘definitely endangered’ language. Its speakers are dispersed internationally, it has no official national status anywhere in the world, and it benefits from very little to no state support or infrastructure.

Estimates of current Yiddish speaker numbers vary widely, from anywhere between half a million to two million, with difficulties including lack of consistent census data for the geographically discrete communities and uncertainty regarding levels of fluency. However, it is clear that for the most part, Yiddish continues to be transmitted to children only within Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Ashkenazic Jewish communities, whereas among other sectors of Ashkenazic Jewish society, it has largely ceased to function as a vernacular for all but the oldest generations. Outside of the Haredi community, Yiddish can be studied as an academic subject in dozens of universities worldwide, with heritage students and others gaining fluency in the language through such courses as well as through summer schools in various locations. However, the numbers of such individuals are relatively small, and do not constitute a substantial population of intergenerational speakers.

Yiddish Music

In addition to its literary heritage, Yiddish is associated with a long and extremely rich musical tradition dating back to the medieval and early modern periods (see Matut, 2011). Yiddish music includes a large repertoire of folksongs (see Rubin,

1979), many of which date back hundreds of years and share characteristics with the music of the Eastern European host nations (Slobin, 2010). Yiddish-speaking culture also has a vibrant tradition of instrumental music, often featuring the clarinet and violin, and traditionally performed at weddings and other special occasions. This instrumental style has become famous in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries under the label of 'klezmer', which derives from the Yiddish word for the itinerant musicians who traditionally performed it (Feldman, 2010; Sapoznik, 1999).

In the early twentieth century, a Yiddish ethnographic movement emerged, whereby Eastern European Jews began to conduct expeditions to collect and document various aspects of Yiddish folk culture, including music and traditional folksongs (see Gottesman, 2003). This period saw the rise of professional Yiddish poets and songwriters whose works were set to music based on these traditional folk melodies. At the same time, new compositions created for the Yiddish theatre and, slightly later, film industry, began to emerge on a large scale. Many of these songs gained huge popularity among Yiddish-speaking Jews in Eastern Europe and among the immigrant communities in North America and elsewhere, and would become established staples of the Yiddish musical repertoire.

In the interwar period, during the peak of Yiddish-language creativity, Yiddish musical styles were not restricted to the traditional folk melodies but also engaged with and adapted the musical traditions of other cultures. For example, tango, which is thought to have emerged in Buenos Aires in the late 1800s and early 1900s based on earlier Latin American dance styles, became popular among Eastern European Jews at this time, and Yiddish-language tangos were created in the pre-war and wartime periods, even in the ghettos and concentration camps (Czackis, 2003). Likewise, swing music was incorporated into the Yiddish repertoires of the pre-war and wartime periods (Wood, 2007b, p. 368; Yiddish Radio Project, 2002). As with Yiddish language and culture more generally, the Holocaust had a sudden and catastrophic effect on the trajectory of Yiddish music (see Wood, 2002). In the post-Holocaust period, the secular Yiddish song repertoire that emerged in the interwar years has typically become taboo in Hasidic communities, being regarded as impure (see Wood, 2007c, p. 209). This is particularly true of the younger generations, in contrast to older Hasidic Jews who grew up in the pre-war period when there was more communication and cultural exchange between Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jewish communities (see Vaisman, 2013, pp. 344–345). Outside of Hasidic circles, Yiddish music has experienced a revival since the 1970s (Wood, 2007b), in tandem with the broader reawakening of interest in Yiddish language and culture mentioned above.

Postvernacular Yiddish Language and Music

While Yiddish has for the most part been lost as a Jewish vernacular outside the Haredi community, the past few decades have seen a growing interest among the descendants of non-Haredi Yiddish speakers in reconnecting with their Eastern European linguistic and cultural roots. One of the main elements driving this

rekindled interest is a desire to engage with the music of the Yiddish-speaking world. Thus, on many occasions, musicians from diverse backgrounds, both Jewish and non-Jewish, with an interest in performing klezmer music and Yiddish folksongs, may seek to familiarise themselves with the Yiddish language at least to some extent so that they can better understand the songs which they interpret. However, in many cases, this engagement with the Yiddish language is largely symbolic in nature: as such, it is common for musicians who perform in Yiddish never to achieve a solid grounding in the language (see Wood, 2007b, p. 374). Thus, within this context, music plays an important role as a potent method of connecting with Yiddish culture and the Yiddish-speaking heritage, which often remains somewhat separate from an actual desire to become a speaker of the language. This phenomenon has been termed ‘postvernacularity’ by Jewish Studies scholar Jeffrey Shandler (2006). Postvernacularity refers to the life of a language after it has ceased to function as an everyday spoken language. This theoretical framework could be applied to any language which continues to play a role in the life of a cultural group after it is no longer a vernacular – e.g. Greek, Latin, and other ancient languages, as well as endangered and moribund minority languages which continue to possess an important symbolic function after they have largely stopped being spoken by their traditional community (see e.g. Moriarty, 2011).

In the case of Yiddish, as mentioned above, the language is still alive, so postvernacularity does not apply to it across the board in the same way that it does for ancient languages such as Latin or Greek. However, given that in non-Haredi Jewish communities, Yiddish has largely ceased to serve as a vernacular and exists primarily as a symbol of Ashkenazic heritage, the concept of postvernacularity is an extremely appropriate lens through which to examine it. In his work on postvernacularity vis-à-vis Yiddish in American Jewish culture (which is largely Ashkenazic), Shandler has noted different realms where the language plays an important cultural role among people who do not speak it fluently, or indeed at all. These include the use of Yiddish in material culture (e.g. coffee mugs, T-shirts, tote bags, fridge magnets, etc.) with single Yiddish words on them like *mentsh* ‘a decent human being’, *oy vey* ‘oh dear’, and *yenta* ‘busy-body’, and popular Yiddish dictionaries focusing on curses and other words which are often familiar to postvernacular heritage speakers, and which are often regarded as ‘funny’ or ‘cute’. Frequently these have become distilled as representatives of Yiddish culture by people who often think of the language as simply a collection of curses and funny expressions. Further research on postvernacular uses of Yiddish among young American Jews in the twenty-first century has been conducted by Benor (2013). Her findings include the discovery that the use of Yiddish lexical items has increased among young people in comparison with the previous generation, despite their lack of direct contact with the language (less than 2% of her survey respondents reported proficiency in the language). The use of Yiddish vocabulary seems to serve as an expression of ethnic identity (Benor, 2013, p. 323), which correlates with the increasing interest and pride in the Yiddish-speaking heritage observed in recent decades mentioned above.

A specific expression of postvernacularity that [Shandler \(2006, pp. 126–154\)](#) has studied is ‘Yiddish as performance art’, which includes the use of Yiddish in theatre, poetry recitals, Yiddish film screenings, dance, and music. Such events have become popular in recent decades with the increased interest in Yiddish culture mentioned above. In such settings, the postvernacular nature of the Yiddish language is clearly evident: being the vehicle of the music, theatre, and poetry, it has a clearly ritual and symbolic value as the linguistic emblem of Ashkenazic culture, rather than as a communicative medium. At such events, the metalanguage is most typically English (see [Wood, 2007a, p. 249](#)), and, in many cases, most of the audience members and sometimes also the performers have little or no understanding of the Yiddish used in the performances ([Wood, 2007b, p. 374](#)).

The hugely important symbolic role of Yiddish in performative settings is summed up by Alicia Svigals, a founding member of the prominent klezmer band The Klezmatics, who observes (cited in [Shandler, 2006, pp. 143–144](#)) that klezmer musicians ‘are now taking on the same role of serving as a cultural avant-garde that rock musicians have played in the West since the 1960s’ [...] ‘if there hadn’t been a Holocaust, she posits, “there would be Yiddish rock bands today, playing the kind of music we play”’. Central to this statement is the notion that if Yiddish-speaking musical culture in its Eastern European heartland had not been so suddenly and violently devastated in the 1940s, it would have evolved naturally so that in the twenty-first century, it would encompass the same diverse range of contemporary genres that music in other languages whose trajectories were not cut short have produced. There is an idea that due to the singular historical circumstances which led to the largescale destruction of Yiddish-speaking culture, present-day musicians working with this tradition now have the responsibility to commemorate, interpret, and promote pre-war Yiddish music and song to keep it alive. This is often manifested in musical performances dedicated explicitly to memorialising and mourning the obliteration of Yiddish culture in the Holocaust (see e.g. [Wood, 2002](#)). This drive to commemorate and preserve goes hand in hand with the recognition that the language itself has not evolved in the same way that it might have done in different historical conditions, as the pervasive lack of in-depth knowledge means that new Yiddish-language literary and cultural production is very limited outside of the Haredi world.

Thus, the act of performing in Yiddish is situated firmly within the context of memorialisation and commemoration of what is widely perceived to be a lost world of Yiddish-language musical creativity. This conceptualisation of contemporary Yiddish song performance as a way of honouring and preserving the musical culture that blossomed predominantly in pre-war Eastern Europe is evidenced by the fact that artists most commonly maintain the classic melodies and traditional musical styles of Yiddish folk and theatre songs, with traditional instruments such as the clarinet and violin featuring prominently. As [Wood \(2007a, p. 248\)](#) observes, given the lack of a geographical Yiddishland towards which enthusiasts of Ashkenazic culture can orient themselves, ‘a present Yiddish cultural space is created via creative engagement with materials of the Yiddish past’.

Yiddish Metal

Only a few years after Shandler's book on Yiddish postvernacularity was published, the world saw the appearance of the first heavy metal album in Yiddish, and there are currently two bands which perform Yiddish metal music, *Gevolt* and *Dibbukim*. The emergence of metal music in Yiddish is a particularly fascinating manifestation of postvernacularity. The choice to produce metal in Yiddish is a striking and perhaps unexpected one because, as [Kahn-Harris \(2011\)](#) has noted, 'Metal is often seen as a quintessentially white, Western, music', and has no overt links with Jewish culture or traditions; in fact, it is often regarded as particularly alien to the Jewish experience. Indeed, associations between metal music and white supremacy (see [Kennedy, 2018](#); [King, 2017](#)), including specifically antisemitic ideologies (see e.g. [Kahn-Harris, 2012](#)), may suggest that the genre is completely incompatible with Jewish language and culture, and that the fusing of the two might be seen as anathema.

Despite such perceptions, the past two decades have seen the emergence of a number of Jewish metal artists, such as the Israeli bands *Orphaned Land*, *Salem*, and *Arallu*, and the New York-based *Jamie Saft*, all of which draw on aspects of Jewish culture in their music (see [Kahn-Harris, 2011](#); [Shinefield, 2011](#)). Notably, *Saft's* album *Black Shabbis* is focussed specifically around the theme of challenging historical and present-day antisemitism, featuring songs devoted to blood libels, massacres of Jews, and other incidents of anti-Jewish violence (see [Kahn-Harris, 2009](#)), and is 'one of the voices out there that stands tall and defiant in the face of much of the anti-Semitism that is promoted by some black and death metal bands' (Jurek, n.d.). However, these bands typically sing in Hebrew or English. Yiddish is not the obvious choice for a contemporary Jewish metal band for two reasons. First, as mentioned above, Yiddish is largely unfamiliar to most of the world's younger generations of Jews, for whom the main two languages are Hebrew (chiefly in Israel) and/or English (particularly in the relatively large Jewish communities of North America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa). Hence, singing in Yiddish would render a band's music comparatively inaccessible, not to mention the fact that most Jewish metal performers are themselves unversed in the language. Second, Yiddish has extremely strong connotations with pre-war Eastern European Jewish culture, which (despite the increased interest among younger Jews in recent decades) nevertheless still suffers from relatively widespread perceptions of being outdated and old-fashioned, conjuring images of older relatives and the strictly religious Haredi community; in short, the very opposite of the sort of subversive culture typically associated with metal music. Hence, the motivation for a metal band to perform in Yiddish could be regarded as extremely low. As such, the fact that two bands have indeed made this choice can be understood as a highly conscious and unexpected decision rather than a practical or incidental one. It might also at first glance seem like a very different phenomenon from the straightforwardly memorialising and commemorative trends seen in the typical examples of Yiddish as performance art discussed above, where the language is generally presented within the context of traditional Ashkenazic musical styles.

However, despite the seeming unlikeliness of the juxtaposition of Yiddish and metal, there are actually some arguments why such a fusion is not only possible but indeed historically apt: as [Kahn-Harris \(2007\)](#) has observed, there are ‘some interesting parallels to be drawn between the iconoclasm and radicalism of secular Yiddish culture and the anti-religiosity of Metal’. The members of one of the two Yiddish metal bands, Dibbukim, also draw on the established strongly secular connotations of Yiddish culture in response to questions regarding the suitability of the language as the vehicle for their non-traditional music, emphasising in an interview that ‘Yiddish is not a religious language’ when asked whether traditional Jews would disapprove of their music ([devil-metal747, 2011](#)). Hence, the active decision that these two bands have made to perform metal in Yiddish despite the practical and cultural reasons not to do so, can, thus, perhaps be seen as the twenty-first-century evolution of the pre-war secular Yiddish trend of adopting non-Jewish musical genres such as tango, jazz, and swing, and developing them in a uniquely Jewish way. When regarded in this light, the decision to fuse metal with Yiddish can be seen as an attempt to pick up from where Svigals’ statement left off, going a step further in mediating the relationship between the preservation of pre-war Yiddish culture, Yiddish as a postvernacular cultural symbol, and the evolution of new genres, a reimagining of what would have happened if the twentieth-century history had treated Yiddish very differently. Moreover, precisely the unlikeliness of the pairing of this ‘old-world’ language with the rebellious and iconoclastic culture of metal music could be regarded as exactly the sort of subversive juxtaposition to be appreciated by fans of the genre, even if they are unaware of the historical link between Yiddish and secular radicalism. Moreover, the choice to sing metal in a language whose speakers were decimated in the Holocaust can be seen as a conscious response to the antisemitic elements extant in the general metal scene (see below for further discussion of this point). It is relevant to note that this twenty-first-century attempt to reimagine Yiddish in new musical contexts is not limited to metal; a similar postvernacular phenomenon has been observed in the sampling of old Yiddish songs in contemporary hip-hop music (see [Smulyan, 2013](#); [Wood, 2007a](#)).

Gevolt

Gevolt, who describe themselves as ‘Yiddish metal pioneers’, are a metal band based in Israel that was founded in 2001 by Anatholy Bonder (vocals), Yevgeny Kushnir (guitars), Oleg Szhumsky (drums), and Max Mann (bass guitar). The founding members were Russian Jews who had immigrated to Israel as teenagers in the 1990s. Gevolt was the world’s first band to combine a metal sound with Yiddish lyrics. Bonder says that ‘in the beginning it was sort of an absurd joke’ to perform metal in Yiddish ([Paraszczuk, 2010](#)), pinpointing the commonly held perception mentioned above that the juxtaposition of the old-world sound of Yiddish folk music with the gritty youth culture of heavy metal seems like a bizarre oxymoron. However, they later ‘started to see that Yiddish is a bridge between the different generations’ ([Paraszczuk, 2010](#)).

Gevolt's music can be classed as industrial metal in the Neue Deutsche Härte style, and the band's sound has been compared to that of the German Neue Deutsche Härte band Rammstein (see e.g. [Brushvox, 2011](#); [Defiler and Klopstock, 2011](#); [Kahn-Harris, 2011](#); [Keum, 2016](#)). However, the line-up also includes a violin, in a nod to traditional Yiddish folk and klezmer style, and the band is sometimes described as metal-folk fusion or metal-klezmer fusion (see e.g. [Frank-Backmann, 2012](#); [Naor, 2013](#)); [Brushvox \(2011\)](#) calls it 'an extremely exciting and creative mixture of metal, industrial, and classic music elements with folk and traditional roots', while [Old Man \(2007\)](#) suggests that it fits in with the folk metal style established by Scandinavian bands. Their singing is characterised by the deep gravelly voice of Anatholy Bonder, whose sound is often likened to that of Rammstein lead vocalist Till Lindemann (see e.g. [Kahn-Harris, 2011](#); [Keum, 2016](#)). On the choice of songs, Bonder notes that 'we chose these old songs because we want to give them a new flavour', adding that they want 'to make today's youth aware of them' ([Paraszczyk, 2010](#)). Thus, their work can be regarded as a way of introducing young metal fans to classic Yiddish songs in a way that appeals directly to their musical tastes. This fits in precisely with the wider aims of the klezmer and Yiddish folk movement's desire to preserve, commemorate, and perpetuate the treasures of Yiddish music for contemporary audiences.

The band's name is based on a common Yiddish expression of horror or annoyance, *gevalt*, or *oy gevalt*, meaning something similar to 'oh no' or 'oh, for God's sake', and, as such, evokes direct associations with the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazic cultural tradition. These associations are obvious even to Ashkenazic Jews who do not actually speak Yiddish, because *gevalt*, or *oy gevalt*, is one of a number of expressions that are widely familiar to and commonly used by heritage speakers with little or no knowledge of the language itself. The immediacy of this association can be observed in the title of one of the blogposts reviewing the band, 'Oy! Gevolt Is Anything But' ([Frank-Backman, 2012](#)), a play on words relying on readers' familiarity with the expression *oy gevalt*. Gevolt itself embodies the concept of Yiddish singing as an expression of postvernacularity, in that the band members do not themselves speak the language, though Bonder has learned to read and understand it, and they have a consultant who helps them with the lyrics in their songs ([Keum, 2016](#)). Similarly, the band's fan base includes not only Yiddish-speaking enthusiasts but also a wider body of people with an interest in Yiddish song as well as in world metal.

Gevolt's first album, *Siddur* 'Jewish Prayerbook' (2006) was in Russian, but at the time of its release, they had already begun putting their idea of singing metal in Yiddish into practice with a metal version of the classic Yiddish folksong *Tum Balalaika* (2005). Importantly from the perspective of the postvernacular role of Yiddish as a symbol of the survival of Ashkenazic culture, Gevolt members say ([Keum, 2016](#)) that the chief factor which cemented their decision to continue singing in Yiddish, and go on to produce an entire album in the language, was their subsequent experience interpreting the song *Zog nit keynmol* 'Never Say'. *Zog nit keynmol* was the anthem of Jewish partisan groups in Vilna and elsewhere in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust, and remains perhaps the most

prominent musical symbol of Jewish resistance to the Nazis (see below for further discussion).

In 2011, Gevolt made history with the production of the world's first full-length Yiddish-language metal album. The album is entitled *AlefBase* (2011), which is a pun on the Yiddish word *alefbeys*, meaning 'alphabet', and 'bass'. As with the name of the band itself, the album's title serves to evoke a central element of Ashkenazic society, the Hebrew/Yiddish alphabet. The *alefbeys* occupies a prominent and highly respected position in Jewish culture, symbolically representing the entire Torah and by extension all of Jewish learning. The name is also an intertextual allusion to the famous late nineteenth-century Yiddish song *Oyfn pripetshik* 'The Alphabet/On the Hearth', by well-known folk poet and composer Mark Warshawsky (1848–1907), which paints a vivid nostalgic picture of how children used to learn the *alefbeys* in *kheyder*, the traditional Eastern European educational establishment for young boys where, starting at the age of three, they would learn to read Hebrew and study the *siddur* and Torah. *Oyfn pripetshik* is a classic staple of the modern Yiddish musical repertoire and is often one of the first songs that beginning students of the language learn in classroom contexts: for example, it features early on in one of the most widely used contemporary Yiddish language textbooks (Zucker, 1994). The juxtaposition of this image of the *alefbeys* with the reference to the bass guitar produces a striking symbol of this fusion of the desire to memorialise the pre-war Yiddish-speaking world of Eastern Europe with the twenty-first-century associations of metal music.

Dibbukim

The second metal band which has produced a full album in Yiddish is called Dibbukim. Dibbukim is based in Sweden and was founded in 2009 by a couple, Niklas and Ida Olniansky, both of whom say that Yiddish and metal are their biggest interests, and that this inspired Ida Olniansky with the idea to combine the two (devilmetal747, 2011). Before founding Dibbukim, Niklas (under the previous surname of Olausson) was a member of the power metal band Broken Dagger (2003–2008) and the Viking metal band Folkearth (2006), and sang for the thrash/doom metal band Veritate between 2009 and 2011.

As in the case of Gevolt, Dibbukim's name reflects the centrality of Yiddish culture to its *raison d'être*. A *dibbuk* (plural *dibbukim*) is the Yiddish and Hebrew word for a figure of Eastern European Jewish folklore, the spirit of a deceased person who takes over a living body in order to express unfinished business (see Scholem, 2007). The prominence of the *dibbuk* in Ashkenazic tradition is exemplified by the fact that it became the subject of a famous expressionistic four-act Yiddish-language play by the prominent writer and ethnographer S. An-ski, *Der dibek: tsvishn tsvey veltn* 'The Dybbuk: Between Two Worlds', which premiered in Warsaw in 1920. *Der dibek* was based on materials collected during An-ski's ethnographic expeditions among Russian Jews before the First World War (Steinlauf, 2010). The play was made into a film of the same name in Poland in 1937, which would later be regarded as a classic of Yiddish cinema

(Hoberman, 2010, pp. 279–285), as well as being adapted into an opera and a ballet, and ‘became the accredited emissary of Jewish theater art to the world at large’ (Steinlauf, 2010).

Dibbukim call themselves a ‘klezmer metal band’. In contrast to Gevolt, which have performed in Russian, Dibbukim’s repertoire is exclusively in Yiddish. They describe their sound ‘as a mix between a metalized version of the old Klezmer tradition and Nordic Folk Metal in the veins of Tyr and Korpiklaani’ ([devilmetal747, 2011](#)), and some elements of their musical style have also been compared to Iron Maiden ([Angry Metal Guy, 2011](#)). Kahn-Harris (2011) describes the band as ‘a standard metal bass/drums/guitar set up with male and female vocals’. The members of Dibbukim are different from those of Gevolt in that they do speak Yiddish, and are involved in other Yiddish cultural projects: for example, in 2010, they founded a Yiddish-language publishing house, Olniansky Text, which commissions original material, mainly children’s books. Indeed, they cite their love of Yiddish and desire to participate in its revitalisation as one of the motivating factors behind their choice to sing in the language, noting that they ‘truly want to spread this wonderful mystic language’ ([devilmetal747, 2011](#)). Moreover, in contrast to Gevolt, some of the songs featured on their full-length album are original compositions. Dibbukim is also different from Gevolt in that it is more closely linked with the traditional klezmer scene: for example, they performed a Yiddish-language cover of *The House of the Rising Sun* at the Lund Klezmer Festival in Lund, Sweden, in 2016. However, Dibbukim resembles Gevolt in that the majority of songs on their album are the same kinds of popular classics that feature on *AlefBase*.

Dibbukim’s first, and to date only, album is called *Az a foygl un a goylem tantstn* ‘When a Bird and a Golem Dance’ (2011). Like *AlefBase*, the title of Dibbukim’s album evokes explicit associations with Yiddish culture. It does this via the reference to the golem, a clay man which according to Jewish legend can be brought to life by magical incantations, and which, like the dibbuk, is a popular fixture of Ashkenazic folklore. The most famous example of this legend is the golem of Prague, who in popular Eastern European Jewish belief is thought to have been created by Judah Loew (d. 1609), the chief rabbi of Prague, to protect the city’s Jews from antisemitic attacks (see [Kieval, 2010](#)).

The Bands’ Repertoires

The types of songs chosen for the Yiddish albums of both Gevolt and Dibbukim clearly illustrate the way in which the bands employ the language as a postvernacular symbol with the innovative twist of adapting it to a non-traditional musical genre. The albums consist primarily of familiar and well-loved Yiddish folk and theatre songs, many of which are familiar to large numbers of Ashkenazic Jews, and all of which are staples of the international klezmer and Yiddish music circuits. In some cases, the same traditional song is performed by both bands, a testament to their popularity and perceived indispensability on what can be regarded as a metal version of a Yiddish ‘greatest hits’ album.

Lullabies and Children's Songs

Perhaps surprisingly from a metal perspective, lullabies and other children's songs feature prominently on both *AlefBase* and *Az a foygl un a goylem tantsn*. For example, both albums include the folksong *A mol iz geven a mayse* 'Once upon a Time', a melancholy lullaby about the downfall of a Jewish king and queen. The lyrics allude to the biblical story of the wicked queen Jezebel recounted in 1 Kings 21, and have also been interpreted as a parable about the Jewish people. Like the other songs on the albums, *A mol iz geven a mayse* has been performed by many eminent Yiddish folk singers, such as Chava Alberstein, an Israeli performer who is well known for her Yiddish repertoire as well as her Hebrew one. The song's chorus includes the refrain *lyulinke mayn feygele, lyulinke mayn kind* 'sleep, my little bird, sleep, my child', which marks it unambiguously as a lullaby. This refrain, along with the rest of the traditional lyrics and the melody, is retained in the metal versions.

Another celebrated Yiddish lullaby, which appears on Dibbukim's album, is *Rozhinkes mit mandlen* 'Raisins with Almonds', which was written by Avrom Goldfaden (1840–1908), popularly known as 'the father of Yiddish theatre'. *Rozhinkes mit mandlen* has been made famous in popular Ashkenazic culture by the Barry Sisters (Minnie and Clara Bagelman), a renowned Yiddish duo who were active in the United States from the 1940s to the 1970s and performed some of the best-known versions of many classic Yiddish songs. Dibbukim's album also includes the lullaby *Oyfn veg shteyt a boym* 'On the Road Stands a Tree', written by the beloved Yiddish poet and balladeer Itsik Manger (1901–1969), whose numerous compositions have become classics (see Gal-Ed, 2016). *Oyfn veg shteyt a boym* is one of his most famous compositions, and has been performed by various singers including Chava Alberstein. It tells the story of a baby bird who yearns to fly off and leave his tree, but who is weighed down literally and figuratively by his mother's excessive worry for his health when he leaves home.

Gevolt's album also includes the traditional children's song *Tshiribim tshiribom*, which has been most famously performed by the Barry Sisters, and the classic song *Der rebe elimelekh* 'Rebbe Elimelech', a Yiddish version of the eighteenth-century English nursery rhyme Old King Cole composed in 1927 by the prominent Yiddish poet and satirist Moyshe Nadir (1885–1943). *Der rebe elimelekh* has been famously performed by many Yiddish folk singers, including, for example, Theodore Bikel, who is well known for his long-standing role as Tevye in the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The fact that lullabies and other children's songs feature so prominently on the two albums, alongside other Yiddish classics, is striking evidence of the bands' desire to honour and commemorate pre-war Ashkenazic musical culture: rather than selecting these songs in order to interrogate or subvert them, they have chosen them because of the centrality of the genre to the traditional Yiddish repertoire, and the fact that these are some of the most well-loved and familiar songs to many Jews of Eastern European heritage. This approach can

be contrasted with the use of lullabies by major English-language metal bands: for example, Metallica's *Enter Sandman* is inspired by a lullaby but is used ironically to invoke the opposite of the calm feelings typically associated with a child's sleep song.

Love Songs

Like lullabies, love songs are a staple of the traditional Yiddish song repertoire, and are as such well represented among the songs on the two Yiddish metal albums. Some of the best-known Yiddish love songs are traditional folksongs without a known author. One of these is perhaps the most famous Yiddish song, *Tum balalaika*, whose lyrics consist of a conversation between a boy and a girl, in which he poses her riddles and she deftly solves them. The song has been made famous in performance by numerous Yiddish folk singers, including the Barry Sisters. *Tum balalaika* appears on both Gevolt's *AlefBase* and Dibbukim's *Az a foygl un a goylem tantsn*, which is a testament to its great popularity and familiarity to generations of Ashkenazic Jews, even those without deep knowledge of Yiddish-speaking culture.

Another well-known love song appearing on Gevolt's album is *Bay mir bistu sheyn* 'You're Beautiful to Me', which was written in 1932 by the Yiddish theatre and vaudeville performer, director, and composer Jacob Jacobs (1890–1977) for a New York Yiddish-language musical play. Like many of the other songs on both albums, *Bay mir bistu sheyn* has been immortalised by various established Yiddish folk singers, including the Barry Sisters, and was also made famous among more general audiences in an English version by the (non-Jewish) Andrews Sisters recorded in 1937.

Theatre Songs

As mentioned above, Yiddish-language theatre and film occupied a central position in pre-war Eastern European Jewish culture, and many of the most famous songs in the traditional Yiddish repertoire were originally composed for the theatre or cinema. One of these is the song *Yidl mitn fidl* 'Yidl with his Fiddle', which appears on Dibbukim's album. It was written by Itsik Manger for an eponymous film which came out in Poland in 1936. The film starred Molly Picon (1898–1992), a luminary of the Yiddish theatre and cinema in the interwar period who performed mostly in the United States. *Yidl mitn fidl* is a romantic musical comedy about a father and daughter musical duo who, when evicted from their lodgings, are forced to set out on the road through rural Poland as itinerant performers. Deeming this lifestyle too dangerous for a young girl, they decide that Picon's character should disguise herself as a boy. The song *Yidl mitn fidl* is cheerful and upbeat in tone, with lyrics describing the pair of klezmer musicians as they journey on a wagon through the Polish countryside, encountering a goat and a bird along the way and commenting on the importance of enjoying life. It is performed to the accompaniment of lively violin music. Made famous by Picon, the song has remained a central element of the Yiddish musical canon. Dibbukim's

version retains the fiddle and cheerful tone of the original, but fuses it with fast-paced metal bass and drums.

Dibbukim's album also features the song *Papirosn* 'Cigarettes', which was composed in the 1920s in Eastern Europe by Yiddish actor, director, and playwright Herman Yablokoff (1903–1981). This heart-breaking song movingly describes the tragic fate of a starving orphan boy forced to eke out a living by selling cigarettes and matches on the street, lamenting the death of his mother and sister from crushing poverty. It was inspired by Yablokoff's own childhood experiences during the First World War and by the post-war sight of children hawking cigarettes on the streets of Poland and Lithuania. The song was popularised on American Yiddish radio in 1932 and then even more so when it featured in a Yiddish play of the same name which Yablokoff produced in 1935. *Papirosn* has since been performed by the Barry Sisters and other famous Yiddish singers. The music is based on a Bulgarian folk tune and it is often performed as a *doina*, a style popular in Ashkenazic Jewish music which derives from a Romanian folk form linked to Middle Eastern musical forms and consists of 'sparse back-up chords against which a soloist improvises a weaving, twisting, plaintive melody' (Slobin, 1987, p. 97). However, it can also be performed in a livelier style. Dibbukim's version, like its other renditions of Yiddish folksongs, preserves the traditional melody.

Resistance Songs

One of the songs on Gevolt's *AlefBase* is the quintessential song of Jewish resistance against the Nazis, entitled *Zog nit keynmol* 'Never Say', also called *Partizaner Lid* 'Partisan Song'. *Zog nit keynmol* was composed in 1943 by the Yiddish poet Hirsh Glick (1922–1944), a Yiddish poet and editor who spent the early 1940s in the Vilna Ghetto and nearby forced labour camps (Schulman & Miller, 2007) and subsequently died fighting the Nazis in Estonia after escaping from a concentration camp. The song vividly evokes the partisans' struggles in the ghettos and camps with lines such as *dos hot a folk tsvishn falndike vent / dos lid gezungen mit naganes in di hent* 'a people between collapsing walls / sang this song with pistols in their hands'. It has been immortalised by a number of established Yiddish singers, including Chava Alberstein and Martha Schlamme, an extremely well-known Austrian-born performer of Yiddish folk songs who was active in the United States from the 1950s to the 1980s.

As the band members observe in an interview (Keum, 2016), they were inspired to perform this song in a metal style because it 'touched the members of the band deeply and motivated them further to "make it powerful. Because of this song, the whole album *AlefBase* came out. With this song, we knew we had to do it.'" This is perhaps the most striking example of the two bands' postvernacular drive to preserve and honour Yiddish heritage: it was *Zog nit keynmol*'s powerful emotional associations with Jewish resistance and the cultural world destroyed in the Holocaust which motivated Gevolt's members to commit themselves to singing in their heritage language, even though they were not actually speakers of it, and thus to play a role in its continued existence. In this respect, the band's choice of song can be regarded as the same type of commemoration of the Holocaust and

the destruction of Yiddish musical culture often seen in more traditional klezmer performances. It also serves as a direct challenge, like Jamie Saft's *Black Shabbis*, to the racist and antisemitic elements that exist within metal culture. (Indeed, protest songs are a well-established element of metal music more broadly; see Malott & Peña, 2004; Varas-Díaz & Scott, 2016). Ironically, a recent review of *AlefBase* featured on the Bulgarian metal webzine *Today's Metal – Bulgaria* (Zorn, 2011) is itself laden with overtly antisemitic tropes, including comments such as *se pred-laga bezplatno (evrei – bezplatno, zabelezhete ironijata)* '[the album] is available for free (Jews – free, note the irony)' and *ne e zad'lzhitelno da xaresvate evreite kato nacija, za da xaresate tozi album* 'you do not have to like the Jews as a nation to like this album'. These comments highlight the importance of the very existence of explicitly Jewish bands such as Gevolt and Dibbukim within the metal scene. More broadly, Gevolt's choice to perform *Zog nit keynmol* can be regarded as part of a global trend whereby minority peoples harness contemporary musical genres as a way of dealing with historical traumas (see Sheffield, 2011 for a discussion of this phenomenon in the case of Native American hip-hop). Kahn-Harris (2011) suggests that Gevolt's selection of *Zog nit keynmol* may also raise additional questions such as the possibility that Yiddish metal is a 'celebration of Jewish – non-Zionist – hardness' or an 'ironic exploration of Jewish hard masculinity', which adds another layer of complexity to this desire to memorialise pre-war Yiddish culture and to process its loss.

Original Compositions

While the majority of songs on the Yiddish albums by Gevolt and Dibbukim are rooted directly in the traditional Yiddish folk and theatre song repertoire, both bands exhibit a degree of interest in moving away from the purely memorialising role typical of postvernacular Yiddish culture by creating original material in the language. This is most evident in the work of Dibbukim, as *Az a foygl un a goylem tantsn* includes four original compositions in addition to the five traditional ones (plus two instrumental tracks). The original songs are *A mabl fun mashke* 'A flood of drink', a song about how drinking can drown your sorrows (which is also a popular theme in metal more broadly, e.g. Alestorm's *Whisky Hangover*, Korpiklaani's *Vodka* and *Happy Little Boozers*); *Khaloymes* 'Dreams', which contains folkloric elements such as the golem; *Der rodmakher* 'The Wheel-maker', about how we let earthly things control our lives; and *Hinter dem tol* 'Behind the Valley', about a *shretl*, a 'gnome' of Yiddish folklore. Examination of the titles and themes of these songs shows that, like those deriving from the traditional repertoire, they focus on Yiddish culture and folklore. This underscores the fact that the bands' main motivation behind choosing to sing in Yiddish is to commemorate and preserve this culture (in addition to their associations with other types of metal, as in the case of *A mabl fun mashke*).

While Gevolt's original work is, thus, far more limited than that of Dibbukim, in 2015 they released an original single, called *Khokhotshet* 'Guffaw', accompanied by a video with futuristic, urban, and space images such as skyscrapers, smartphones, and space stations. The music combines the typical Gevolt industrial

metal style with a klezmer background. In contrast to Dibbukim's original lyrics, those featured in *Khokhotshet* are not explicitly linked to traditional Yiddish folk themes; rather, they are instead quite abstract and seem instead to be more closely tied to the classic metal associations with fantasy, including references to dragons and crowns, with the only clearly Yiddish cultural allusion being a mention of bagels. Gevolt says that they plan to compose more original material, though not exclusively in Yiddish; they also intend to write songs in Hebrew, Russian, and possibly English (Keum, 2016). As Kahn-Harris (2007) has noted, it remains to be seen whether the phenomenon of Yiddish metal creativity develops further, or remains something of 'an interesting curiosity'. As of the time of writing, Gevolt has not produced anything new since *Khokhotshet*, and Dibbukim have not brought out another album since *Az a foygl un a goylem tantsn* was released in 2011.

Conclusion

Yiddish metal music comprises an element of a very particular cultural and sociolinguistic phenomenon, namely the postvernacular use of Yiddish as performance art and symbol of Ashkenazic heritage. Gevolt and Dibbukim take their place alongside the numerous contemporary performers who seek to preserve and interpret pre-war Yiddish musical culture. Their choice of traditional Yiddish songs interpreted in a metal style is based primarily on a desire to honour and perpetuate these classic staples of the Yiddish musical repertoire, rather than as a subversive or critical move. However, these metal bands also play an innovative role that goes beyond the preservation of the traditional Yiddish song repertoire: in addition to doing this, their juxtaposition of well-known Yiddish lyrics and melodies with an identifiably metal style helps to reinterpret Yiddish music for contemporary youth culture. As Shinefeld (2007) comments, 'Gevolt aren't singing nostalgia tunes – they've done nothing less than shaken Yiddish back to life'. In this way, Yiddish metal bands can be regarded as continuing the long-established tradition of innovation within Yiddish musical culture, as evidenced in the pre-war incorporation of genres such as tango and swing into the Yiddish repertoires. In addition, their existence can be seen as a challenge to pervasive antisemitic and neo-Nazi tropes and beliefs that can be observed in the wider metal scene. As such, Yiddish metal goes beyond mere commemoration, instead offering an answer to the impossible question of what Yiddish musical creation might look like in the twenty-first century if the Holocaust had not happened and Yiddish had continued to be the main vernacular of the Ashkenazic Jews.

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Chapter 2

Baudelaire and Black Metal: Performing Poetry under *Perestroika*

Caroline Ardrey

Abstract

This chapter considers the reception of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire through the music of the Soviet metal band Chernyi Obelisk. It argues that Chernyi Obelisk's four Baudelaire settings, performed in Russian, as part of their early live sets in 1986/1987, offer an important part of the poet's reception history within the Soviet Union. Taking as a starting point, Michael Robbins's claim that 'metal and poetry are [...] arts of accusation and instruction', the chapter explores ideas of alienation and of the carnivalesque in Baudelaire's works, as presented through the medium of metal music. Focussing in particular on settings of 'Spleen' and 'Une Gravure fantastique', the chapter contends that Chernyi Obelisk's intertextual and interlingual dialogue with Baudelaire can be read as an aesthetic response to social and political uncertainty during the era of *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

Keywords: Poetry; Soviet Union; black metal; word-and-music studies; Baudelaire; heavy metal lyrics

Introduction

In an article for *Harpers* magazine, entitled 'Destroy Your Safe and Happy Lives: A poet's guide to metal', Michael Robbins argues that 'metal and poetry are, among other things, arts of accusation and instruction. Together with Rilke's archaic torso of Apollo, they say: 'You must change your life'. To see metal as demanding something of us – a fundamental change, a shift in perspective, an acknowledgment that we are *headed in the wrong direction* – is to admit that when we listen to it, we're receptive to its message' (reproduced in [Robbins, 2014](#)

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Equipment for Living, p. 38). This fundamental link between poetry and metal music, both as an expression of dissatisfaction and as a catalyst for or response to change, has, I argue, been a key driver in metal's ongoing dialogue with literature, a dialogue which crosses languages and geographical borders. From Iron Maiden's quoting of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', to German band Zerstörer's death-metal setting of Rainer Maria Rilke's 'Der Panther' ('The Panther'), borrowings from literature and direct settings of poetic texts are commonplace in the sphere of metal music. The interest in Western literature demonstrated by musicians across the globe raises an important question as to what happens to literary texts when they are transformed into other art forms and translated into other languages. Taking a thematic approach, which draws on methodologies from literary studies and from popular musicology, this chapter argues that the transformation of the nineteenth-century French poetry into song marks a fundamental 'shift in perspective', acting as a catalyst for changes to aesthetic values and to the social order.

The link between poetry and metal – these two 'arts of accusation and instruction' – is clearly illustrated by the case of the nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) whose life and works have been a longstanding source of inspiration for metal musicians across the globe from the 1970s to the present day. According to the Baudelaire Song Project database, there are 43 known song settings of poems by Baudelaire which can be classed as 'metal', with bands from across the world taking the nineteenth-century French poet as a source of lyrical inspiration.¹ Notable metal settings of poems by Baudelaire have come from Celtic Frost (Switzerland), Gorgoroth (Norway), Sludge (Switzerland), Chernyi Obelisk (Russia), Mörb (Canada), Sabaoth (Paraguay), Nâstrond (Sweden), Akash (Colombia), Ancient Rites (Belgium) and Leiden (France), demonstrating the wide reach of his poetry. Of the 'metal' settings of poems by Baudelaire, 25 settings are based on translations and/or adaptations from the original French, including texts in English, Serbian, Russian, Nynorsk, Spanish, and Japanese. Drawing on the rich interactions between metal and poetry, established by the Baudelaire Song Project team, this chapter considers the link between a French poet and heavy metal music, a link which traverses geographical and linguistic boundaries; it poses the question of what attracts metal musicians to this famous *poète maudit* and explores what happens when poetry is performed and translated, through the medium of metal music, into another language, era, and cultural context.

Within the context of metal music and its various subgenres, the 1857 verse poem 'Litanies de Satan' ('Litanies of Satan') is the most frequently set to

¹The Baudelaire Song Project (AHRC-funded 2015–2019) has compiled a publicly accessible database listing all known song settings of poems by Baudelaire; as of July 2019, the database comprises more than 1,600 song settings with around 50 settings categorised as metal or sub-genres, thereof, spanning more than eight languages, including English, French, Serbian, Spanish, Japanese and, of course, Russian. See <https://www.baudelaire song.org/search/>.

music of all Baudelaire's works, according to the Baudelaire Song Project database. This is at odds with the trend across the overall corpus of songs, which sees *L'Invitation au voyage* ('Invitation to the Voyage') of 1857 and *La Mort des amants* ('The Death of Lovers'), first published in the 1868 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as the most often set.² While the latter two poems deal with sexuality, sensuality and escapism, either through death or through an exotic voyage of the senses, *Les Litanies de Satan* is a liturgical plea to the devil for mercy. The poem's subversion of the Christian 'Kyrie Eleison' chimes in with the fascination with the diabolical and the interest in subverting Christian conventions which is characteristic of metal music (cf. Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 37–39). *L'Invitation au voyage* and *La Mort des amants*, on the other hand, have garnered famous classical art song settings, with Henri Duparc composing a famous setting of the former in 1870 and Claude Debussy setting both poems to music between 1887 and 1889; the notoriety of these classical settings has, I suggest, set the tone for musical interest in these two poems across the board. Metal music, however, has deviated from the 'classical' trend for musical adaptation of Baudelaire's more sensual poems, instead, privileging darker and often more 'spiritual' works, and setting to music poems which correspond to key themes in metal music, including death, destruction, the occult, power, and rebellion.

This chapter takes as a case study the music of the Russian metal band Chernyi Obelisk (Black Obelisk), who set to music four poems by Baudelaire in Russian translation, between 1986 and 1987. The poems set as metal songs are *Litanies de Satan* ('Litanies of Satan'), *Spleen* (*Quand le ciel bas et lourd...*) ('Spleen (When the low, heavy sky....)'), *Une Gravure fantastique* ('A Fantastic Engraving'), and *Au Lecteur* ('To the Reader'), the prefatory poem to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, which was recorded under the Russian title *Vstuplenie* ('Introduction'). These four tracks appeared on the band's early live sets, performed during the latter years of the Soviet Union, following the implementation of the policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (re-structuring), devised by USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev.³ This chapter examines two of Chernyi Obelisk's four Baudelaire settings – 'Spleen' and *Une Gravure fantastique* – considering themes of melancholia, the gothic, and the carnivalesque within the band's appropriation of Baudelaire's works. For reasons of space, rather than offering a detailed musicological analysis of the songs, the chapter will focus particularly on the cultural underpinnings of the band's engagement with Baudelaire, in the midst of *perestroika*, and the lyrical themes addressed in Chernyi Obelisk's setting of poems from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*Flowers of Evil*, hereafter referred to under their French title). Placing the

²Cf. 'The Baudelaire Song Project database', <https://www.baudelaire song.org/search>.

³For an outline of the political and social background of '*glasnost*' and '*perestroika*', see Gidadhubli, R. G. '*Perestroika* and *Glasnost*.' *Economic and Political Weekly* 22, no. 18 (1987): 784–787. www.jstor.org/stable/4376986; for a discussion of the impact of *glasnost* and *perestroika* on late-Soviet media and culture, see 'Introduction' in *Gorbachev's Glasnost: The Soviet Media in the First Phase of Joseph Gibbs* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), pp. 3–10.

emphasis on the socio-political context in which these songs were composed and performed, this chapter argues that Chernyi Obelisk's engagement with Baudelaire's poetry shows the convergence of these two art forms – metal and poetry – to be, as Robbins puts it, 'arts of accusation and instruction'. However, I diverge from Robbins in claiming that, rather than 'demanding' a 'fundamental change, a shift in perspective', Baudelaire's poetry and Chernyi Obelisk's metal settings of his work interact to offer up a means of responding to change and making meaning in times of upheaval.

Baudelaire

Baudelaire is arguably one of France's most famous literary figures. In his relatively short lifetime, he produced one collection of verse poetry, *Les Fleurs du Mal*⁴ – first published in 1857 – and wrote 50 prose poems, which were published posthumously in 1858, under the title *Le Spleen de Paris* (*The Spleen of Paris*) or *Petits poèmes en prose* (*Little Prose Poems*).⁵ Arguably central to Baudelaire's popularity is the universal and timeless nature of his subject matter – from love and death to religion and industrialisation, themes in Baudelaire's poetry remain topical, even in the twenty-first century. In the *Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, Beryl Schlossman describes how the poet

explores the experience of the self and the other through a singular vision of poetry: time, memory, pleasure, love, suffering and evil [...]. Throughout Baudelaire's works, the separation of mind and body informs his perspective on original sin, laughter, comedy and the human condition. He formulates the intensity of imaginative vision in literature and in the connections among the arts. (Schlossman, 2005, p. 175)

Perhaps because of the varied and often dialectical themes in his poetry, as well as this 'intensity of imaginative vision', Baudelaire has become a key source of lyrical inspiration for musicians across diverse musical genres, from classical art song and opera, to pop, rock, rap, and metal music, with different aspects of his work privileged by musicians of different genres.

One of the driving forces in Baudelaire's poetry is a series of dynamic oppositions, which sees the concept of 'spleen' (explored in more depth later on) pitted against the poetic ideal, ideas of love juxtaposed against destruction, beauty in dialogue with decline, and the divine offset against the diabolical. The undercutting of idyllic poetic commonplaces with their darker, grittier counterparts is central to the poet's modernity, as is his political engagement. Writing in her 'Critical Lives' biography of Baudelaire, Rosemary Lloyd describes how

⁴Baudelaire (1975, pp. 5–134).

⁵Baudelaire (1975, pp. 275–363).

in his early twenties [...] he seems to have been increasingly driven by a sense of rage and revolt against the values embodied by his mother, step-father and half-brother, an anger that found a useful parallel in the political events of a country growing increasingly unwilling to accept the leadership of Louis-Philippe's bourgeois monarchy. (Lloyd, 2008, p. 39)

Baudelaire's personal and political dissatisfaction points to the status of his poetry as an 'art of accusation and instruction', representing a call for change as per Michael Robbins's description. The dynamic force of 'rage and revolt' in Baudelaire's early life and the backdrop of political turmoil under which he grew up chimes in with the rhetoric of alienation and anti-establishment sentiment which characterises much metal music.⁶ I suggest that the themes of alienation and social critique which permeate Baudelaire's poetry are central to his appeal to metal musicians and, in the case of Chernyi Obelisk's metal settings of his work, offer a lens through which to express the political dissatisfaction and uncertainty which characterised youth culture in the late Soviet era.

Baudelaire, Politics, and *Perestroika*

Chernyi Obelisk are a Moscow-based band, founded by Anatoly Krupnov in 1986, shortly after Gorbachev announced the new policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which relaxed censorship laws in the USSR, opened up the possibility of trade with the West, and would, ultimately, lead to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The band is still in existence, though the membership of the group has almost entirely changed and there have been several periods of hiatus in the band's activity, with an almost complete reformulation in 1999, following Krupnov's death in 1997. Chernyi Obelisk was one of the initial members of the Moscow Rock Laboratory, launched in 1985, along with well-known Russian metal bands such as Aria and Crematorium (cf. Soloveichik, 2016; Radio Svoboda, 2015). Prior to 1985, metal music had been largely maligned in the Soviet Union; official channels were critical of Western metal music and metal performances were outlawed, only becoming permitted once again, at least in Moscow, with the cultural about-turn of *glasnost* (see Hazle, 2017, p. 54). The Moscow Rock Laboratory was an officially sanctioned group of artists which 'established rock as a positive social force, celebrating *glasnost* and *perestroika*' (Troitsky, 1987 p. 137). In contrast to the better-known Leningrad Rock Club, which promoted established groups, the Moscow Rock Laboratory was dedicated to launching the careers of new bands (Wickström & Steinholt, 2009, p. 316).

Although the Moscow Rock Laboratory was state sanctioned and allowed rock musicians the freedom to perform in public, this is not to say that the music

⁶See, for example, Jeffrey Arnett's (1996) book: *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, which describes alienation as the 'dominant theme' of metal music (p. 97).

of aspiring rock and metal stars in Russia was liberated from political concerns – indeed the relaxation of trade and censorship laws meant that popular youth culture, although no longer ‘underground’, became increasingly contentious. Writing in 1989, Ernest Mandel notes that: ‘the rebellious spirit which is beginning to manifest itself in the working-class milieu is even more widely spread and better articulated among youth [...] pop concerts become semi-political demonstrations. When, for instance, a young guitarist in a Moscow suburb begins to improvise with a song against the war in Afghanistan, there is enthusiastic applause from his audience’ (Mandel, 1989, pp. 176–177). Youth culture, in particular, was a dynamic force for change under *perestroika* and, as Mandel’s testimony highlights, Moscow was a particular hive of politicised activity, through mass events and, in particular, through musical performance.

It was during *perestroika* that the establishment of sub-groups focussing on social, cultural, and political interests and activities began in Soviet cities. Known as *neformaly* (‘informals’), these groups highlighted social and political tensions and played a key role in driving political unrest. As Russell Bova (2015) asserts, *glasnost* ‘expose[d] hitherto taboo social issues with the express aim of mobilizing party organizations, and the public’, bringing about a demand for political change’ (p. 328). Bova positions young people at the centre of political and media attention ‘and institutional discourse on youth became one in which youth was used symbolically to represent the social marginalization and political disintegration that threatened the country as a whole’ (p. 327). With their focus on apocalyptic themes, on sin, greed, and the flawed human condition – clear both from their Baudelaire settings, and from the lyrics evoked in other tracks in the *Tsvety Zla* (*Flowers of Evil*) and *Apokalipsis* (*Apocalypse*) sets of 1986/1987 – we might see Chernyi Obelisk’s early musical output as exploring and manifesting the social marginalisation of young people during the era *glasnost* and *perestroika*.

The Chernyi Obelisk of the late 1980s revealed themselves to be heavily influenced by literary works both from Russia and from the West. Boobbyer (2005) notes that ‘during the first years of *perestroika*, literary works were at the forefront of ethical debate’ (p. 186). The band’s name is a Russian translation of the title of Erich Maria Remarque’s 1956 novel *Der Schwarzer Obelisk* (*The Black Obelisk*), which the band’s founder, Anatoly Krupnov, happened to be reading shortly after the band’s inception. Set in the 1920s, the novel tells of the experiences of a young First World War veteran, Ludwig, in the aftermath of Germany’s defeat, and in the midst of hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic. The period following Germany’s defeat was a time of national transition and upheaval which led to economic instability and moved power away from the government; the social and political turmoil of this phase of German history might be seen to anticipate the conditions of *perestroika*. As the website devoted to Krupnov highlights, Remarque’s anti-fascist tale of people working together to fight against evil parallels the anti-war sentiments which run through the band’s debut album *Apokalipsis*, pointing to the novel’s influence on the band’s aesthetic (Tarasov, 1988). Although, as Tarasov highlights, *Tsvety Zla* is not quite as obviously concerned with anti-war themes as Chernyi Obelisk’s first

live album, this second Baudelaire-inspired album remained topical and politically engaged:

While the themes of the songs deviated somewhat from the anti-war concept of *Apokalipsis*, it still deals with current, topical issues. The key idea of the second album was to resist apathy and violence. The guys from Obelisk didn't only want to talk about issues close to home; they were talking about the errors of humanity in general, which lead to wars. (Tarasov, 1998; translation author's own)

The reflections on war and on the violence of humanity in Chernyi Obelisk's musical output might be seen as reflecting the outlook of the Soviet youth, who had grown up in the shadow of the Cold War, which began in 1947 and would last until 1991. Boobbyer (2005) notes that, as Gorbachev came into power, 'the republished works of forgotten writers also reinforced the idea that communism had brought about a terrible spiritual crisis' (p. 188). While Remarque's novel is not overtly concerned with communism, its critique of the prevailing selfishness and greed in the Weimar Republic in the wake of the Second World War would seem to reinforce the negative aspects of political change which became apparent under *perestroika*. Chernyi Obelisk's engagement with both Remarque and with Baudelaire evokes a sense of disillusionment characteristic of rock music in 1980s Moscow, as amateur metal musicians sought to launch their careers amidst social, political, cultural, and economic upheaval.

Literature and Authenticity in Metal Music in the Soviet Union

The lyrical content of Chernyi Obelisk's music is typically intellectual and includes wide-ranging cultural and literary references. As well as drawing on the work of Erich Maria Remarque and setting Baudelaire to music, during live performances the band's lead singer, Krupnov, famously quoted lines from Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*, published in 1967, in between songs as part of the band's *Abaddon* set. (see *Istoriya: Pamjat' o proshlom*, n.d.; Yurasov, n.d.). As Polly McMichael highlights 'Soviet rock songwriters were highly conscious of the sense of cultural inferiority which they inherited from Russian literary culture and which, they felt, was further magnified by official attitudes to rock music' (McMichael, 2016, p. 218). Although this sense of cultural inferiority is not entirely evident in the case of the Moscow Rock Laboratory musicians and its members' work was officially sanctioned (indeed, Chernyi Obelisk joined the Laboratory by invitation), the music of bands like Chernyi Obelisk demonstrates a preoccupation with asserting the culturally highbrow status of metal music, which was one of the dominant popular musical trends of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s.

The fascination with literature in Soviet metal music, specifically, goes beyond Russian-language texts, demonstrating a wide-ranging interest in texts from other cultures and drawing especially on those whose works consider particular social,

political or existential themes. As the Soviet musical and cultural critic Artemy Troitsky (1987) has highlighted, Russian rock music of the late twentieth century typically placed significant emphasis on lyrical content, privileging the ‘literary’ nature of song texts (p. 34). Chernyi Obelisk are by no means the only Soviet band to draw on (Western) literary works for inspiration: the Russian band Alisa (Alice) intersperse the tracks of their 1985 album *Energiya* (*Energy*) with fragments of readings of texts by Mikhail Bulgakov, Nikolaj Gogol, and Alexander Ostrovsky (Alisa, 2015). The title track of this album by Alisa closes with a reading of Baudelaire’s ‘Une Charogne’ (‘A Carcass’), once again highlighting Soviet metal’s fascination with literature and particularly with Baudelaire, alongside the German poet Herman Hesse, the Russian novelist Mikhail Bulgakov (Alisa, 2015); the Soviet band ‘Spleen’, on the other hand, demonstrate a keen interest in their own literary heritage, through engagement with the work of Russian dissident poet Josef Brodsky (Spleen, 2008).

Late Soviet metal musicians’ borrowings from canonical literary works in Russian as well as in other languages and cultures is not a new phenomenon, but fits into a longstanding tradition of inter-art dialogue within Russian culture. In *Baudelaire in Russia*, Adrian Wanner traces engagement with Baudelaire in Russia back to the first publication of individual poems in Russian translation, in 1852, some five years before the publication of the first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*. As Wanner notes, the political situation in nineteenth-century France has parallels with that of twentieth-century Russia which, arguably, goes some way to explaining the interest in Baudelaire’s work in the Soviet Union up to and including the fall of the USSR in 1991 (Wanner, 1996, p. 1). While Wanner’s study focusses on Baudelaire’s influence on Russian symbolist and decadent literature of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, many of the same arguments can, I suggest, be made of responses to Baudelaire in the latter part of the twentieth century and – in particular, in the time of *glasnost* and *perestroika* – by Chernyi Obelisk, in the context of intertextual metal studies. Just as for the translator Yakubovich, Baudelaire ‘expressed [...] the gloom and hopelessness typical of the reaction and depravity following the failed 1848 revolution’ (Wanner, 1996, p. 31), Chernyi Obelisk’s appropriation of Baudelaire’s poetry could be viewed as a reaction to *perestroika* which might, itself, be regarded as a revolution (for more on the understanding of *perestroika* as revolution, see Gooding, 1992; Rakitskaia & Rakitskii, 1990). As Wanner asserts ‘Baudelaire’s revolutionary significance must have meant very different things to different readers. It becomes clear that rather than being a quality inherent in specific texts, the Baudelairean revolution is a phenomenon of reader response’ (Wanner, 1996, p. 3). I contend that Chernyi Obelisk’s appropriation of selected texts from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as part of their debut set and live album, highlights an important and new aspect of Baudelaire’s ‘revolutionary significance’ in the latter years of the Soviet Union. Studying Chernyi Obelisk’s Baudelaire settings, thus, offers key insight both into the poet’s reception in Russia in the 1980s, and into the aesthetics of metal during this period of late Soviet history.

Wanner asserts that ‘the variegated and idiosyncratic reaction to Baudelaire in Russia [...] began earlier than anywhere else in Europe’ (Wanner, 1996, p. 1);

metal settings of the poet's work continue this tradition, playing an important part in the poet's reception history in Russia. The 'idiosyncratic' nature of Chernyi Obelisk's engagement with Baudelaire is highlighted by the four poems the band select for musical setting, with 'Une Gravure fantastique' and 'Au Lecteur' being particularly unusual choices. Across all languages, there are just eight known settings of 'Au Lecteur', including one other metal setting by the Serbian band Stone to Flesh. There are only three other known song settings of 'Une Gravure fantastique' in existence, of which two have been composed by the Chicago-based Theatre Oobleck group, as part of their *Baudelaire in Box* performance, while the third is composed and performed by the French *chansonnier*, Georges Chelon, as part of his attempt to set all Baudelaire's verse poems to music. 'Splín', meanwhile is a Russian-language translation of 'Spleen (Quand le ciel bas et lourd....)' ('Spleen' (When the low, heavy sky....)), the final of four poems by Baudelaire bearing this title, which appear in succession in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. This 'Spleen' poem is not especially well-known within musical spheres, with only fifteen known settings of the poem (compared to seventy known settings of 'La Mort des amants' ('The Death of Lovers') and sixty-eight known settings of 'L'Invitation au voyage' (The Invitation to the Voyage)).⁷ Of these fifteen settings of 'Spleen (Quand le ciel bas et lourd....)', there is one other metal setting, which is sung and performed in English, by the Paraguayan band Sabaoth and appears on their 2008 album *Les Illuminations*, an album inspired by the *mal du siècle* of the nineteenth-century French literature including poets such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud (whose 1886 collection of prose poetry inspired the album's name). While 'Spleen (Quand le ciel bas et lourd....)' is not amongst the most famous of Baudelaire's poems generally, its thematic content echoes ideas of melancholia and *ennui* which are commonplace in both metal music and in the Russian aesthetic tradition of decadence and melancholia inherited from French literature, as shall be examined more closely later on.

Spleen

'Spleen' is the fourth track on Chernyi Obelisk's live album, *Tsvety Zla* (*The Flowers of Evil*) and is the only one of the four Baudelaire settings which does not also feature on the *Apokalipsis* live album (Chernyi Obelisk, 1986, 1987). The song is based on the final of four poems in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, all bearing the title 'Spleen', which are found within the first main section of the collection, entitled 'Spleen et Idéal'. Throughout this section of Baudelaire's collection, the melancholic, world-weary disposition of spleen is pitted against the pursuit of an impossible poetic ideal, though, in all four of the 'Spleen' poems glimmers of this 'Idéal' seem few and far between.

This third 'Spleen' poem describes oppressive, dismal climatic conditions, which parallel the speaker's emotional distress and establish a sense of being trapped or hemmed-in. The first quatrain evokes the low, heavy sky which weighs

⁷Cf. The Baudelaire Song Project Database, <https://www.baudelaire song.org/search>.

down upon the spirit and ‘nous verse un jour plus triste que les nuits’ (Baudelaire, 1975, hereafter referred to as OCI, p. 75) (‘pours over us a day darker than the night’). The world evoked by the poem is dark, narrow, and torturous, as is evident in the vocabulary of the poem, which, in the second stanza, likens ‘L’Espoir’ (‘Hope’) to a trapped bat, flapping its wings and banging its head on a rotten ceiling. The dismal situation of the personified figure of Hope might be seen to link to the skepticism felt by the Soviet youth at the promise brought by the new policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, as the Cold War continued, as well as hinting at a response to the possibility of the loss of a familiar way of life and of the advantages offered by the communist ‘regime’. Alexei Yurchak (2005) describes how, with *glasnost* ‘many discovered that, unbeknownst to themselves, [...] they had always known that life in socialism was shaped through a curious paradox, that the system was always felt to be both stagnating and immutable, fragile and vigorous, bleak and full of promise’ (p. 4). The beating wings of the bat, which stands as an incarnation of hope, shares these qualities of vigour and fragility, of bleakness and promise, which *perestroika* brought to the fore. In the third stanza of Baudelaire’s poem, meanwhile, the rain is compared to the bars of a vast prison, and the speaker describes a silent nation of spiders spinning webs in ‘our’ brains. The parallels between the dark, uninviting world presented in ‘Spleen’ and the closed off space of the Soviet bloc, in which spaces and speech were policed, is clear; one might, thus, see *glasnost* itself as likened to a bat, beating against the ‘rotting ceiling’ of Soviet censorship. Written and performed in the early days of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the song can be read as an expression of ‘spleen’, a response to the rapidly changing political environment set in motion by Gorbachev’s new political policies.

Beyond the political metaphors to be found in Chernyi Obelisk’s setting of Baudelaire’s ‘Spleen’, however, the lyrical content of the band’s musical output also plays into important tropes and themes which Russian literature and art has drawn from a varied cultural traditions. The term ‘spleen’ has a rich multilingual and intercultural history, which plays into Chernyi Obelisk’s interest in intertextual references, discussed above. Originating in Hellenic medicine, the idea of spleen as encapsulating an emotional response can be traced to the concept of the four humours, in which the spleen was considered to be the seat of melancholia (cf. Radden, 2000 Chapters 1–3). In English literature, the concept is described in Anne Finch’s (1702) poem, ‘The Spleen’ where the Greek notion of a splenetic disposition is invoked to portray the vagaries of depression (cf. Finch, 1709; Radden, 2000 pp. 167–169). Alexander Pope also took up the concept in his 1712 mock-heroic poem *The Rape of the Lock* where spleen is depicted as a goddess, who presides over the ‘Cave of Spleen’ (Pope, 2006, p. 130, Canto IV, ll. 11–16). In the Romantic and post-Romantic periods, the notion of Spleen and the *mal-du-siècle* was adopted by French literary figures including Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, as well as Baudelaire.

Interest in the concept of spleen itself became commonplace in Russian music of the late 1980s and 1990s, lending its name to various songs and musical outfits. In light of this, we might see Chernyi Obelisk as setting in motion a trend for using metal music to express this peculiarly literary melancholic affectation,

in the latter years of the Soviet Union; alternatively, we might see the rise in metal music and the concomitant prevalence of melancholic themes in the music of the Russian youth as reflecting feelings of hopelessness during this tumultuous political period. The St Petersburg-based band Splin (hereafter referred to as 'Spleen', using the anglicised spelling), formed in 1994, use the word for the name of their band, borrowing the term not directly from Baudelaire but from a line in the 1909 poem, 'Pod Surdinku' ('Muted' / 'En Sourdine'), by Sasha Chernyi: 'Kak mol'yu, iz'yeden ya splinom... /Posyp'te menya naftalinom' ('like a moth, I am consumed by spleen / sprinkle me with mothballs') (Chernyi, 1991, p. 139) which the band set to music under the title 'Spleen' on their debut album, *Pyl'naja Byl'* (*Dusty Fact*) of 1994 (cf. Spleen, 2008). The various historical moments at which 'spleen' becomes part of a national aesthetic in England, France, and Russia – whether in music or in literature – draws attention to the mood as being linked to periods of personal, social and political upheaval and its expression in music and literature can be seen not so much as 'demanding a social and political change', in the manner which Michael Robbins (2014) suggests, but rather responding to one.

Several formal transformations have been made to Chernyi Obelisk's Russian-language setting of Baudelaire's 'Spleen', to make the poem apt for music setting in the metal genre. The original French poem is made up of five quatrains, with a sustained ABAB or alternating rhyme scheme. The Russian text used for Chernyi Obelisk's setting maintains the original rhyme scheme of the poem, but alters the structure; the first stanza is sung twice in succession and the final quatrain becomes a chorus, which is sung between stanzas two and three, and after stanza four. This chorus describes a funeral procession, passing silently through the speaker's soul, and 'Angoisse' (Anguish) planting her black flag in the speaker's skull. Baudelaire's original poem sees 'Angoisse' given an initial capital letter, as if to personify it as an invader of the speaker's mind; in the Russian rendering used by Chernyi Obelisk, the personified 'Angoisse' is translated as 'toska', a term which is similar (but not the same as) the French term *ennui*, giving it a particular Russian twist.⁸ The repetition of the fifth stanza as a chorus thus serves to bring the song back, repeatedly, to the idea of 'Spleen', embodied in the pervasive force of Anguish or 'toska', and emphasises the morbid and melancholic dimension to the poem.

⁸Anna Wierzbicka (1992) argues that 'toska' is 'one of the key words in Russian culture' and that it 'can be seen as a key to the Russian soul' (p 169). The linguistically and culturally specific nature of 'toska' is highlighted by Vladimir Nabokov in an unpublished essay (cited in Wire, 2010), in which he claims that 'no single word in English renders all the shades of toska. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish, often without any specific cause. At less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, a vague restlessness, mental throes, yearning. In particular cases it may be the desire for somebody of something specific, nostalgia, love-sickness. At the lowest level it grades into ennui, boredom.' (cf. Wire, 2010 cited in Simpson, 2019).

In the Russian translation, the quality of the experience of ‘spleen’ takes on different shades to that of the French, both through the vocabulary used and through the way the final stanza is performed as a chorus. In Baudelaire’s poem, the speaker describes how ‘L’Espoir, / Vaincu, pleure, et l’Angoisse atroce, despotique, / Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau noir.’ (OCI, p. 75) (Hope / Defeated, cries, and despotic, atrocious Anguish / places its black flag on my bowed head). In the original French, the verb ‘planter’, used to describe the act of placing the flag on the speaker’s head, can be translated into English as ‘to plant’; in the Russian rendering, however, the verb used is ‘vonzat’, which translates into English as ‘to stab’ or to ‘thrust in’, enhancing the sense of violence and destruction, which pervades humanity (Chernyi Obelisk, 1987). Ideas of violence, conveyed in this song by the particular translation of the verb ‘planter’, are a thematic commonplace of metal music, as emphasised by Johnson and Cloonan (2009), who claim that ‘violence is notoriously associated with various Metal genres’ (p. 77). The violent presentation of ‘Spleen’ in the lyrics of Chernyi Obelisk’s setting, meanwhile, is further reinforced by the translation of the French word ‘crâne’ – meaning the crown of the head or the skull – into Russian as ‘cherep’, which not only denotes the cranium as in the French, but can also have morbid connotations, presenting the skull as a ‘death’s head’ or memento mori. The grotesque image of the skull is teased out further in performance as, in at least one user-uploaded recording of Chernyi Obelisk in concert in 1988, the band play on a plain set, adorned only with instruments, and with a large model of a skull placed on the front corner of the stage, looming behind the drum kit. This visual depiction of the skull, with red lights emanating from its eye sockets, hints at the carnivalesque element of Chernyi Obelisk’s aesthetic, discussed in more detail in the following section (see *Chernyi Obelisk – Spleen*, 00:38 and *Chernyi Obelisk (Anatoliy Krupnov) – Polnoch’ (1988) (stereo zvuk)*, 2018, 02:02). The performative impact of the skull which looms on an otherwise empty set, and the way in which the song fuses the gothic and grotesque elements of the band’s musical output with a humorous nod, also points to a carnivalesque dimension to the performance of the song, achieved by satirising the concept of death and foregrounding the trope of the memento mori.

Une Gravure Fantastique

While ‘Spleen’ presents ideas of melancholia and imprisonment, ‘Fantasticheskaja gravjura’ plays into a more grandiose, fantastical dimension of the metal aesthetic, often associated with symphonic metal and power metal.⁹ The song is, along with ‘Vstuplenie’ (‘Introduction’), the earliest of Chernyi Obelisk’s Baudelaire settings, appearing as track six on the 1986 *Apocalypse Live* recording; the song also features on the 1987 album *Eshhjo odin koncert dlja skriпки (Another*

⁹Robert Walser (1993) describes metal music as characterised by ‘larger-than-life images, tied to fantasies of social power, just as in the more prestigious musical spectacles of opera’. (p. 2).

Violin Concerto) as track six, along with 'Vstuplenie' and 'Litani Satane'. 'Une Gravure fantastique' is an unusual choice for musical setting, in part, because of its visual subject matter, which sets it apart from the romantic, sensual, emotional and spiritual themes evoked in the most frequently set to music of Baudelaire's poems, such as 'La Mort des Amants' or 'L'Invitation au voyage'. Baudelaire's 'Une Gravure fantastique' was inspired by an etching by Joseph Haynes of 1784, which was based on John Hamilton Mortimer's 'Death on a Pale Horse' (c. 1775), a horrifying representation of the fourth horseman of the apocalypse, depicted in the book of Revelation (cf. Labarthe, 1999, p. 48). Mortimer's ink-drawing, in turn, draws on Albrecht Dürer's woodcut illustration 'The Four Horsemen', which is the third in his series of four apocalyptically themed illustrations, and on Stefano Della Bella's etching 'Death on the Battlefield' (c. 1647). (cf. Dürer, 1498; Mortimer, 1775). In setting to music Baudelaire's apocalyptically themed poem, inspired by the visual arts, Chernyi Obelisk situate themselves within a long-standing tradition of inter-art dialogue, which crosses political and geographical boundaries. As such, we see different languages enter into dialogue, not only through the translation process, but also through the intertextual references to the Bible and to works of English, German, and Italian art, and through the use of ekphrasis and presentation of similar ideas through different artistic media.

'Une Gravure fantastique' (OCI, p. 69) is a sonnet written in Alexandrines – 12-syllable lines, following the traditional form for classical French verse. The sonnet describes Death, personified as one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse (along with Conquest, War and Famine), who begins as a downtrodden and derisory figure, but gains strength and power in the second half of the text. Through its engagement with the Biblical myth of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, mediated through the visual arts, Chernyi Obelisk's 'Fantasticheskaja gravjura' establishes the theme of the morbid and grotesque, which is seen in 'Splin' and is characteristic of the whole *Apokalipsis* album. Baudelaire's presentation of Death's 'front de squelette' ('skeleton-like forehead') (OCI, 69) prefigures the emblematic description of the skull – 'cherep' – in Chernyi Obelisk's 'Spleen', establishing the importance of gothic imagery and the memento mori within the band's aesthetic, through the filter of Baudelaire. For all its dark and grandiose themes, and its references of death and the apocalypse, however, 'Une Gravure fantastique' does not treat Death with great reverence in the first octave of the sonnet, instead presenting it as a 'spectre' wearing a 'diadème sentant le carnaval' ('a diademe, which reeks of the carnival') and riding a 'rosse apocalyptique' ('an apocalyptic nag') (OCI, p. 69), which foams at the mouth. In the original French text, the multi-sensory presentation of Death as a carnivalesque figure, riding an old, sick horse, undermines its imposing figure and undercuts its gory and morbid power. In the Russian translation of the poem used by Chernyi Obelisk, there is no direct reference to the carnival, but instead, the bathos of the carnivalesque is captured through the description of the spectre as wearing 'odna kartonnaya korona s maskarada' (Chernyi (sp) Obelisk, 1986) – a cardboard fancy-dress crown.

The reference to the carnival in 'Une Gravure fantastique' and the slightly derisory way in which the horseman of Death is presented in the translation of the opening verse of Chernyi Obelisk's setting of the poem draws attention to the

importance of the carnivalesque within the band's musical output more broadly. In light of this, I contend that we might see Chernyi Obelisk's aesthetic as playing into a 'carnivalised folklore' (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 112), to use Bakhtin's terminology, which draws on Baudelaire's poetry and on grandiose yet morbid themes of death, decay, damnation, and the apocalypse, which, as we have seen are thematic commonplaces of metal music. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) describes carnival as

[...] a pageant without footlights and without a division into performers and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act. [...] The laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is non-carnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age). (pp. 122–123)

Although, clearly, the metal performance diverges from this model to a certain extent, in being divided into spectators and performers, we might see the act of performing, particularly under the circumstances of *perestroika* and *glasnost* as having elements of the carnivalesque in its destabilising of social hierarchies. The relaxing of censorship laws allowed greater, less restricted participation in the 'carnival act' of musical performance, in an open and non-discriminatory space, with the capacity to transcend the divisions of people and state which had previously governed life in the Soviet Union. Just as the carnival, according to Bakhtin's definition, takes place outside of the strictures of time and space, so we might see the space of the Moscow Rock Lab and the performances of the musicians under *glasnost* as similarly unbound from social, cultural and temporal constraints.

The notion of the carnival also comprises a satirical element. Bakhtin (1984) describes how:

Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid. Connected with this is yet a fourth carnivalistic category, profanation: carnivalistic blasphemies, a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body, carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings [...]. (p. 123)

The parodic and 'blasphemous' elements of the carnivalesque can be seen in Baudelaire's poetry. From the obvious parody on a sacred text in his 'Les Litanies de Satan' (cf. Abbott & Ardrey, 2018), to more subtle examples of profanation, such as the aforementioned belittling of the figure of Death, carnivalistic aspects abound in the specific poems set to music by Chernyi Obelisk, and the way in which the band brings Baudelaire's texts to life in the exuberance of a metal

performance only serves to highlight this effect. In Baudelaire's 'Au Lecteur' ('To the Reader'), for example, set to music as 'Vstuplenie' ('Introduction'), the speaker lists the vices which afflict and unite humans, in what we might see as a Bakhtinian 'bringing down to earth', which sets the tone for both Baudelaire's poetry collection and for Chernyi Obelisk's debut set and thus their aesthetic more broadly.

This satirising of death is not confined to the lyrical content. Visually, this parodic handling of 'serious' themes, can be seen in the video of Chernyi Obelisk's performance of 'Spleen', discussed earlier, in which a large model skull is the only stage decoration. By making the degradation of the physical body explicit in ways which point to Baudelaire's glorifying of a carcass in 'Une Charogne', the skull on the stage plays into what Karen [Bettez Halnon \(2006\)](#) has described as 'the heavy metal carnival as a politics of "grotesque realism"' (p. 35). Musically speaking, too, the seemingly 'highbrow' lyrics, penned by a canonical Western literary figure, and the portentous themes of death, melancholia and the apocalypse, fused with the exuberant and performative genre of metal music could, also, be seen as playing into the carnivalesque. As, [Bettez Halnon \(2006\)](#) argues, metal music offers a rich example of the Bakhtinian carnival, through its treatment of the physical body (e.g. sexual and scatological references), through the close physical proximity of crowds in concerts, through performativity and jocularly (e.g. wearing masks), and through the treatment of the interplay between life and death (pp. 33–48). It is the latter of these which is particularly pertinent to our understanding of 'Une Gravure fantastique' and its role within Chernyi Obelisk's discography. [Bettez Halnon \(2006\)](#) contends that, in the context of metal music,

playing with death, confronting it directly as a form of re-creation, is perhaps the carnivalesque theme par excellence. It is a transgressive challenge to all socially objective definitions of ordinary, everyday, taken-for-granted reality, the goal of carnival taken to its furthest extreme. (p. 43)

In their ebullient setting of 'Une Gravure fantastique', Chernyi Obelisk enact a form of re-creation, reviving an oft-treated artistic trope, which, itself, reflects on the theme of death and of the apocalypse, subverting Biblical references for aesthetic purposes. In a socio-political environment in which censorship no longer applied and the strict rules governing performance were relaxed, engagement with the carnivalesque offered metal musicians an alternative mode of transgression, within the space of the state-sanctioned Moscow Rock Laboratory.

While metal music demonstrates some elements of the carnivalesque in offering a wry and exuberant handling of the themes of death, destruction, and the grotesque within Baudelaire's poetry and in their own lyrics, there is no obvious humour to the lyrical themes of any of the songs in the *Apokalipsis* or *Tsvety Zla* albums. Throughout Chernyi Obelisk's discography, we see a battle between optimism and despair, between good and evil, paralleling the Baudelairean dualities which run through *Les Fleurs du Mal*. While in Baudelaire's collection, I contend, these oppositions are never resolved, in Chernyi Obelisk's selective metal

music adaptation of his works and, indeed, in their own lyrics, death, destruction, and evil ultimately prevail. The wry glance which Chernyi Obelisk give to death, through the lens of Baudelaire, allows the musicians to assert power on a lyrical level, supporting the sonic power created by their music. The notion of power, control, and rebellion is taken up by the band in the songs penned by Krupnov, as if drawing on the strong, unfettered image of the horseman of death, established in 'Fantasticheskaja gravjura'. In this way, we see Baudelaire's poetry serving as a starting point for the lyrical and thematic traits in Chernyi Obelisk's discography; while the band would not set Baudelaire to music directly after the late 1980s, the continued popularity of their Baudelaire songs and the influence that these settings had on the direction of their musical output in the decade which followed highlights the influential role which Baudelaire played in the band's aesthetic development. In this way, I suggest, Chernyi Obelisk appropriate Baudelaire's creative persona as a figurehead for the pessimism and marginalisation of the Soviet youth in the midst of *perestroika*, using his poetry as a blueprint for carving out an aesthetic identity for themselves and, indeed, for Russian metal music in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

As one of the founding members of the Moscow Rock Laboratory, whose establishment was facilitated by the implementation of the policy of *glasnost*, Chernyi Obelisk's musical output and its reception can be seen to have been influenced by the social and political changes taking place in Russia in the mid- to late-1980s. The fact that the band draw heavily on Baudelaire's poetry, taking the title of his collection for their first live set and their resulting live album highlights the influence which the poet had on the band's aesthetic during their early years. The way in which Chernyi Obelisk juxtapose their Baudelaire settings with references to other literary figures of the period, including Mikhail Bulgakov and Erich Maria Remarque, both in their name and in their lyrical content, points to the importance of intertextuality as a way of establishing authenticity during the politically unstable time of *perestroika*.

Chernyi Obelisk choose poems by Baudelaire which correspond to commonplace themes in heavy metal and, as such, their selective engagement with Baudelaire plays into the rich and longstanding reception history of the poet's work. While, as Adrian Wanner notes, the nineteenth-century translations of Baudelaire tended to promote a symbolist dimension to the poet's aesthetic, the choice of poems set to music by Chernyi Obelisk, along with the position these settings take within the 'narrative' of their performances foregrounds aspects of the gothic, the melancholic, and the carnivalesque. As such, Chernyi Obelisk offer us a representation of Baudelaire's work, through the medium of metal music, which, as we have seen, is both peculiarly Russian and also aesthetically important in its establishment of metal themes within a late Soviet context. In drawing on the darker, aspects of Baudelaire's poetry and appropriating them into metal music, Chernyi Obelisk seize upon the newly relaxed environment of *glasnost* to celebrate the transgressive potential both of Baudelaire and the metal genre, responding to

the social and political changes of the time. Through a combination of musical style and lyrical themes which simultaneously satirise and celebrate the symbolic power of mortality Chernyi Obelisk create a music which is both a serious manifestation of cultural authenticity under the new conditions of *perestroika* and a carnivalesque ‘feast of becoming, change, and renewal’ ([1936] 1984, p. 10).

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Part II

National, Cultural, and Minority Identity

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Chapter 3

*Større enn tid, tyngre enn natt*¹ – The Interplay of Language and Cultural Identity in the Lyrics of Norwegian Metal Bands

Imke von Helden

Abstract

Lyrics hold a complex status, not only within the world of metal music. They are subject to diverse motivations and backgrounds within groups of individuals and may serve various functions – as poetry, as means of channelling social criticism or feelings. Lyrics may be barely perceptible as produced by human beings, they may be hard to understand and they may not even be printed in CD booklets. While some bands claim their lyrics do not matter, others translate and/or explain underlying concepts and metaphors used in the texts to ensure the listeners' understanding and intended interpretation of the words of a song in other languages than English. Thus, metal lyrics are an interesting subject for analysing various stances of identity, of cultural implications, and of politics, especially when it comes to the use of specific languages within a societal context.

In Norway, bands such as Enslaved, Solefald, and Wardruna already expressed themselves in their native languages in an early phase of their careers, simultaneously engaging in Norse themes, such as the Viking Age and Norse mythology. Based on my work on cultural identity in Norwegian metal music and three sample bands, I author will take a closer look at the interplay of lyrics, language and cultural identity. In this paper, I will show

¹'Greater than time, heavier than night'. Name of a track from Enslaved's (2000) album *Mardraum* 'nightmare'.

how the bands engage in Nynorsk, Bokmål or Høgnorsk lyrics and what it means for the bands to deal with the languages' history and meaning.

Keywords: Metal music; cultural identity; lyrics; Norway; Bokmål; Nynorsk

Introduction

During the 1990s, bands such as Enslaved and Helheim began to include lyrics and cover artwork which at that time was not unheard of (which depicted mighty fjords, Vikings and mythical creatures), but they also changed the use of language. English, without doubt, was the domineering language from the outset of metal music and the use of any other language, would be perceived as unusual, if not exotic. In my previously published work on cultural identity in Norwegian metal music (von Helden, 2017), I considered the work of selected Norwegian bands to learn more about how cultural identity is being constructed by doing qualitative and quantitative analyses of lyrics and cover artwork. I combined my findings with the results of interviews with Norwegian musicians, asking about sources, motivation, and intentions as well as their idea of how Norwegian society in general reacts to themes such as Norse mythology, religious aspects, and the portrayal of Norwegian nature. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the interplay of lyrics, language, and cultural identity. After providing a sketch of the history of the Norwegian language, I will focus on lyrical themes in the work of Enslaved, Solefald, and Wardruna and place them into the context of the musicians' intentions and motivations as well as their socio-cultural context.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity, the feeling of belonging to a group of people or geographic region, is not limited to the boundaries of a nation state. On the contrary, it can depict a smaller identity unit such as a community, sometimes called post-traditional communities (Hitzler, 2008, p. 9ff). This collective does not consist of a homogeneous group of people, but an imagined community (Anderson, 2006, p. 6) that implies a heterogeneity within culture which is characterised by a multitude of perspectives, aims, and motivations (Hansen, 1995). The definition of collective cultural identity also entails delineating oneself from other groups. Identity as a social category, that is, as a collective concept, consists of content (norms, rules, regulations, social purposes such as goals and common practices) and contestation (public discourse, discussion among members of a group or community (cf. Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2009, p. 19ff.)).

Metal culture can be one such cultural circle or community (cf. Weinstein, 2000). There are various music scenes with strong ties, but metal is special in that it creates belonging through concerts and fans recognising each other by means of band shirts in the streets. Furthermore, metal exists all over the world.

The motivation for engaging in metal culture may be diverse, but everything that happens in metal culture is looked upon worldwide, discussed worldwide and even incorporated worldwide. There is a Japanese band with a Norwegian band name, an Italian band with lyrics in Norwegian, black metal in Iran and so on. Subgenres of metal may originate in certain regions – for example, the Second Wave of Black Metal in Norway, but they are always spread globally to various ends. To put it in Roland Robertson's terms ([Guilianotti & Robertson, 2004](#), p. 547ff.): Metal is a glocal phenomenon – present on a global basis, but with regional specifics. In my work on Norwegian metal music (cf. [von Helden, 2017](#)), for instance, most bands that I talked to regarded their work within a Nordic rather than Norwegian context when working with topics such as Viking Age, Norse mythology and nature.

The inclusion of historical national references national and Scandinavian Norse mythology references to a distinctly Norwegian nature and an influence that comes from Romantic nationalism and Norwegian nation building. There could be various reasons that none of the interviewees mentioned Romantic nationalism as a source of or inspiration for their work. In fact, none of the musicians in the interviews did mention a particular source of their knowledge and the imagery they used for their lyrics and artwork. Most replied that they had various sources in mind, but rather pointed to films and sagas in general, without giving titles.

Norse-themed Metal Music

In my work on cultural identity in Norwegian metal music (cf. [von Helden, 2017](#)), I looked at album covers and lyrics in what I, for the sake of the analysis, called *Norse-themed metal music* and found many references that could be divided into the following categories: nature, religious elements, history, metal culture and Norwegian or Nordic identity. In the following, I will introduce the categories in order to show what they entail and in which context(s) the respective elements appear.

Nature is the largest of the major categories and encompasses portrayals and descriptions of landscape, such as forests, mountains, valleys, the sea, lakes, fjords, elements such as wind and earth, geographical references: distinct place names and directions. Furthermore, it includes references to climate and weather (weather, seasons, and temperature), being in nature (feelings and emotions of closeness to nature; town versus country life as well as animals, natural and mythical). The second category, religious elements, includes references to Norse mythology, North Germanic polytheism (often referred to as 'heathenism' and 'paganism'), and also references to Christendom as an intruding force. The third category, history, entails representations of history, numerous references to fighting and battles, time in general and a not further specified past, people, historical practices as well as literary, sonic, and visual sources.

The fourth category includes a spectrum of topics often connected with metal music and aesthetics. To delve further into the matter, I set up an additional, more general corpus consisting of lyrics of the 100 best metal songs mentioned

in German *Rock Hard* magazine in 2011, which I coded and analysed regarding their themes to be able to compare them to the findings in the exclusively Norwegian corpus. The references could be summed up in the following categories, which appeared in the lyrics of the original corpus: emotions (such as anger, despair fear and love), society (including way of living, freedom and belonging), religion (often combined with violence, life, nature, sex and love, and authenticity, ‘true-ness’).

The fifth and final category deals with Norwegian and Nordic culture. Its references point towards both a historical and contemporary collective identity, including references to the Nordic, the Norwegian language and general references to collectivity as well as alterity (i.e. enemies, strangers, the Danish, and Christians).

Looking at the topics in Norse-themed metal music, there are some inconsistencies. First, it is striking that everything original and authentic seems to be of importance, yet there is also a tendency towards focussing on battles and fighting rather than the description of everyday life. The widespread assumption of the term ‘Viking’ as a name for a specific group of people with the occasional occupation of seamen suggests that we should not imagine ‘the Vikings’ as an ethnic group constantly raiding and pillaging (cf. Simek, 1998, p. 7). Apparently, the imagery of the strong warrior seems more fit for metal music. A second interesting aspect are the numerous references to winter and cold weather in general, which seem to address the comparably mild winters in South and Western Norway instead of the Arctic North. Furthermore, the portrayal of Vikings is often limited to fighting and killing and further adventures, which are topics that perfectly fitted to metal aesthetics. In another study (von Helden, 2017), I showed that women, if at all present, represent a/the ‘softer’ side of Viking Age and mythology, for example, when saying farewell to their husbands who go into battle. However, there are examples that point to a new direction: The Swedish band Amon Amarth in their song *A dream that cannot be* portrays a woman defending her own destiny (Amon Amarth, 2016).²

To exemplify the above-mentioned categories and to show how the elements reverberate throughout the spheres of Norse-themed metal music, I will introduce selected works of three Norwegian bands, Wardruna, Enslaved, and Solefald, each having their very specific approach to Norse topics. In addition, and to delve further into the aspect of cultural identity as portrayed in metal lyrics, I will offer a short view into the Norwegian languages and connect the bands’ outputs to the use of language.

A Glimpse into the Socio-cultural History of the Norwegian Languages

Norwegian is a North Germanic language and belongs to the family of continental Scandinavian languages, which, in contrast to Insular Nordic (such as

²Thank you, Amanda DiGioia, for pointing me to this example.

Icelandic and Faroese), were highly influenced by Middle Low German and High German in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. The languages are similar in many respects with a great number of loan words in Norwegian.

Between the years 1380 and 1814, Norway was under Danish rule. This resulted in a loss of written Norwegian in most areas, which was substituted by High Danish with a Norwegian pronunciation.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Ivar Andreas Aasen, lexicographer and poet (among many other professions), fashioned a Norwegian language based on dialects with occasional loans from Old and Middle Norwegian which was called *landsmaal*. It is remarkable that a single person managed to design a language and getting it acknowledged as second official Norwegian language in 1885. Since 1929, this language exists as Nynorsk and had to be moderated to ensure its being used by people.

Today, both Bokmål and Nynorsk are officially spoken in Norway, while spoken Nynorsk is strongly influenced by dialects and spoken Bokmål remains closer to its written language variant. Nynorsk is most prominently spoken in rural Western Norway and central Østlandet, otherwise Bokmål is spoken. The *Norsk Språkråd*, the Norwegian language council, ensures that the percentage of one of the languages does not fall below 25% in a public context, such as news on TV.

Høgnorsk (High Norwegian) is an unofficial variant of Nynorsk, similar to Ivar Aasen's Landsmål, and was used by people who reject the official Nynorsk reform of 1938 for being too close to Bokmål and its Danish origin. Today, a small group of Norwegians use it. This might be due to the fact that especially written Høgnorsk seems archaic to most. When spoken, it does not differ to much from other dialects. Popular poets who wrote in Høgnorsk were Ivar Aasen, Aasmund Olavsson Vinje, Arne Garborg, Elias Blix, Olav Aukrust and Olav H. Hauge. It is interesting that the intentional use of one of these variants may be of expressing belonging and may be connected to an awareness of the socio-cultural history of the language, there is more than one band who used Høgnorsk or referred to the works of Hauge, for instance. During the nineteenth century, users of Riksmål (Bokmål) identified with the Danish Norwegian culture and saw no reason for linguistic separatism and/or a new start in terms of language. Speakers of Nynorsk emphasise the individual character of Norway, especially in linguistic-cultural terms. Today, there are several regional dialects, especially in Eastern and Central Norway as well as parts of the North.

The use of dialects and regional variants is clearly visible in Norwegian metal music. However, in some cases, these languages eventually were abandoned in favour of English, thus enabling non-Norwegian speakers to comprehend their meanings.

Intentions and Motivation

Many musicians gave motives for their work with Norse themes that pointed towards a political dimension. They implied cultural and societal criticism, which in the interviews was limited to a seemingly faulty interpretation of history, that is, the motives on stave churches and to the Satanic black metal scene,

which, some interviewees pointed out, did not stand for anything, included many misperceptions, or was deemed 'idiotic'. A second aspect encompassed the rehabilitation of Norse themes. Some musicians expressed a certain anger that they were not able to use history without suspicion (for more information on right-wing extremist ideology in (black) metal music, cf. [Dornbusch & Killguss, 2005](#); [Spracklen, 2012](#)), while others wanted to enable different perspectives on matter.

In terms of intentions or messages, Ivar of Enslaved stated he wished to encourage fans to look at their own cultural heritage and to interpret Enslaved's music in their own way. Another band claimed to have no message at all, while a third wished to emphasise the importance of roots, which in the view of one musician enables people to live self-determinedly und helps making decisions. Two further motives came from one musician who emphasised the possibility of discovering aspects of history and stories and the idea to establish a 'humanistic tradition' in Viking metal, as opposed to the often nihilistic approach in black metal. The last intention was given by a band who claimed that Norse topics, Vikings and violence, as well as 'the dark side', were cool.

Although religious aspects and mythical elements appear frequently, my interviewees do not provide information on religious attitudes and practices in their personal lives. Having said that, the musicians often pointed towards the fact that mythology and the sagas provided guidelines for a way of living and dealing with things and that Christianity, main religion in contemporary Norway, is viewed as an intruding force. The musicians' takes on Norse religious forms differ significantly from self-conception of contemporary neo-pagan groups and resemble rather non-institutionalised and non-unified approach to a 'Norse religion' of the Viking Age.

The ideological implications in metal culture in general and in Norse-themed metal music in particular are varied. By taking up Norse themes, bands have to face the fact that other groups outside of popular culture have coined the topics before them and made these topics the theme of nationalist or nationalistic tradition and of extreme right-wing ideologies. Consequently, these bands are often associated with ideologies of the extreme right. Notwithstanding the fact that there are bands that promote racist and right wing ideas in metal culture (e.g. National Socialist Black Metal) most bands reject the idea of right-wing ideologies. Hence, there are certain aesthetic aspects (e.g. the Vikings, runes, warriors as such) and attitudes (e.g. preservation of national heritage), which can be found in both scenes, but which are embedded in and refer to completely different contexts. Perhaps this is an explanation for why all interviewees have been accused of promoting extreme right-wing ideology, or at least have been asked if they did, both by metal and mainstream media. All are aware of the problematic subject they are dealing with, yet all state that they do not promote racist or other views, but refer to their respective nations' histories and cultural heritage. This deeply problematic and complex issue does not concern metal culture only. In a world that is increasingly perceived as threatening, many people cling to their cultural and/or national heritage, intending to preserve their culture in various different approaches. It is important to keep in mind that in the case of individual

musicians, it is often impossible to anticipate their political views, as these are not usually mirrored in the band concepts.

Wardruna – The Power of Runes

In their lyrics, Wardruna – a Norwegian band that does not exactly define as metal, but includes musicians who have been or still are active in metal bands (e.g. Einar Selvik, Gaahl) and frequently play metal festivals – focus on nature, religion, and the interpretation of runes. In interviews, Selvik states that the lyrics deal with runes from their origin and form not only the lyrics, but also inform the choice of instruments, sound and language (Kilroy, 2017). Selvik and his band collect information on authentic instruments and how they might be built. Additionally, the musicians use materials from nature, such as wood and even ice as instruments as well as they include sounds from nature, such as rain.

The musician describes the motives for engaging in the above-mentioned range of topics as being involved in something that holds meaning for him (Uta, A., 2017). While hoping to rehabilitate Norse themes and, to disengage them from the misuse by nationalist groups, Selvik wishes to set the image of the plundering barbarians right and tell a different story. With his musical project, his intention is to work towards creating new music from ‘old’ thoughts, tools and instruments, i.e. stories and ideas taken from Norse sagas and related topics (Music Norway, 2014). Rather than re-enacting a Viking past, Selvik’s ambition is to connect thoughts from cultural heritage with contemporary society. By doing this, he thrives to further look into humankind’s relationship with nature, with each other and each individual with ourselves. The concerts, rather than being just another show, are designed as a kind of ceremony in which the audience experience transcendence.

Svarte skyar rir i meg	Dark clouds drift within
Lengten lokkar, hugen dreg	The longing lures, pulls my mind
Ber du meg	Will you carry me?
Vil i veg	I want to go
<i>Raido from Runaljod: Ragnarok (Wardruna, 2016)</i>	

In the lyrics of one of their more recent songs, *Raido* [rune of the Elder Futhark meaning ‘journey’ or ‘riding’] from the Runaljod-trilogy, sonic expressions of various topics are tackled, from Norse belief and cults and original runes (Keefy, 2016). Wardruna’s albums contain translations of the lyrics into English plus a text on runes (in the extended digipack version). Selvik states: ‘We address history, we mirror ourselves as a people, as humans through the eyes of history and how it’s been portrayed and whether that’s correct or not. Very often you see it’s politically motivated, what truth you decide to go with’ (Kilroy, 2017). On the process of writing, he comments that he writes most music outside while walking, especially in nature. (Kilroy, 2017)

Enslaved – Contemporary Runes

A second band, Bergen-based Enslaved, were founded in the early 1990s and play a style that they on their second album *Frost* described as ‘Viking Metal’ and which during the years changed from black metal to extreme metal with progressive elements. The band concept also evolved from being centred around tales from Norse mythology in Old Norwegian, Bokmål and Nynorsk, as well as Icelandic towards the portrayal of runes in a rather abstract mode, while the use of English increased. The band’s guitarist, Ivar Peersen, states that this is in some ways owing to globalisation: while touring Europe, North, and South America, he was struck by the meaning the lyrics had to their fans who could read the translation of the lyrics included in the album booklet (von Helden, 2017, p. 148). The lyrics of an album, he states, are an important part of a band’s work and because most of Enslaved’s fans could not read Norwegian, the band started to write an increasing amount of songs in English. In an effort to differentiate themselves from the emerging black metal-wave, that is, Satanism and the *en vogue* anti-Christian motive in Norway during the 1990s (cf. Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007, p. 63f), the band focussed on Norse mythology and nature, while later turning to Viking history in *Eld* ‘fire’ (1997) and *Blodhemn* ‘blood revenge’ (1998). After that, the band focussed on an abstract handling of Norse themes, blending mythical elements with philosophical ones from *Mardraum: Beyond the Within* (2000) onward. In an interview I conducted with Ivar S. Peersen, the guitarist identified three different layers in his work: the first category, which he describes as poetical, or *ordkunst* ‘word art’, encompasses the act of composing lyrics by arranging sounds of words together and the abstract meaning they may contain, expressed with the help of several stylistic poetic devices. Not every topic is fit for this area of lyrics writing. He says: ‘things that are very much connected to the everyday world, such as washing the dishes – they destroy lyrics, they take them out of the musical sphere and transfer them into everyday life, such as politics and the like. Lyrics are poetry in a way, they should not function as specialised or academic text’ (von Helden, 2017, p. 147). As a second category, Peersen establishes historical and mythical references that focus on Nordic history. These include rune mystics as well as topics seen ‘from a more modern perspective’, and probably ‘more scientific’. In a third category, he includes personal experiences. This personal aspect in his work, Peersen describes as varied and impossible to explain every single detail that people perceive differently (cf. von Helden, 2017, p. 148).

On their album *RIITIIR* (2012), the band take a new approach to their band concept and lyrics. The name *RIITIIR* is Ivar Bjørnson’s ‘Norse-ified’ take on the words ‘rites’ or ‘rituals’, or ‘the rites of man’, and rituals form the central concept of the album. The lyrics are loosely connected by topics that include instincts of people, same fears, often roughly same gods:

I can not tolerate being held in the dark
 I need to see, I will the flames
 Expanding light, from within a cube of darkness

I need to see, I will the flames
I found myself crawling, looking for an “out”
Veilburner from RIITIIR (Enslaved, 2012)

This new approach to and portrayal of Norse mythology corresponds to Peersen’s second category, mythic and historical elements transported to our contemporary world. It is interesting to see that this transfer is approved by metal culture, even though it is highly unusual for a scene that occupied with the past.

Solefald – World Metal

A third band, Solefald, is a rather unusual example when it comes to Norse topics. Founded in 1995 in Kristiansand, this Norwegian band has incorporated many sonic influences into what they (currently) call ‘world metal’, blending a strong black metal focus with elements from jazz, punk, pop, classical music and hip hop – and many more. Not unlike the music, the lyrical focusses have been diverse, ranging from a Pagan heritage, Old Norse sagas, pop and metal culture, socio-political issues among others with lyrics in English, various forms of Norwegian as well as French, employing rap and dada styles, too. Ever since the albums *Red for Fire: An Icelandic Odyssey, Pt. 1* (Solefald, 2005) and *Black for Death: An Icelandic Odyssey, Pt. 2* (Solefald, 2006), the band Solefald’s main focus has been on Norse culture and mythology. The band name derives from the old Norse word for sunset, literally meaning ‘the fall of the sun’, or just ‘sunset’ in a Danish way of spelling from the nineteenth century and is also the name of a painting by the Norwegian artist Theodor Kittelsen. *Norrønasongen: Kosmopolis Nord* ‘Norse song: Cosmopolis north’ (Solefald, 2014) is an album in various Norse idioms, accompanied by the Hardanger fiddle, a local instrument from Western Norway. The band describes their album *Norrønasongen* as ‘a journey through the Norse cultural tradition, with poetry and melodies invoking walks through the Jotunheimen mountains’ (Humphries, 2014), but seems never to stand still in their endeavours to develop new ideas. Lars Are Nedland states in an interview: ‘The only way to stay true, is to evolve. [...] people who are preoccupied with staying true, usually try to do so up to an immovable and set ideal, not taking into consideration that people change, the world changes and that our society is not a static one’ (Marcus, 2015).

Conclusion

Today, Norse themes are a constituent factor within Norwegian society, albeit a limited one. Norse themes and terms are present in everyday culture, such as street names, sports clubs, and university sigils as the Vikings are regular characters in films, video games, etc. on a global scale.

Since the infamous church burnings and murders during the 1990s, Norwegian society’s perspective on metal music has changed a lot. Today, metal in Norway is embedded in mainstream culture in that it is present on mainstream festivals and on public broadcast. Bands receive funding from governmental programmes such

as Fond for Lyd og Bilde 'Fund for Sound and Vision', and Bergen Kommune 'Municipality of Bergen', and they are awarded with the *Spellemannsprisen*, the Norwegian Grammy. In Norse-themed metal music, there is a sense of belonging to Nordic or Norwegian culture – yet the bands exist somewhat outside their societal context both in terms of music (metal music) and of contents (Norse themes). On the other hand, Norwegian metal music is still eyed suspiciously or smiled upon – either way, people in Norway have heard of it.

By taking up Norse themes, the Norwegian scene is just one example of many in metal culture to take up local mythology (outside Norway, there are Sepultura and Melechesh, to name just a few). An increasing amount of references to a past that is perceived as 'authentic' or 'original' and in a certain geographical surrounding; not only in Europe and not only in metal culture, but fields of contemporary culture (medieval markets, historic novels, etc.).

In terms of language, the bands employ local varieties of two of the official Norwegian languages as well as a range of dialects. For some bands, such as Wardruna, language is an important means of transporting identity. For others, such as Enslaved, their attitudes towards the use of language changed somewhat in that they, too, expressed identity by writing lyrics in Norwegian and older variants, but then turned to English to make sure the contents were received better by the fans. Solefald seem to draw on every knowledge of language they have, even employing *dada* elements and explaining their use of language in the album booklets. Both Enslaved and Wardruna emphasise the importance of runes for their work, which they interpret in various ways in their songs and try to extract meaning from them.

The Norwegian scene is just one example of many in global metal culture that incorporate a trend towards taking up local, national, and pan-national mythology. The spread of metal culture worldwide in all its variety by linking together people from all over the world as a global community is not only a phenomenon of globalisation, but also a way of dealing with globalisation.

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Chapter 4

Spanish and Non-Spanish Perspectives on El Cid in Heavy Metal: Identity Vindication, Cultural Appropriation and Islamophobia

Amaranta Saguar García

Abstract

More than 20 songs by Spanish and non-Spanish bands about the Castilian lord and epic hero Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, El Cid, account for the topicality of the Hispanic Middle Ages in heavy metal. This chapter explores how diversely El Cid is addressed in 10 of these songs, in particular, from the perspectives of reception theory and both the cultural background of the band (Spanish or non-Spanish) and the language in which the lyrics are written (Spanish or English). Through detailed textual analysis and contextualisation, I will examine how, for Spanish (and Spanish-American) bands, El Cid serves the purpose of naturalising the stereotypical heavy-metal medieval knight, thereby functioning as a vindication of Hispanic cultural heritage within what is perceived to be an Anglo-American (and Germanic-Nordic) dominated musical scene. By contrast, non-Spanish bands resort primarily to El Cid to refresh the overused motif of the medieval knight, but sometimes in a more connoted manner as well, in which his iconic value as a Moor-slayer and a defender of the Western white Christian principles is highlighted. Moreover, I will discuss the appropriation and re-appropriation of El Cid by, respectively, non-Spanish and Spanish heavy metal bands, from the point of view of cultural appreciation and appropriation, and Islamophobia.

Keywords: heavy metal narratives; Spanish cultural identity; Spanish nationalism; cultural appropriation; white nationalism; Islamophobia

Introduction

Medievalising themes and narratives are a prominent feature of heavy metal. In lyrics, cover art, video clips, and fans' and bands' aesthetics, warriors, knights, sorcerers, minstrels, and the whole cast of the medievalising popular culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries alternate with stories from Germanic-Nordic mythology and the Arthurian cycle, the preserved epic poetry of the European Middle Ages and other typically medieval European literary compositions, traditional ballads and legends on medieval or medievalising topics, and references to more or less genuine historical characters and events of the European Middle Ages. Even whole metal subgenres are defined to a great extent by their medievalising component, be it the medievalising Tolkienesque fantasy motifs of European epic metal (iconically, Blind Guardian, but Tolkien is also a recurring source of inspiration in black metal, as evidenced by Kuusela, 2015), the return to the pre-Christian Germanic-Nordic cultures of the subgenres represented under the term pagan metal, in particular, viking metal (e.g. Moonsorrow or Amon Amarth, but on this subject it is worth having a look at Weinstein, 2014, and, with some caution, Yamamoto & Isaia, 2010; as well as at the growing bibliography on the presence of Vikings in heavy metal: Cunha Albuquerque & Gallindo Gonçalves Silva, 2016; Heesch, 2012; La Rocca, 2017; Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007; Walsh, 2013; Yamamoto, 2011; Zanen, 2017), or the fascination of the different manifestations of extreme metal, especially black metal, with the concept of the Dark Middle Ages (Ancient Rites, for instance, but on this matter see Gardenour Walter, 2015a, 2015b). Not for nothing, heavy metal medievalism is becoming a tendency in the field of Heavy Metal Studies, in particular since the publication of the edited volume by Barratt-Peacock and Hagen (2019).

As a genre convention, heavy metal medievalism portrays a predominantly white-washed, Western European, hypermasculinised and, depending very much on the subgenre, either romanticised and idealised or debased and inhumane Middle Ages (Heesch, 2011, 2012; Manea, 2015; Wallach, 2011; Wong, 2011; but also the book chapter 'Forging Masculinity: Heavy Metal Sound and Images of Gender' in Walser, 1993, despite some of its conclusions having recently been questioned and qualified in the section 'Metal and Gender Politics' in Brown, Spracklen, Scott, & Kahn-Harris, 2016). In this sense, heavy metal medievalism is no different from other contemporary displays of medievalism in Western popular culture, as the classical study by Richards (1999) on the hypermasculinisation and the idealisation, either positive or negative, of the Middle Ages in popular culture shows.

Furthermore, heavy metal is subject to the Anglo-centrism of Western popular culture as much as any of its other manifestations are, 'Anglo' functioning here as a synonym of 'English speaking' rather than as a reference to Anglo-American culture: English is the pervasive language and, to a certain extent, the *lingua franca* of heavy metal, regardless of the cultural background and/or the mother tongue(s) of the bands and/or fans (on black metal, but applicable to any non-English speaking metal scene with a wish for internationalisation, see Spracklen, 2016, pp. 159–162). In fact, many non-English speaking bands compose original

lyrics in English even if they are not really proficient in the language, a phenomenon that is not usually seen in the opposite direction, despite the globalisation and glocalisation of heavy metal having significantly opened the way for languages other than English in the international scene, and contributed to the rising relevance of local – and historical – languages in folk-influenced subgenres (for more on this, see Wallach, Berger, & Greene, 2011, and the ‘Global Heavy Metal’ section of Karjalainen & Kärki, 2015). This might explain why scenes from non-English speaking regions, but in which proficiency in English is usual (eminently, Scandinavia, but Germany as well), have been able to assume leading roles in certain subgenres, such as power metal or black metal, thereby creating an Anglo-Germanic-Nordic driving force that is sometimes identified with Western metal as a whole. As a result, Hazle’s (2018, p. 7) criticism of the ‘global scene’ concept, that is, that it designates ‘that which is popular or successful in the West and, even then, often in Anglo-American culture’ should be extended to Germanic and Nordic cultures as well. But this is not an exclusive feature of heavy metal. Popular medievalism is also characterised by an Anglo-Germanic-Nordic focus that is responsible for the prevalence of themes and characters of Anglo-Germanic-Nordic interest and a typically Anglo-Germanic-Nordic perception of the Middle Ages (Sturtevant, 2018). This tendency is particularly enhanced in heavy metal by the Anglo-Germanic-Nordic cultural background of the leading bands.

So described, Western metal metaphorically reverse the *Barbaria-Romania* contrast of Roman times, with the Anglo-Germanic-Nordic cultures playing the role of the Empire and non-Anglo-Germanic-Nordic cultures featuring the barbarians. Inside the Western scene(s), Latin-heritage ones stay in the margins: Romance language speaking regions have produced some internationally relevant bands (e.g. Moonspell in Portugal or Rhapsody of Fire in Italy, both of them with lyrics in English), but, in general, they are not as influential in the ‘global scene’ as bands from regions with an Anglo-Germanic-Nordic background. Moreover, Western European metal bands in Romance language speaking regions share ‘glocalising’ behaviours with non-Western scenes. ‘Global’, that is, Anglo-Germanic-Nordic motifs, appear combined with local elements or naturalised and, at the same time, a vindication of the own cultural identity takes place, either through language or through choice of topic, or both (for these strategies, see the sections ‘National Identity, History and Cultural Roots in Heavy Metal’ and ‘Global Heavy Metal’ in Karjalainen, 2018). However, in the Spanish case, the dichotomy *Barbaria-Romania* adopts an additional dimension: it runs parallel to the idiosyncratic belief that ‘the North’, and in particular the Anglo world, despises, ignores and marginalises Spain and everything Spanish because they are too self-centred – and jealous – to see beyond their Northern mentality, but also that Spain and everything Spanish is much worse and less sophisticated than anything ‘northern’.¹ Therefore, Spanish bands find it difficult

¹Do treat this statement with the greatest caution: the Spanish idiosyncrasy being related to contradictory feelings of undervaluation and inferiority is a simplification of the idea of Hispanicity as a cultural identity opposite to Anglo-Germanic-Nordic

to consider their Spanish cultural identity of interest, that is, marketable, outside the Hispanic world. In addition to this, the ‘glocalisation’ of Spanish heavy metal is obliged to confront the disgraceful nationalist past of Francoist Spain. Depending on their political views, Spanish bands can find it quite difficult to include national topics in their songs, especially topics that, like the Middle Ages, were dear to the Regime.

El Cid from a Spanish Perspective

The particular circumstances of Spanish bands are directly related to a problem that has recently become a hot topic in the Western world, but that has been a common feature of Spanish society for the last 40 years: the appropriation of the Middle Ages by the extreme right. Before the medievalists’ reactions to the 2017 Charlottesville rally and the subsequent scholarship on the topic (Albin, Erler, O’Donnel, Paul, & Rowe, 2019; Elliott, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Sturtevant & Kaufman, t.b.c.; Valencia-García, 2020), in Spain, Lacarra (1980), Peña Pérez (2010), and the authors reunited in the edited volume by Moreno Martín (2017) were already timidly addressing this issue, which particularly affects Spanish society.

Unlike the rest of Europe, where the manipulation of the Middle Ages for a nationalist purpose either is a remembrance of the nineteenth- and the early twentieth-century nationalism and the times of the Second World War, or a relatively modern problem related to the rise of the extreme right, as in the United States, in Spain, the Francoist exploitation of the Middle Ages only stopped being institutionalised very recently, in 1978, with the approval of the Constitution, after four decades of national-Catholic dictatorship. Since there has not been an official movement to recover Hispanic medieval history from this manipulation, any references to the Hispanic Middle Ages that are not overtly disapproving tend to be considered suspicious and potentially a sign of support of Francoist ideas, a situation exacerbated by the rise of Spanish historical revisionism led in recent years by Roca Barea (whose works I will not be citing).

This situation poses a great dilemma for Spanish bands wishing to comply with the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal and vindicate their Spanish cultural identity at the same time. Their relationship with El Cid is a perfect example of this conflict: he is the most iconic character of the Hispanic Middle Ages and he perfectly satisfies the prototype of medieval knight sought after in heavy metal, but his history as a Francoist symbol ensures a polemic reception in the Spanish scene.

(northern) cultures (a quite succinct introduction is available in Campos López, 2015). Despite most Spaniards rejecting this antagonism nowadays, traces of it reappear involuntarily all the time and pose great problems when trying to define Spanish cultural identity, in particular for those with more progressive political ideas, as the frontier to the concept of Hispanicity is not very clear and it is associated with nationalist, conservative, and even racist political ideas.

The historical Rodrigo Díaz was born ca. 1043 in Vivar, a little village near Burgos. El Cid was the right-hand man of, first, Sancho II, king of Castile, and, after his death, of Alfonso VI, brother and heir of Sancho, until some noblemen falsely accused him of treason. Alfonso, therefore, banished El Cid from Castile, thus, starting a successful career as a mercenary commanding the troops of the Muslim kings of Zaragoza (1080/1081–1086). Just 2 years after his readmission in Castile (1088), he fell out of favour of Alfonso again and was banned a second time, so that he left and captured the taifa kingdom of Valencia and ruled as its sole lord, proclaiming himself its prince. His death, a natural one, took place in Valencia sometime between May and July 1099. However, this biography is almost unknown to most Spaniards, who are more familiar with the literary and the legendary Rodrigo Díaz depicted in, respectively, the *Poema de mio Cid* ‘The Poem of the Cid’, the most important Castilian epic and a compulsory reading at school until recently, and the series of traditional ballads known as *Romancero del Cid* ‘Ballads of the Cid’, still sung today. The former literaturises the second banishment of El Cid and portrays him as the perfect vassal, a rightful ruler, and a family man, in addition to his knightly qualities. The latter shows an unruly warrior who is banished from Castile for having obliged king Alfonso to swear that he was not involved in the killing of his brother Sancho, and who inspires so much fear in his enemies that he won his last battle after death. Finally, there is a more modern, symbolic Rodrigo Díaz in Spain: Romantics made El Cid incarnate the original Spanish identity, the 98 Generation saw in him the perfect standard bearer of Regenerationism, their own political programme, and Francoism equalled both, Franco and El Cid, as heroes of the nation.

This last iconic interpretation of El Cid is what was at play in 1999, when the very first heavy metal songs about El Cid by Spanish bands (*Cid* by Avalanche and *Legendario* by Tierra Santa) were released.² They were received with accusations of sympathising with the extreme right, a situation that was exacerbated by the editorial success of *Diario de un skin* ‘Diary of a Skinhead’, in which it is stated that ‘there are some epic metal bands like, for example, Tierra Santa and Avalanche, whose songs focus on Spanish history and legends such as El Cid, the Reconquest, the Inquisition, and Don Pelayo, which are linked, to a greater or lesser extent, to the neo-nazi movement’ (Salas, 2003, p. 184, the translation is mine; the author has since qualified these words). This statement is particularly ironic in the case of Avalanche, given their composition presents a postmodern hero overwhelmed by an identity crisis, rejecting his heroic nature and questioning the legitimacy of the Reconquest, which is the absolute opposite of the Francoist image of El Cid (for a more detailed analysis of both songs, see

²*El Cid* by the Costa Rican band Trauma predates them by 2 years. It is worth mentioning that in 1979, the Spanish progressive rock band Crack had already recorded *Marchando una del Cid* ‘Coming up: a Song on El Cid’, which is probably the first attempt to approach the topic from a non-acoustic perspective. Moreover, José Carlos Molina, leader of the heavy metal band Ñu, has been working since 1985 on a rock opera based on El Cid that remains unrecorded (Galicia Poblet, 2005, p. 86).

Saguar García, 2019; for the lyrics of these and of all the other songs commented in this work, refer to The Metal Archives, 2002–2019, unless otherwise stated). In any case, Avalanch has since removed *Cid* from their repertoire, although I could not find any direct evidence of these accusations having played a role in this decision.

More than 10 years went by before another mainstream Spanish band dared to sing about Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar.³ In 2010, Dark Moor found a workaround to distance themselves from the Francoist heritage of El Cid and released *Mio Cid* in English, with just the final strophe in Spanish. It is true that they also conveyed a more nuanced portrait of the hero as the champion of both Moorish and Christian kings but, judging by how ineffective the de-radicalisation and de-Christianisation of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar in *Cid* by Avalanch was, language seems to have played a more decisive role in *Mio Cid* being received with less controversy. However, the best evidence of language defining the relationship of the band with Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar is the 2012 compositions *Mio Cid mercenario* ‘Mio Cid Mercenary’ (in Spanish) and *Mio Cid Campeador* ‘Mio Cid the Champion’ (in English) by Purgatory’s Troop. Both songs form a whole, with no break between the first and the second track but well-differentiated tempos and melodies. However, while the song in Spanish evidences a dismissive attitude towards El Cid, repeatedly despised in the last three strophes, the English lyrics are unproblematic and depict a quite standard medieval knight, with whom the listener even is invited to sympathise. As a result, it seems that, as long as the language is English, the Spanish origin of the band is not evident from the lyrics and the song could pass for a composition by a non-Spanish band, singing about El Cid is acceptable and treated as a mere stylistic choice, that is, a tribute to the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal. However, in all the other cases, a contemptuous attitude or other qualifications – such as the reference to the service to the Moorish kings as made by Dark Moor or the revisitation of the character by Avalanch – are adopted, very likely to avoid transmitting sympathy for the Francoist characterisation of El Cid and, thereby, avoiding accusations of nationalism and/or right-wing ideology.

El Cid from a Spanish American Perspective

Unlike other cultural remnants of Spanish colonial history, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar does not receive the contempt certain Spanish historical topics inspire in Spanish America.⁴ His belonging to a historical period prior to the colonisa-

³Unfortunately, *Afrenta de Corpes* ‘The Offense of Corpes’ by Isengard and *Leyenda y realidad* ‘Legend and Reality’ by Klanghör, both released in 2005, cannot be taken into account because they had no impact outside the local scenes of each band.

⁴Spanish-phobic attitudes were key in the independence movements of Spanish America in the nineteenth century, in particular in Mexico (see Pérez Vejo, 2008, and, in general, his work on the topic). Some of these remain nowadays, as evident, without leaving the field of Heavy Metal Studies, in the anti-Spanish (anti-empire and anti-

tion of America and being totally alien to the history of the continent probably made him less problematic a character during the forging of Spanish American cultural identities before, during, and after the independence wars. When he is subject to such contempt, *El Cid* is controversial as a central character in an imposed foreign historical account that replaced and banished the region's own pre-Columbian past and became official history at an institutional level (on the lack of 'Americanism' of medieval Spanish heroes, see [Guzmán Pérez, 2007](#), pp. 76–78 in particular). Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, thus, entered the school curriculum or, at least, Spanish American canonical culture, becoming a more or less familiar name, primarily associated with a certain level of education, sometimes recognisable in some aspect of everyday life (a brand name, a joke, in advertising, etc.), but which does not say much to the majority of the population.

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar as a school subject is precisely what is found in the lyrics of Spanish American heavy metal bands. *El Cid* by the Costa Rican band Trauma resumes the main action of the *Poema de mio Cid*, and more concretely the plot of its first chant, exactly as it is explained at secondary school: a quest to recover the lost favour of the king. This is far from strange, given how important compulsory readings are in the Costa Rican school system and the particular relationship between some of the most important Costa Rican intellectuals and pedagogues and the above-mentioned text (e.g. [Barahona Jiménez, 1943](#); [Brenes Mesén, 1900](#)). Therefore, despite not having been able to confirm the presence of the *Poema de mio Cid* in the literature curriculum of the 1980s–1990s (compulsory reading lists at the official website of the Consejo Superior de Educación of Costa Rica only go back to 2003), it seems very likely that Trauma were influenced by school memories, either knowingly or otherwise, when they decided to compose this song. Or, at least, by what Costa Rican society considered essential general knowledge at the end of the twentieth century.

The same applies to *El Cid Campeador* 'El Cid the Champion' by Kabrax, the only other Spanish American heavy metal band with a song about *El Cid* I could identify. In this song, the band retell the biography of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar as if it were some kind of History lesson: with encyclopaedic and literary details mixed together and in a chronological order that confuses the first and the second banishments of *El Cid*, or the towns of Zaragoza and Alcocer, or both (Kabrax is not included in *The Encyclopaedia Metallum* and their MySpace.com site is not functional anymore, so the only way to access this song is through YouTube).

As a result, a fundamental difference between Spanish and Spanish American bands singing about *El Cid* arises: while the former see him as a controversial

Christian) nationalist narratives of certain pre-Columbian pagan metal bands related to NSBM and/or the Pagan National Socialist Organisation (O.N.S.P. to use its initials in Spanish), such as the Mexican bands Ixtaukayotl, Kukulcan, Eztlacuani, Yaocui-catl, or Tlillan Calmecac. Curiously enough, the Spanish-phobic discourse of these bands is not based on the so-called Spanish Black Legend, which is the main source for non-Hispanic bands, especially English-speaking ones.

but somehow iconic aspect of their cultural identity, the latter treat El Cid as part of Spanish American scholarly culture. This explains why Spanish bands resort primarily to oral, traditional and popular sources when writing their lyrics on Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, while Spanish American bands prefer to make use of learned sources and the literary, non-popular interpretation of the historical character. Moreover, this justifies why there is no problematisation of the character of El Cid in Spanish American bands at all: while contemporary Spanish popular culture still is full of the characterisation of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar as a Moor-slayer and leader of the Re-conquest, exploited by Francoism to support its national-Catholic programme, literary, non-popular readings of El Cid focus instead on his less nationalistically and religiously connoted literary persona and historical character.

In this sense, singing about El Cid is, for Spanish American heavy metal bands, not particularly different from singing about any other European medieval character or topic: a mere genre convention. There is obviously a certain desire for cultural vindication and/or naturalisation behind the choice of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar instead of an Anglo-Germanic-Nordic hero, as more than a century of pan-Hispanic politics and ideologies have contributed to wash off Spanish colonialism and to instil a certain feeling of community between Spain and Spanish America based on difference to the English speaking world, the so-called Hispanicity (for a quick introduction to the concept, see [Campos López, 2015](#)). But there is also a feeling of estrangement from El Cid that does not arise from a problematic relationship with Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, as in the case of the Spanish bands studied above, but from an existing, real cultural distance from him. That is, El Cid is only incidentally and surrogately part of Spanish American culture, more concretely of Spanish American learned culture, therefore, he appears less often in the songs of Spanish American bands than in those of Spanish bands and, when he does, he is treated with the same kind of distance associated with official, schooled culture. More familiar and more 'at hand' than Anglo-Germanic-Nordic characters for fulfilling the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal, El Cid probably is the most Spanish American medieval knight possible, but he still is more Spanish than American.

Cultural Appropriation Mechanisms in Heavy Metal?

When heavy metal bands without a Hispanic cultural background decide to sing about El Cid, cultural vindication and naturalisation of a recurring topic can no longer explain their choice of subject, as he bears no national or cultural symbolic value for them. However, the 1961, the film *El Cid*, directed by Anthony Mann, can very much account for the song *El Cid the Champion* by the international project Folkodia and, not surprisingly at all, for many of the songs by Spanish bands ([Boix Jovaní, 2015](#); [Saguar García, 2019, 2017](#)). From this perspective, the Hollywoodian Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar functions as an icon of Western pop culture in general and, as such, is readily accessible to anyone with or without a Hispanic cultural background. The only difference is that, for spectators of non-Hispanic heritage, El Cid arrives free from his historical, literary, legendary, and political

loads, serving only as the main character of yet another epic Hollywood film set in the Middle Ages, in which he perfectly satisfies all the values of the standard popular culture medieval knight. Consequently, Folkodia sings about *El Cid* not as the Castilian hero, but as the clichéd character played by Charlton Heston in the commonplace film by Anthony Mann, insofar as he is consistent with the medievalising conventional rhetoric of heavy metal.

A similar treatment reappears in *El Cid* by the Italian band Dragonharp, a song to a certain extent inspired by *La spada del Cid* 'The Cid's Sword', a 1962 Italian-Spanish production directed by Miguel Iglesias and conceived as an unofficial continuation of Anthony Mann's *El Cid*, which was not as successful internationally as its forerunner. In their song, the band retell the first plot of the above mentioned *La spada del Cid*, that is, the abuse to which the Infantes de Carrión subject the daughters of *El Cid* and its consequences, that is, the plot of the third chant to the *Poema de mio Cid*. In addition, Dragonharp complete their lyrics with information likely taken from the 1961 film and/or the popular accounts of the biography of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar. However, this is done so in a manner that invites questions as to whether the members of the band are familiar with the actual *Poema de mio Cid*. Indeed, *El Cid* is not featured in the Spanish-Italian film and the portrayal of him made by other characters only reminds of the Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar described by Dragonharp very vaguely. By contrast, in the epic poem, the same attributes are highlighted as in the song: loyalism, concern about personal honour, and involvement in the diplomatic, political game of the time. Furthermore, these are not the characteristics that usually qualify Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar for heavy metal: *El Cid* is not portrayed as the fear-inspiring hypermasculine warrior of the above-mentioned films (and songs). He is instead presented as the submissive vassal who complies with everything his king commands of the *Poema de mio Cid*. The perfect subject who does not avenge his lost honour and that of his daughters in person, and who delegates this duty to his trusted men to keep to the letter of the law.

Given the above-mentioned deviations from the cinematographic Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar and the conventional medieval knight, it is tempting to consider *El Cid* by Dragonharp to be knowingly and purposely transcending the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal and cinema to offer a more informed portrait of the Castilian hero. Superficial as it is, the comparatively less topical portrayal of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar distances this song from the convenience of adapting a film, a straightforward way to produce lyrics, and evidences a certain interest in individualising and de-stereotyping the character. That is to say, the above-mentioned films *La spada del Cid* and *El Cid* might have inspired the band to sing about Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar to an extent, but they have tried to present *El Cid* as neither the interchangeable knight of Folkodia's *El Cid the Champion*, nor the cinematographic character, but as the protagonist of the *Poema de mio Cid*. In this sense, Dragonharp seems to appreciate *El Cid* more for what he is than for the suitability of his epic filmic characterisation for the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal. As a result, they approach *El Cid* in a less instrumental, more conscious way that involves a certain amount of first-hand research into the original, Spanish sources. Not for nothing, Paolo Albergoni, guitarist of

Dragonharp, confirmed in a personal communication that the *Poema de mio Cid* played a certain role in the creative process of this song: the bassist of the band had read some parts of the text in translation and also watched the film *La spada del Cid*. Nevertheless, the main sources of inspiration were the songs by the Spanish bands Tierra Santa and Dark Moor on El Cid.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *Revenge of Tizona* by the German band Metalium. The song has been described as nonsense in which only the approximate date of birth of El Cid, the proper names of his sword and horse, and a reference to the legendary account of his last battle are correct (Boix Jovaní, 2015, pp. 306–307). As a result, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar is transformed into a vengeful knight formerly at the service of Ferdinand of Aragon, betrayed by him and now seeking vengeance, who has nothing to do with either the vassal of Alfonso of Castile of the Spanish *Poema de mio Cid* and the 1961 film, or the rebellious character of the oral tradition.

Such an accumulation of basic errors evidences an absolute lack of interest in the content of the song and necessarily leads to the conclusion that Metalium sing about El Cid for a practical purpose. In fact, *Hero Nation* is a concept album devoted to history and literature, in which all tracks (except those on German and Nordic themes, which are equally shallow but more accurate) suffer from superficiality and platitudes (although no song is as full of errors as *Revenge of Tizona*). The subjects chosen are commonplace as well: Nero, Rasputin, Odin, Joan of Arc, the Loreley, Ulysses, the fall of the Inca Empire, *Romeo and Juliet*, and, of course, El Cid. Therefore, it is evident that Metalium treat history and literature as a stock of potential themes for songs, which are convenient on account of their epic (e.g. El Cid or the fall of the Inca Empire), anti-epic (e.g. Rasputin or Nero), or romantic-tragic (e.g. Loreley or *Romeo and Juliet*) dimensions, but they are reworked in a manner in which accuracy is not important. That is, they serve the purpose of the concept album and within it, the purpose of variety, but ultimately epicism and tragedy is what these songs are all about, not the historical and/or literary topics and characters about which they talk. In fact, the first track of the album is very explicit about this instrumental use of history: El Cid, Nero, etc., are '[...] historical bodies of those / once admired or hated' in which Metalium is reincarnated to prove his epic character.

This instrumentalisation of history and literature does not pose a problem until confronted with the many errors of *Revenge of Tizona*, in particular when the greater accuracy of the songs on German or Nordic topics is taken into consideration. Although this inequality is very probably the result of sheer ignorance and in no way intentional, from the perspective of the conceptual framework of cultural appropriation, the question arises as to the extent to which it is proper for a non-Spanish, German band to instrumentalise and commercially exploit a figure central to Spanish cultural heritage with such disregard. In particular, since Spanish bands feel subordinate in importance to German bands in the international – but Anglo-Germanic-Nordic-driven – heavy metal scene, and both *Cid* by Avalanch and *Legendario* by Tierra Santa predate Metalium's *Revenge of Tizona* by 3 years, more than enough time for the German band to have had the chance

to listen to these songs and perhaps even be inspired by them. Not to mention the fact that Tierra Santa and Avalanch toured Germany at the beginning of the 2000s, with shows at, for example, the Bang Your Head (2001) and Wacken Open Air (2002) festivals, respectively.

My intention is not to accuse Metalium of appropriating the ideas of Spanish bands and using their comparably advantageous position in the metal scene to market El Cid more successfully than Avalanch or Tierra Santa ever would, as the above simile with cultural appropriation would imply. Even less is it to claim cultural appropriation as such, as it is impossible to apply this concept to Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, as [Boyarin, Christensen, Sagar García, and Swinford \(2019\)](#), p. 76) have perfectly explained:

And even bands without a Hispanic cultural background do not engage in cultural appropriation when singing about El Cid, as he still belongs to Western culture: he is European, he is a Christian, he is presumably white and he is an icon for protecting the European identity against the Moorish invasion, even if he never intended to do so. More importantly, the power dynamics within Europe do not reduce Spanish culture to a position of inferiority that allows us to talk about cultural appropriation. The inferiority complex typically attributed to Spanish culture is, despite the Francoist insistence on an Anglo-Saxon conspiracy to minimise the role of Spain in history, just that, a complex, so that Western bands without any kind of Hispanic heritage singing about El Cid do not mirror the situation of a dominant culture exploiting a minority culture. And let alone in the case of Rodrigo Díaz, a perfect representative of Western values.

What I actually aim to do is to state that the negligence with which *Revenge of Tizona* is written is not connotation-free within the power dynamics of the international heavy metal scene: despite Metalium's audience not being limited to Germany, it conveys the idea that non-German topics are less worthy of attention than German ones and, to a certain extent, that the satisfaction of non-German fans is less important than that of German ones. Although this could be interpreted as a mere consequence of the German background of the band, thus, of their greater familiarity with German topics, or simply as a marketing decision based on sales in Germany and abroad, an indirect consequence of it is the impression that there are first class (Anglo-Germanic-Nordic) and second class (everything else) topics. In this sense, the contrast with Dragonharp's dedication is particularly revealing: perhaps because they feel that they also belong to the margins of the Western international scene, as Spanish bands do, the Italians show a much more horizontal relationship with El Cid, while the Germans clearly approach him from above, from the perspective of being able to take what they need from foreign history instead of acknowledging, appreciating and showing interest in it.

Unintentional Islamophobia?

The absolute lack of historical, literary, legendary, and political background with which non-Spanish (and non-Spanish-American) bands confront *El Cid*, combined with the epic tone of the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal, might result in a kind of exaltation of the figure of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar comparable only with that found in the songs of Spanish extreme right bands, in particular, with regard to the animosity towards Muslims. Lines such as ‘stand and deliver / thy land from these dogs!’ of Folkodia’s *El Cid the Champion*, ‘Defend your Christ and save the Spain! / Defeat the moor and save your king!’ of Dragonharp’s *El Cid* or ‘ready to break muslims’ spine’ of Eagle the White’s *El Cid* are unthinkable in songs by Spanish bands, which tend to avoid the characterisation of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar as a Moor-slayer and of the Reconquest as a religious war by abstaining from either direct references to religion or the word ‘Moor’ itself (Saguar García, 2019).

Setting aside Eagle the White, whose attitude towards Islam is problematic, at best,⁵ it can be assumed that what is behind these lines is not political intention, but sheer thoughtlessness. As long as the sources of inspiration of Folkodia and Dragonharp (the 1961 and 1962 films, and the *Poema de mio Cid*) are not held responsible for this wording, it only can be interpreted as a rhetorical choice motivated by the Reconquest context. Or, better put, by the concept of the Reconquest that both bands (and most non-Spanish bands) share: a religious war between religious fanatics that hated and despised each other. From the perspective of these lyrics, verbal violence against Muslims (Africans and Asians) and aggrandisement of Christianity (Europeans) function merely as a contextualisation device and does not (or should not) have further implications, according to the most repeated defence of racist occurrences in medieval themed songs, books, films, videogames, etc. It is just the spirit of the Middle Ages (for the presence of this argument in the heavy metal scene, see Spracklen, 2015, but for discussions on the inherent racism of popular culture medievalism, it is worth having a look at the special series ‘Race, Racism and the Middle Ages’ of *The Public Medievalist*). However, by sheltering ourselves behind the fallacious argument of historical contextualisation to justify the inclusion of anti-Muslim rhetoric in the above mentioned songs, we are, first, ironically failing to create historically accurate lyrics, as the Reconquest, in its current form of a myth of national origins and a fight between Western civilisation and the rest of the world, specifically dates back to the nineteenth-century nationalism and the twentieth-century national-Catholic

⁵Of the six tracks of their only EP *Heading to Jerusalem*, all but the cover of *Eagle Fly Free* by Helloween are religiously connoted and exalt Christianity, in particular, *Splendor of Kings*. Of their unrecorded songs, one is devoted to Charles Martel and at least another to the Crusades, making their focus on the Christian Middle Ages quite evident. This, together with the anti-Muslim climate of their homeland, Poland, and the similarities between the band’s name and logo and the white eagle of the Polish coat of arms, points to traditionally nationalist, white-nationalist and white-Christian ideological views that I have not been able to confirm or dismiss.

propaganda (García Fitz, 2009). Second, we are also failing to see that these lyrics, either unintentionally or otherwise, fuel and give credibility to the ahistorical concept of the white Christian Middle Ages, so dear to the extreme right. And, third, we are conveying the idea that reflecting on the possible unwanted political implications of songs or the undesirable use that can be made of them is not worth the effort. Of what use is then that the above mentioned Spanish bands struggle to dissociate El Cid from right-wing ideology if non-Spanish bands make a use of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar that perpetuates the characterisation that made him to a right-wing icon in the first place?

Recapitulation

In the light of the 10 songs analysed, it is obvious that there is a significant difference between the attitude with which Spanish and non-Spanish heavy metal bands address the historical character of El Cid. This is primarily related to the psychological and political consequences of the Francoist appropriation of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar during 40 years of dictatorship, which still has an effect on Spanish society. By contrast, the further a band is culturally from Spain, the more El Cid is transformed into an archetype that fits both the medievalising tendencies of heavy metal and the pop-culture concept of the Middle Ages.

Furthermore, this analysis has highlighted at least three important issues in the contemporary heavy metal scene: the consequences of the appropriation of the Middle Ages by the extreme right for the medievalising narratives of heavy metal, the risks of tolerating anti-Muslim rhetoric in medieval-themed heavy metal songs with the excuse of historical contextualisation, and the parallels to cultural appropriation of certain attitudes within the power dynamics of the 'global' heavy metal scene. As this investigation is still ongoing and the very much needed open debate on these problems has not been going on for long enough in the metal community, I have limited myself to contextualise and describe the case study of the songs on El Cid and no conclusions have been drawn at this stage. However, it is worth noting that an emerging trend directly related to the above mentioned issues is becoming visible in the metal scene, led particularly by anti-Fascist extreme metal bands such as Gaylord or Neckbeard Deatchcamp: ambiguity – not to mention overt sympathy – towards white supremacy is becoming no longer tolerable, even not as a strategy to *épater les bourgeois* or portray oneself as transgressive or 'edgy' (Boyarín et al., 2019, p. 76). Therefore, maybe the time has come in which the medievalising rhetoric of heavy metal can no longer be reduced to a mere aesthetic device and all bands, not only extreme metal ones, need to unambiguously position themselves when singing about the Middle Ages. Bands (and fans) are being prompted either to choose an ideologically conscious standpoint, with everything this implies in terms of choice of topic, words, sources, and treatment of these sources, or to opt for a more unconcerned, frivolous attitude towards history, but to make an informed decision, confront the implications of their position and not to shelter themselves behind allegations of unawareness and misinterpretation. In other words, paraphrasing Smialek (2019, p. 50), musicians and fans have to become aware of their biases regarding medieval history

and the complex ways in which the medievalising discourse of heavy metal affect them, like Spanish bands have been forced to due to their particular socio-political circumstances.

Song List

- Afrenta de Corpes [Recorded by Isengard]. (2005). On *Olges* [Demo], Guadalajara, self-released.
- Cid [Recorded by Avalanche]. (1999). On *El llanto de un héroe* [LP], Siero, Flame.
- El Cid [Recorded by Trauma]. (1997). On *El Cid* [LP], unknown, self-released.
- El Cid [Recorded by Dragonharp]. (2016). On *Let the dragon fly* [EP], Milan, self-released.
- El Cid [Recorded by Eagle the White]. (2016). On *Heading to Jerusalem* [EP], Wrocław, self-released.
- El Cid Campeador [Recorded by Kabrax]. (2009). On *Kabrax* [Demo], unknown, self-released.
- El Cid the Champion [Recorded by Folkodia]. (2012). On *Battles and myths* [LP], Verhnaya Pishma, Stygian Crypt Productions.
- Legendario [Recorded by Tierra Santa]. (1999). On *Legendario* [LP], Villaviciosa de Odón, Locomotive Records.
- Leyenda y realidad [Recorded by Klanghör]. (2005). On *Zamora* [Demo], Zamora, self-released.
- Marchando una del Cid [Recorded by Crack]. (1979). On *Si todo hiciera crack* [LP], Madrid, Chapa Discos.
- Mio Cid [Recorded by Dark Moor]. (2010). On *Ancestral romance* [LP], Milan, Scarlet Records.
- Mio Cid Campeador [Recorded by Purgatory's Troop]. (2012). On *Iron wild, (oh mad axeman)* [LP], Barcelona, The Sound of the Kings.
- Mio Cid mercenario [Recorded by Purgatory's Troop]. (2012). On *Iron wild, (oh mad axeman)* [LP], Barcelona, The Sound of the Kings.
- Revenge of Tizona [Recorded by Metallium]. (2002). On *Hero nation* [LP], Abstatt, Massacre Records.

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Chapter 5

At the Crossroads of Nordic Traditions and Languages: The Representation of the Swedish-Speaking Finn Community in Finnish Heavy Metal

Lise Vigier

Abstract

The two concepts of metal music and identity are often linked to each other, from the bands' and their audience's perspectives as well as in the academic field of metal studies (von Helden, 2017; Kärki, 2015; Moberg, 2009a; Mustamo, 2016). One significant example of the interaction between metal and identity can be found in the Nordic scene. North-related themes and Nordic languages are used by metal bands in their music, visual representations, or narratives as components of their identity. Despite the increasing number of studies about Nordic metal scene and identity, the case of Nordic minorities seems to remain in the shade of major Nordic cultures. Willing to draw the attention on this shortcoming, this chapter will study the case of Finland's Swedish-speaking population. After a presentation of the groups analysed, the paper examines how the culture and language of Swedish-speaking Finns is represented through their works. This textual analysis will further discuss the particularity of being situated at the crossroads of Scandinavian and Finnish cultures and languages.

Keywords: Heavy metal; Nordic traditions; Nordic languages; Swedish-speaking Finns; identity; Finland Swedes

Introduction

The academic interest in the Nordic metal scene and the way Nordic cultures and identities are represented or performed has been growing steadily since the 2000s. An increasing number of publications (Hainaut, 2017; von Helden, 2017; Kärki, 2015; Mustamo, 2016) and academic events have examined the link between heavy metal and Nordic countries. It is even rare to find books, collections, or conference programs on metal music that do not contain articles or communications about the Nordic metal scene. Additionally, identity is a very important topic in discussions about metal music and has always been discussed from a wide range of perspectives (Nagy, 2018; Moberg, 2009a; Walser, 1993, p. 12).

Metal music is a subgenre of popular music that enables identity assertions through different means including language, historical, cultural, and intertextual references (von Helden, 2017, p. 59; Kärki, 2015, p. 136; Moberg, 2009a, p. 114). However, despite the emphasis that has been put on Nordic identities and specificities, the case of Nordic minorities seems to remain in the shade of major Nordic cultures since at the time of writing, no other study on Nordic minorities and metal could be found. The aim of this chapter is to analyse the case of one Nordic minority in the heavy metal scene through the representations of the Finnish Swedish-speaking minority in Finnish heavy metal lyrics. After a concise presentation of the Swedish speaking Finns, and an introduction of the corpus, this chapter will consider the representation of the Finland-Swedish minority in terms of number of bands, linguistic choices, and lyrical themes. Moreover, special attention will be given to the particular cultural and linguistic situation at the crossroads of Scandinavian and Finnish traditions and languages.

The Finland-Swedish Minority

Finland has two national languages: Finnish and Swedish. However, the two languages are different in several respects. For example, their origins differ; the former belongs to the Finno-Ugric group of languages and the latter to the north branch of the Germanic languages. Whereas Finnish has been spoken by the majority of Finland's inhabitants for centuries, Swedish and its ancestors have only been spoken in Finland by a small subset of the population since the eleventh century. Nowadays, the status of Swedish as a national language is debated, since the number of Swedish speakers is constantly diminishing. Commonly called Swedish-speaking Finns, they are considered a national minority in Finland (Karlsson, 2017, p. 30) and often suffer from disparities in cultural and administrative access and representation (Wolf-Knuts, 2013, pp. 15–16). Ulrika Wolf-Knuts tellingly compares the situation of Swedish-speaking Finn communities to that of islanders, in that she describes the former as living on 'mental and cultural', and also sometimes geographical, enclaves surrounded by the Finnish-speaking majorities (2013, p. 16). It is also worth noting that despite being considered to be the same language, the Swedish language spoken in Finland slightly differs from the one spoken in Sweden and is regulated by the Swedish Language Board at the

Institute for the Languages of Finland (Karlsson, 2017, p. 31), emphasising the seclusion perspective pointed out by Ulrika Wolf-Knuts.

From a cultural perspective, the Swedish-speaking minority has played an important role in Finland's history, including during the period of national awakening in the nineteenth century. For instance, several Swedish-speaking intellectuals and artists participated in the rise of a Finnish national consciousness as well as in the creation of a Finnish literary and artistic tradition (Meinander, 2011, p. 87–92). However, it is also during this period that debates, arguments, and reflections about linguistic and ethnic differences among the population of Finland emerged (Allard & Starck, 1981, p. 95; Engman, 1999, p. 167; Fewster, 2006, p. 16–17). To explicate this intricate situation, Ulrika Wolf-Knuts analysed it as a coping strategy adopted by the Swedish-speaking Finn community in a time when Finland was under the Russian rule, implying as a consequence, a definitive separation from Sweden and a growing refusal to become Russian (Wolf-Knuts, 2013, p. 18).

Although Swedish is one of the national languages of Finland, an increasing number of Swedish-speaking families are adopting a bilingual way of life (The Swedish Assembly of Finland, p. 3), and the use of Swedish is declining within Finnish society (Karlsson, 2017, p. 34). Thus, Swedish-speaking Finns engaged in cultural activities have to cope with their peculiar position, belonging to neither the Finnish majority culture, nor to the one from Sweden, their position has become increasingly complex.

Representation of the Swedish-speaking Community in the Heavy Metal Scene

As this chapter and others in this book will illustrate, the use of different languages is common in heavy metal songs. In the case of Finland Swedish creations, this can lead to misinterpretations of the meaning of a language. Two Internet databases, one related to global metal music called *Encyclopaedia Metallum* and another specialised in Nordic metal called *Nordic Metal*, were examined to find Finnish bands that use Swedish lyrics, Swedish words, or Finland Swedish references in their songs. However, the metal music databases do not sort bands by languages but rather by genres and subgenres, or by nationality. Thus, the following criteria were used to distinguish between Finland Swedish creations and Finland Finnish ones. First, the texts that will be analysed here had to be written by bands whose members live in Finland. Second, the bands chosen have or had Swedish-speaking Finns as members who have or had a noticeable influence on the band's creative process. Finally, these bands wrote songs, at least partially, in Swedish.

The Bands Studied

From this selection, resulted a very small amount of usable information. Three groups, namely *Finntroll*, *Turisas*, and *Ondfød*t, were taken on as relevant subjects and constitute the main part of the corpus because they already have long careers

in the metal music industry, or their discography counts a significant number of Swedish lyrics. The other bands that were found using the above criteria only have a few songs written in Swedish or their lyrics are not available online. However, these three case studies contain a set of various interesting elements concerning the representation of Finland-Swedishness that will be examined here.

Finntroll

Since Finntroll does not have a dedicated website anymore, the only ‘official’ information about the band comes from its humorous biography on Finntroll’s official Facebook page (Saari, 2010, Influences section). It informs the reader that the band was co-founded in 1997 by a vocalist and lyricist named Jan ‘Katla’ Jämsen, who is a Swedish-speaking Finn. Finntroll’s musical influences are quite varied, from extreme metal music to a kind of traditional Finnish music here described as an equivalent of the hoedown. This presentation of the band already gives a glimpse of Finntroll’s thematic influences as well as some insight on the way they present themselves to the audience: some kind of imaginary creatures haunting the Finnish wilderness. Another interesting detail, from this chapter’s perspective, lies in the band’s name. Since *troll* has a Finnish equivalent that is *peikko*, it is then interesting to notice that the band chose the Swedish and also English version of this word. The association of the noun *Finn* with the name *troll* illustrates the band’s links to both Scandinavian and Finnish cultures and traditions. From a linguistic perspective, the band mainly sings in a rather standardised form of Swedish.

Turisas

As for Turisas, it was formed in 1999 and counts among its co-founders the Swedish-speaking Finnish vocalist and lyricist Mathias Nygård. Turisas is the name of an ‘ancient Finnish God of war’, according to the band’s website (The Official Battleground, ‘Band’, 2013, para. 2), meaning that, unlike Finntroll, Turisas’ name is entirely rooted in the Finnish tradition. From the music perspective, Mathias Nygård explained in a filmed interview that the music Turisas plays is usually called ‘pagan metal’ (Nota Bene, 2017c), which is a subgenre of metal music that is mainly defined by its pre-Christian lyrical themes and commonly includes traditional instruments such as violins or accordions.

Ondfødt

Ondfødt, composed of the Scandinavian noun *ond* meaning ‘evil’ and *født* a Norwegian and Danish spelling of ‘fed’ or ‘born, can be translated as ‘evil born’. The band was created in 2013 by two Swedish-speaking Finns, Owe Inborr and Juuso Englund, and has released one EP and two albums all written in Finland-Swedish, more precisely, an Ostrobothnian dialect. Ondfødt’s music is characterised as black metal, on the band’s official Facebook page (‘About’, 2013). Unlike Finntroll and Turisas, Ondfødt does not mainly treat such themes as paganism or

pagan cultures and focusses instead on Satanism or occultism, which are not, at least at first glance, strongly related to Finnish culture.

The Linguistic Choices

Among Finnish metal bands, English is the most common language, then comes Finnish and finally Swedish. Concerning Finland Swedish bands, as shown [Table 1](#) that is based on Finntroll's, Turisas's, and Ondfödt's song titles and the lyrics indexed on the Encyclopaedia Metallum's website, two different trends emerge.

On the one side, Finntroll and Ondfödt chose Swedish as a main language and, in Finntroll's case, use Finnish as a secondary language. On the other side, Turisas followed the main trend by using mostly English, occasionally Finnish, and more rarely Swedish. As Johannes Brusila points out, the choice of language is made after considerable thought and, in the case of Finland-Swedish artists, it can be explained by the significant consequences of this choice on the economic impact of the song, its aesthetics, and its reception by the public ([Brusila, 2015](#)). The observation of the occurrences of Swedish, Finnish, and English will be used to reflect on the way these languages are displayed in the songs and the possible outcomes of these choices in terms of meaning.

Table 1. Linguistic Choices of Finland Swedish Metal Bands.

	Swedish		Finnish		English		Other Languages	
	Main language	Part of the song / Title	Main language	Part of the song / Title	Main language	Part of the song / Title	Main language	Part of the song / Title
Finntroll	63	13	1	2				
Turisas		2	1	4	34			3
Ondfödt	14	4						

The Swedish Language in the Finnish Scene

The presence of Scandinavian languages is not rare in the Scandinavian metal scene. For instance, bands dealing with topics related to this region may favour a language rooted in it. However, the use of Swedish differs slightly in Finland in some respects. In terms of the number of speakers, Swedish is a minority language despite its national status. One consequence of this is increased difficulty in accessing recording contracts, and the chances are even lower if the artist sings in a Finland Swedish dialect ([Brusila, 2010](#), p. 2). Because of this, as [Brusila \(2015, p. 13\)](#) argues, the potential audience is too small to 'viably sustain its own profitable niche in the music industry of Finland' and the Finland Swedish cultural sphere remains mostly in the shade of major Finnish and Sweden Swedish spheres to which it could be related. Thus, the choice of Finland

Swedish or one of its dialects may incur a far lesser visibility and cultural influence than that of Scandinavian bands would have, at least with national Scandinavian languages.

The band Finntroll uses a standardised form of the Swedish language, uninfluenced by dialects or regional particularities. Whereas Johannes Brusila considers the choice of Swedish language in Finntroll's lyrics as a way to give its lyrics a 'fairy-tail like flair of Old Norse' (Brusila, 2010, p. 8), the band explains this choice of language as a consequence of having a Swedish speaking Finn as its first singer and co-founder (Saari, 2010, Influences section).

Ondfødt (2019) is one of the very few bands to have favoured their regional, in the present case, Ostrobothnian, form of Swedish in their lyrics as seen in their album *Dödsrikets Kallelse* 'Summons of the Dead's Realm'. Only one other band is known to use a specific form of Finland Swedish, hence, 1G3B that has been studied by Johannes Brusila (2010). The use of dialectal forms, from the Norwegian perspective, has already been characterised by Imke von Helden as a means of expressing bonds to special places, 'feelings of authenticity and rootedness', or political issues (von Helden, 2017, pp. 126–127) and the use of Swedish lyrics in the Finnish metal scene may serve the same purpose. Despite the limitations given by this choice, Ondfødt may use the Ostrobothnian dialect of Swedish to reflect their connection to the Ostrobothnian region, which may be perceived as an identity stance despite the limitations given by this choice. However, the topics of Ondfødt's songs follow the models of extreme metal themes such as Satanism, anti-Christian discourses, occultism, and bonds to nature, and do not emphasise the band's relation to Finland Swedish nor to Ostrobothnian cultural specificities.

Swedish language and Swedish names can also be employed by some other Finnish bands which have no obvious ties to Swedish language or culture, favouring for instance English or Finnish language for their lyrics. For example, bands such as Dö 'To die', and Solgrav 'Sun's grave' (which in 2009 translated its name into the Finnish *Auringon Hauta*), or Grönholm or Johannes, whose names have been taken from one of their founders. In addition, the use of Scandinavian mythological names by Finnish bands such as Brymir, which may be an adaptation of the name of the Scandinavian mythological giant Ymir. Svartalfheim or Nornir are also common. These examples may show how, as suggested by Brusila (2010) concerning the use of the Swedish language by Finntroll, some bands may have used these names in order to evoke a precise Scandinavian metal imagery or to fit in with particular metal subgenres, for instance, the extreme ones to which several famous Norwegian and Swedish bands belong. However, these bands never or scarcely ever use Swedish in their lyrics and can, thus, be misleading indicators of Finland Swedish representation in the heavy metal scene.

Turisas has one song, named *Rex Regi Rebellis* 'The king is rebellious towards the king' (2004, track 11), that contains Swedish lyrics, combined with English and Finnish. The choice of languages reflects the theme of the song in that, through different layers of intertextuality, it refers to a Finnish special cavalry unit that served in the Swedish army during the seventeenth century.

This song is not the only example of the use of languages as tools that set the context of the lyrics' narrative. Actually, Scandinavian words are also noticeable in the lyrics of the songs *To Holmgard and Beyond* (2007, track 1), *A Portage to the Unknown* (2007, track 2), *In the Court of Jarisleif* (track 5), *Five Hundred and One* (2007, track 6), or *The March of the Varangian Guard* (2011, track 1). In these songs, Scandinavian names and toponyms are used to give a more realistic view of the stories of the Scandinavian pre-Christian populations and their travels eastwards along the way known as the Way of the Varangians to the Greek to Constantinople, narrated in the albums *The Varangian Way* and *Stand Up and Fight*. Such names as Holmgard, Miklagard (Turisas, 2007, track 8) are indeed the Scandinavian translations of the toponyms Novgorod and Constantinople (Bosselmann, 2018, p. 391) used by the populations often referred to as Vikings, and Jarisleif is the Scandinavian version of the name of the '11th-century Grand Prince Yaroslav' (Bosselmann, 2018, p. 398). As Antje Bosselmann-Ruickbie points out, the band also chose to use the Greek language in the title *Βένετοι!* – *Πράσινοι* 'Blues – Greens' (2011, track 4), given to a song about a race in Constantinople's Hippodrome (Bosselmann, 2018, p. 409). Unlike Ondfødte, Turisas does not generally use Swedish as a way to take identity stances but rather, on an equal level to other languages, it appears as a way to convey the historical context of the songs' subject matter.

The Particular Use of the Finnish Language

There is a specific pattern in the themes of the lyrics written in Finnish, as illustrated in the songs of Turisas *The Land of Hope and Glory* (2004, track 4) and *Sahti Waari* 'Beer Grandpa' (2004, track 9), and the song *Madon Laulu* 'The worm song' (2003, track 9) written by Finntroll. In these lyrics, the use of Finnish appears as a way to relate to a native land as well as to its imagined original traditions and lifestyle.

The song *The Land of Hope and Glory* is about a man who leaves his native country for a richer and more hospitable place. At a certain point, while discovering this rich and luxurious land, the protagonist and narrator starts to miss his homeland. While the main part of the song is sung in English, the lyrics that evoke the narrator's feelings are then sung in Finnish:

Kaikuen laulu raikaa takaa ulapan
 Kotimaan rannat kutsuu poikaa Pohjolan
 'The echoing song resonates from behind the open sea
 Native land's shores call [back] the boy of the North'
The Land of Hope and Glory (Turisas, 2004, track 4)

Mathias Nygård, thus, chose the Finnish language to stage the call of his character's homeland. The stress on Finnish language and culture is emphasised through the pre-Christian gods Ahti, the sea god, and Ilmarinen, the blacksmith and creator, whom the character greets while he crosses back over the sea to his homeland.

Sahti Waari, the other song by Turisas, is also taken from the album *Battle Metal* (2004). It is the band's only song that is sung entirely in Finnish. This title stands for the core theme of the song: the perpetuation of the Finnish traditions and of the memory of Finnish origins. The lyrics tell how through the act of drinking *sahti*, a traditional Finnish home-brewed beer, original traditions are transferred to the younger generations regardless of external events and wills such as Christianisation. It should be noted that Christianity is often depicted in several extreme heavy metal subgenres as a threat for original traditions or the cause of their loss (Bénard, 2004, p. 61; Mustamo, 2017, p. 49), as done in *Sahti Waari*. This song can, thus, be understood as a call to perpetuate the old traditions and lifestyles or to revive them.

Madon Laulu 'Song of the worm' is a Finntroll song that follows the band's usual dark fantastic themes and moods. Presented as an 'Old Finnish shamanic curse' this text is a summoning of supernatural forces to chase criminals and hunt their dreams. The main language used is an eastern dialectal form of Finnish. The lyrics are based on at least two different poems gathered in the poem collection *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* 'the ancient poems of the Finnish people' published by the Suomen Kirjallisuuden Seura 'Finnish Literature Society'. The first verse of the song is an adaptation of the poem 1558 (Kempainen, 1915) and the second verse is mostly inspired by the verses 71-76 of the poem 750 (Marttini, 1911). These poems are composed following the Kalevala's metric, which is a specific poetic metric originating from Fennic oral traditions whose most famous example is the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*. The Finnish Literature Society has created a whole website section about the origins of the Kalevala, as well as its role in Finnish culture (Finnish Literature Society, n.d., Kalevala section). The distinctive character of this song resides firstly in the fact that the band drew its inspiration from a collection of poetic texts that has been given an important nationalist value, from the Finnish culture's perspective, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Haapoja-Mäkelä, Stepanova, & Tarkka, 2018, p. 22). Moreover, the song's poetic form is an exception in Finntroll's work, as well as the fact that it is the only song entirely sung in Finnish in Finntroll's discography.

The common point of these three songs lies in the way Finnish is used to embody a form of cultural and traditional unity rooted in Finland. Finnish is represented as the language of the homeland, as well as the language of what both bands present in their lyrics as a prime tradition and culture that has to be protected, revived and/or performed. Consequently, the presence of the Finnish language contributes mainly to representing the Finnish culture and not the Finland Swedish one. This situation is not dissimilar to what happened during the Finnish national awakening in the nineteenth century among the partisans supporting the creation of a national identity based on Finnish language and culture that would be free (Fewster, 2006; Kirby, 2006, pp. 90-100; Meinander, 2011, pp. 87-92). At that time, a Finnish national identity was constructed by academics and intellectuals who were for the most part Swedish-speaking Finns. To serve this nationalist purpose, more and more research and writings were produced with the aim of publishing texts in Finnish, that are characterised by Derek

Fewster (2006, pp. 18–19) as symbols of Finnish nationalism, along with other artistic creations of that period. However, this similarity between these uses of Finnish oral traditions is also limited from a contextual perspective. The political issues and agendas, the cultural and the linguistic situations in the Swedish-speaking community as well as in Finland by and large have evolved to a great extent between the nineteenth century and the present day (Allard & Starck, 1981, pp. 95–98; Engman, 1999, pp. 175–176; Wolf-Knuts, 2013).

Despite some uses of Swedish language as well as of Swedish typical dialectal forms from Finland, representation of the Finland Swedish community is extremely scarce from the linguistic perspective. Based on this observation, the focus will be now move to the thematic viewpoint.

Presence of Historical References

Among the most usual themes, analysed for instance in Walser's pioneering work (1993, pp. 160–165) or in von Helden's (2017) more recent research about Norse themed metal music, history appears as a regular topic as much in the global heavy metal scene as in the Finnish one. Bands such as Turisas, Finntroll, or Ondfödt are no exceptions. However, two periods seem particularly favoured by these bands: the Viking era, that is generally depicted as a lost golden age of Nordic cultures, and the Christianisation of the Nordic area, which is often perceived in the folk, pagan, and black metal subgenres as the cause of its end (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 40; Moberg, 2009a, p. 199; Spracklen, 2015, p. 360).

The Viking Era

One of the first pieces of evidence of durable contacts between ancient Finnish and Swedish populations dates back to the Viking era, making it a relevant period from a Finland Swedish perspective (Kirby, 2006, p. 4; Meinander, 2011, pp. 5–6).

However, according to the databases used in this study, Turisas has been the only Finland Swedish band that has dealt with this theme, devoting two albums to this topic, namely *The Varanguian Way* (2007) and *Stand Up and Fight* (2011). These albums narrate the journey of a group of Scandinavians from the present-day Sweden to Constantinople between the ninth and the eleventh centuries. This group is usually referred to as the Varangians and the Varanguian Way is the path they followed and along which they developed or established trading posts. *The Varanguian Way* is the most relevant concerning the relations between Scandinavian and Finnish populations, since the songs follow this Varanguian Way through the topics or languages used. For instance, the first song of the album, *To Holmgard and Beyond* (2007, track 1), mentions the name of some of the members of the group the band is following, and we can discern that this crew is composed of Scandinavians as the names Ulf, Tostensson or of course Hakon the Bastard imply, as well as Finnish people bearing such names as Kokko, Kyy, or Turo. In addition, we can notice that this is at the beginning of the album that has been placed the song *Cursed Be Iron* (2007, track 3) which is actually an English translation published in 1888 of the ninth poem of the Finnish National

epic named *Kalevala* (Lönnrot, Origin of Iron) and composed by Elias Lönnrot between 1835 and 1849. From a narrative perspective, this choice may lead to think that the Scandinavians may have been in touch with Finnish population and consequently traditions while navigating along the Baltic coasts.

One should bear in mind that the connections evoked in the songs are not represented as pure historical data recounting the birth of the Finland Swedish population, but rather as a testimony of the band's sensitivity towards this part of the Viking history that is not much depicted in other heavy metal creations dealing with Viking related themes.

The Christianisation of the Nordic Area

The Christianisation of the Nordic area is also a typical heavy metal topic and is even more present in the Nordic scene, as pointed out for instance by [von Helden \(2017, pp. 95–112.\)](#). As mentioned before, the Christianisation of the Scandinavian regions is often considered a factor in the disappearance of the Vikings as well as the original Nordic culture ([Moberg, 2009b, pp. 118–119](#)). This perspective leads to the representation of the Christian religion as responsible for the loss or the lack of an original identity. This rejection of Christianity and adoption of anti-Christian stances has often been prevalent since the birth of heavy metal music ([Moberg, 2009a, p. 114](#)).

The song of Finntroll called *Bastuvisan* 'The sauna song' (1999, track 5) exemplifies the position adopted by the band towards Christianity. In this song, as in some of Finntroll's other songs, a group of trolls defeat Christian missionaries such as Amund and Ketill who are killed in a sauna or *bastu* in Swedish. The title illustrates in a way the Finland Swedish crossroads situation, through the evocation of the sauna, which is commonly recognised as a Finnish symbol and the *visa*, a kind of Swedish folk song. Moreover, the story told in *Bastuvisan* is closely related to the legend that can be found on the band's 'about' section on its official Facebook page. According to this legend, the name Finntroll is based on a Finnish legend of Swedish priests who met a wild-looking Finnish man who succeeded in killing most of the priests' company. The Christian representatives are thus depicted as the enemies of these Finntrolls. These stories about missionaries being attacked by Finnish characters may be linked with a Finnish legend according to which Lalli, a Finnish peasant, killed Henry, the first Bishop of Finland in the middle of the twelfth century ([Anttonen, 1999](#)). The Finnish metal band [Moonsorrow \(2001\)](#) has also referred to this legend in its song *Köyliönjärven jäällä* 'On the ice of the lake Köyliö' (track 2).

Intertextuality

On a different topic that is surprisingly rarely explored, the songs of [Turisas Prologue for R.R.R. \(2004, track 10\)](#) and *Rex Regi Rebellis* (2004, track 11) share some interesting features. These songs are about the seventeenth century Finnish light cavalry later named *Hakkapeliitat* in Finnish and *Hackapeliter* in Swedish that served in numerous wars, including the Thirty Years War. It was at that time

that the Swedish Empire, then comprising Finland as a Swedish region, expanded its borders and enjoyed major political power (Kirby, 2006, pp. 30–31; Meinander, 2011, p. 37). The Hakkapeliitta cavalry was composed of Swedish- and Finnish-speaking Finnish men, and was known as a dangerous corps of the Swedish army. This name comes from this cavalry war cry *Hakkaa päälle* which is often translated into ‘Cut them down’ (Meinander, 2011, p. 38). The reputation of this corps was later used as a symbol of strength and glory during the nineteenth century but also at the end of the first half of the twentieth century when the Hakkapeliitat were again used as a rallying symbol to unite the Finnish population between the two World Wars (Fewster, 2006, pp. 320–327; Meinander, 2011, p. 145).

To deal with this topic, as explained by Mathias Nygård in an interview (Undercraft, 2004, paras. 12–14), Turisas chose to quote the author Zachris Topelius’ (1853) first of the five volume historical novel *Fältskärens berättelser*, or ‘The surgeon stories’ in English, as well as lyrics of the *Finska rytteriets marsch i trettioåriga kriget* (1872) or ‘March of the Finnish cavalry in the thirty years war’ in the *Prologue for R.R.R.* (2004, track 10). Topelius was also a Swedish-speaking Finn who played an important role in spreading the idea of Finland as a nation during the nineteenth century (Klinge, n.d.).

Therefore, these songs constitute a set of double references, first to a significant episode of Finnish history and second to an important Finland Swedish intellectual figure. In this way, the bands include a part of the Finland Swedish cultural heritage in their songs, though they use mostly English translations or their own lyrics to make the topic of the songs more accessible and easier to share for a foreign audience.

Conclusion

From what has been presented in this chapter, it would be excessive to speak of a proper representation or staging of the Finland Swedish community in the heavy metal scene. Not many bands can be labelled as Finland Swedish, only a few references are made to this minority and the use of Swedish shows mostly a trend to enter a specific Scandinavian heavy metal frame or to create particular atmospheres influenced by Scandinavian mythology and folklore.

However, Swedish may not be as important an obstacle in the heavy metal scene as in other spheres of popular culture, since the Scandinavian scene already benefits from a noticeable reputation in the Nordic area and abroad (von Helden, 2010, p. 33; Weinstein, 2011, pp. 41–42). As a result, the audience is already accustomed to the presence of the Swedish language in heavy metal lyrics.

Moreover, and as illustrated by an online video report about the role of the heavy metal scene in the learning of historical topics (Nota Bene, 2017a), song lyrics can introduce foreign audiences to new cultures and communities, including Finland Swedish ones, as for instance with the songs of Turisas *Prologue for R.R.R.* (2004, track 10) and *Rex Regi Rebellis* (2004, track 11).

Another challenge facing bands who address Finland Swedish history may be the scarcity of historical sources. The Swedish metal band Sabaton for instance pointed out that, quite logically, recent events are more documented than events that happened several centuries ago, and that it is, therefore, harder to

create artistic material with scarce sources (Nota Bene, 2017b). The band itself encountered this difficulty while making an album about Sweden's great power period that took place between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Kent, 2008). Since Finland was a part of Sweden for almost six centuries, Finnish metal bands approaching Finland Swedish topics may face similar difficulties if they do not find themselves able to access to certain sources.

The Finland Swedish minority is not often discussed by Finland Swedish heavy metal bands and artists. On the one hand, this can be explained by the constantly diminishing number of Swedish speaking Finns (Official Statistics of Finland, 2018). On the other hand, these bands have to cope with the difficulty of signing record contracts and their position as a minority culture (Brusila, 2010, p. 1). The songs' topics, the variety of languages used, the position at the crossroads of two Nordic traditions, and languages can be perceived as an opportunity for wider influences. Finland Swedish artists appear to be more inclined than Finnish ones to mix Scandinavian, Finland Swedish, and Finland Finnish cultural and linguistic influences in their songs or in their concepts, as exemplified by the songs *Bastuvisan* 'The sauna song' (Finntroll, 1999, track 5) and *Sahti Waari* 'Beer Grandpa' (2004, track 9) or the song *Rex Regi Rebellis* 'The king is rebellious towards the king' (Turisas, 2004, track 11) and the album *The Varangian Way* (Turisas, 2007), from a historical perspective. Thus, they also represent relevant examples of the mutual influences existing between the Swedish-speaking minority and the 'Finnish society as a whole' as pointed out by Wolf-Knuts (2013, p. 24).

This chapter focussed on only one Nordic minority that still benefits of a national status, being a minority in terms of numbers and that speaks a language that is closely related to the national language of Sweden. It would then be interesting to analyse other – non-national – minorities' cases in the Nordic heavy metal scene. Whereas heavy metal provided an opportunity for some populations to express their own identity or to introduce their own culture and lifestyle to a broad audience, the cultures of minority groups remains underexposed. From another Nordic minority's perspective, Sagitarius and Intrigue appear as the very few bands representing the Saami minority and its culture in the hard rock and the heavy metal scenes, using, for example, the Saami singing technique called joik in a significant number of songs. Other forms of analysis may also be relevant to this issue, including musical and visual analysis. These approaches may yield further insights into the representations of minority groups in heavy metal music.

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Part III

Processing Oppression, War, and Bereavement

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Chapter 6

Poetic Analysis of the Anti-war Song *Muerte en Mostar* by the Spanish Heavy Metal Band Desafío

Elena-Carolina Hewitt

Abstract

This chapter contains a case study analysis on a song by the Spanish heavy metal group *Desafío* or ‘Challenge’. The lyrics of the song are treated as a poem, and I will thus progress toward a linguistic and poetic analysis (Leech, 2013). Songs include many poetic devices, such as personification, metonymy, paradox, tautology, antithesis, and hyperbole (cf. Hewitt, 2000, p. 189). During the aforementioned linguistic and poetical analysis, it will be seen that the song *Muerte en Mostar* ‘Death in Mostar’ abounds with poetic features. The song begins with personification, for example: ‘The moon reflects in her face the shadows of evil’. Liturgical lexis and bellicose vocabulary also proliferate. Especially active in the song is the notion of an almost religious crusade. For example, one liturgical aspect found in the chorus is where an unnamed protagonist is described within the context of an almost holy war: ‘To his squadron’s flag he promised his loyalty / His heart of love would be called by God’. The song goes on to recount the subsequent events and, therefore, this song in fact seems to be a mini-narrative. Finally, I will show how so much literary allusion reveals, in the end, that the song is not about Spain at all but about events that took place during the war of Bosnia–Herzegovina.

Keywords: Liturgical lexis; bellicose vocabulary; poetic analysis; Spanish heavy metal; heavy metal lyrics; Bosnia–Herzegovina; anti-war song

Introduction

Desafío ‘Challenge’ is a heavy metal band from the Navarra northern region of Spain. The song I am going to analyse here is called *Muerte en Mostar* ‘Death in Mostar’ (1996). ‘The Basque Region Music Website’ is a blog that houses a music video archive of 1,169 Basque bands. According to the aforementioned Basque Region Music Website and its page about the song and its description, the band recorded their only long-playing album, also titled *Desafío* in 1996 in the 21st Sound Studios in the town of Esparza de Galar situated in the Navarra region of Spain. The tracks on this album were called: *Occasional Pleasure*, *Break the Chains*, *Crystal Vice*, *Death in Mostar*, and *I Will Live*.

With this album, they won the third edition of the San Adrián Villa contest in 1997, in the Rock category. The San Adrián Villa contest is held every January in the town of the same name. It was founded in the year 1995, and it is a contest that aims to find and promote new bands. The event has three parts: first, the youth of San Adrian town arrange the contest, then the invited groups arrive, and, finally, the contest and activities take place in the town. It is a non-profit contest organised by the young people of the town. They do this with the goal of making the cultural scene in their town more interesting, as well as with the hope that the bands will also find fame nationally (cf. The San Adrian Villa contest web page and the YouTube page of the song). As with most of their songs, this one *Muerte en Mostar* is written and sung in Spanish (my own observation). In this chapter, only the English translation of the song lyrics is given due to space limitations.

According to Dzorr (2019, p. 1), Spanish heavy metal lyrics were historically about girlfriends and the difficulties of day to day living. The same writer claims that some Spanish heavy metal bands like *Triana*, *Mezquita*, and *Medina Azahara* were influenced by flamenco. Flamenco is a type of traditional folk music from the south of Spain. On the other hand, Basque radical rock was influenced by the unemployment and de-industrialisation in that northern region of Spain of the same name, the Basque country. The Basque region had previously been prosperous but in the 1980s started to show the same evidence of decline as North America and the United Kingdom had. Kahn-Harris (2007) comments on the scarcity of information about Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian metal bands. He attributes this to the bands being ‘somewhat insular in global terms’ (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 116), possibly because they did not look for fame outside of their respective countries.

Also, according to Dzorr (2019, p. 2), the group *Barón Rojo* or ‘Red Baron’ was the most famous Spanish heavy metal band. It was influenced by a wide range of other bands. However, *Barón Rojo* did not really become famous internationally although they were well-liked in South America. In fact, its first two albums were re-recorded in English so as to bring in a wider audience. The saxophonist of the bands King Crimson and Camel collaborated with *Barón Rojo* and Dzorr remarks that the album *Larga Vida al Rock and Roll* (Long Live Rock and Roll) is essential listening in order to understand the *Barón Rojo* band and Spanish heavy metal.

The lyrics of the song *Muerte en Mostar* will now be analysed using poetic analysis. Since poetic analysis is mainly used for poetry and not for song lyrics, I will now set out some pointers as to how I use this type of analysis.

Mus (2018, p. 242) comments that: '[...]By granting... songs the status of "pensée" [thought] or "univers" [universe], there is a shift in the status... creations are now considered as part of a framework of artistic views, as evidence of an author's poetics'. However, most poems have metre, rhyme, verses, verses in prose, and systems of sounds. But usually songs have fewer of these poetic features. Nevertheless, both songs and poems have in common that their text needs to be understood as a whole and not only line by line, for a useful poetic analysis to take place. Obviously, a song has an extra facet to it, which is the music. Music may help to add extra emotion, whereas a poem lacks this aspect. A poem also lacks the physical aspect of hearing aloud the singer's voice. However, music often covers up the lyrics. Martínez and González (2009, p. 14) describe songs as poetical *and* musical discourse (my italics). These same authors also note that songs may express communal ideas whereas poems usually only express the ideas of an individual author.

Regarding poetic analysis and song-lyrics, one similarity is that both may include rhyme schemes. Rhyme schemes help a song or poem to flow as poems, as much as songs and lend themselves to analysis of their rhythm. Hess (2019, p. 1) remarks that: 'Rhythm is what makes music as well as poetry. The flowing of words, the instruments' smooth melody; all a part of the greater meaning, is poetry. In fact, there's even a form of poetry which is made into music called lyrical poems'. Also, both have a voice. In the case of songs the voice is not abstract but tangible. In the song by the band *Desafío* the voice is moreover female. In reality, songs and poems are very similar, except one of them has music.

Differences of poetic analysis versus analysis of song-lyrics are described by Zapruder (2012, p. 1) who says, 'Words in a poem take place against the context of silence, whereas ...lyrics take place in the context of a lot of deliberate musical information: melody, rhythm, instrumentation, the quality of the singer's voice, other qualities of the recording, etc.'. The words may be constructed and analysed in different ways. The manner in which meaning is put across with its music has to be put across differently with a poem.

Let us now analyse in detail, the song *Muerte en Mostar* and see what the said analysis reveals. Some preliminary findings are that this heavy metal song includes not only the themes of war and religion but also, however, the theme of pacifism. Indeed, it seems to be about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) United Nation's peacekeeping squadron of Spanish soldiers stationed in Mostar during the Bosnia war of the 1990s.

According to Girón (2002, pp. 11–14), the war in Yugoslavia started in 1991 and it was a string of individual, but linked wars, of the religious-ethnic-political-independence type. It waged on and on and early in 1999 the United States decided to withdraw the United Nations forces from the area and decided that NATO would be the ones to deal with Yugoslavia. It was not until European mediation that the bitter conflict ended and the date that Girón gives as its finish of the war in Yugoslavia is the 10 June 1999, after the signing of the Kumanovo Treaty.

Analysis

Plot

First, I will examine the plot or course of action throughout the song with the aim of giving us a structure to help in understanding the rest of our analysis. The plot in *Muerte en Mostar* is as follows. In verse one, the scene is set and the town of Mostar is described. Next, follows the chorus where the soldier promises loyalty to his squadron and in verse two he is then called to battle. In verse three, the soldier is shot in the head and dies, and, in the same verse, it says that this event also means that Maria has lost her boyfriend. Verse four talks about the onward march of wars and how nothing has changed in this aspect over the course of history. The fifth and final verse talks of all war-bound lovers, and how their blood is always shed to no avail.

Swist (2019) remarks that epic battles similar to the one above are a common theme of heavy metal music. He says that this theme was particularly common after the 1980s when groups: '[...]began translating the classical tradition from literature and film into music where it felt right at home with odes of swords and sorcery from other sources both mythical and fictional' (p. 1). McParland (2018, pp. 65–67) says that myth may be compared to a type of folk story. Stories are told to entertain and to remember history. The heavy metal audience is a collective body that knows and responds to the classic songs and codes of battles and myths. Therefore, and in part thanks to the myths and battles so common in the songs, the heavy metal public interprets them and takes part in the electricity and images of the bands they follow. Umurha (2012, p. 129) explains why heavy metal has made more use of Greek and Roman classics than any other music genre. He states that they fit in with heavy metal as a response to teen frustration and angst. He says that this is because heavy metal's style is a good vehicle for male aggression as well as the celebration of Roman and Greek military know-how. Deena Weinstein (2000), a great authority on metal music, also describes the culture of metal as vigorous and defiant. Thus, we can again see why the theme of battle is so common in metal music.

Meller (2013, pp. 199–200, 214) comments that with the metal band Iron Maiden, historical themes are so prevalent that all of their songs can be ordered chronologically and range from songs about the discovery of fire right up to songs on the battles of the Second World War. Partly, this is due to the contributions to the lyrics made by the band's vocalist who has a degree in history. As examples of songs about battles, Meller gives those of *Paschendale* and *The Trooper*. Both of these Iron Maiden songs are about battles that really did take place. Meller noticed that Iron Maiden themselves remarked that songs about battles are a perfect fit for the aggressive identity that heavy metal has.

Poetics

The song *Muerte en Mostar* begins with two counts of personification, in the first and second lines specifically: In line 1, 'The night begins its slow march' and in line 2: 'The moon reflects in her face the shadows of evil'. The first image

shows the night as a marcher and this evokes the way the night rolls round time after time like the wheel of fortune – the fickle wheel of fortune that is relevant to the rest of the song. Additionally, the use of the word ‘march’ anticipates the subsequent action of soldier in the song. The word ‘march’ also reveals what the rhythm throughout the song will be as shown by its lyrics – as this demonstrates its pounding, constant pace.

The Collins English Dictionary defines the symbol of the ‘wheel of fortune’ as coming from mythology and literature and being a revolving device spun by a deity of fate that selects random changes of direction in human affairs. It represents the changes or the vicissitudes of life which were brought about by the goddess of fortune to obtain reverses in human matters. The fact that the wheel is traditionally controlled by a deity or a goddess may point to the fate and folly of man’s intervention of this war in *Muerte en Mostar*.

The same source especially links this noun ‘marching’ to the phrase ‘marching song’. The latter is a song with the rhythm of a march that soldiers sing as they are moving onwards. This ties in with what I say later in more about the rhythm of this song *Muerte en Mostar*.

Some other poems about marching come especially from the First World War era. This war was also often depicted in poetry as a futile war. It included the following, for example, Thomas Hardy’s poem ‘Marching and after September 1915’. Additionally, Charles Sorley’s poem ‘All the Hills and Vales Along’ (Walter, 2006, p. 33). This is another First World War poem, and is about soldiers singing as they march along to their death. Marjorie Pickthall’s First World War poem ‘Marching Men’ compares the lives of soldiers with Jesus Christ as she offers a spiritual comparison of the deaths, sacrifice, and suffering of both. The song ‘The Longest Day’ by Iron Maiden reflects the futility of war as does the song by Kataklysm called ‘Crippled and Broken’. One metal song about marching includes ‘Hell March’ by Frank Klepacki.

In the personification of the second line, the moon is a lady – and this is a well-used motif – a cliché even. Norgaard (1999, p. 2014) talks about the story that has grown up between the relationship of women with the natural world where female nature is seen as maternal and life-giving. Norgaard states: ‘I think the women and nature story has not only fit theoretically, but has been emotionally satisfying and politically empowering to white women’. This is relevant to the lyrics analysed here as the moon in the song by *Desafío* is also distressed in a maternal way because of the death of the soldier and because of the war.

In *Muerte en Mostar*, the line ‘The moon reflects in her face the shadows of evil’ is an example of personification. This personification and moon motif is again picked up later in line 11 with: ‘The moon is hidden behind tears’. In both lines, the moon is portrayed as an emotional, female person, grieving over the effect of war. Perhaps the moon personifies all mothers who mourn the loss of their sons in the war. Here in *Muerte en Mostar*, the female moon motif is not an empowering symbol, but one seen as helpless and without influence over the war situation.

Line 1 also reveals instances of alliteration, this is a poetic convention where a series of words all begin with the same consonant or vowel sound (Leech, 2013).

In particular, it is demonstrated here, with the written letter <c> or /k/ sound at the beginning of the words. In this section, the sounds correspond to the underlining given here on the song in the Spanish words as follows: *comienza* ‘begin’ and *caminar* ‘march’. In line 2, alliteration is also found in the ‘r’ sound of *refleja* ‘reflects’ and *rostro* ‘face’. The noise these sounds give is one that seems to imitate the sound of a machine gun. *c, c, r, r*. This song with its alliteration is therefore beginning to even function as poetry, and right from the beginning. According to Drabble (1985, p. 19) in literature, alliteration was used to elevate the style. Possibly the group *Desafío* used it in the song for the same reason, so as to make it sound more poetic.

In lines 3 and 4, personification is again present in: ‘This old city, punished by a war...’. This city is portrayed as a human that has had to endure physical retribution, for a war it seems that no-one can even explain the reason behind. The band might have chosen to write this song because Mostar was a town in war-torn Bosnia–Herzegovina. In Mostar during this war, the death of some soldiers also of Spanish nationality like the band, took place. These Spanish soldiers were part of a squadron of ‘Blue Helmets’ or UN peacekeeping soldiers.

Sallas (2018) also talks about cities, specifically about the metal album ‘City’ by the band ‘Strapping Young Lads’ (1997). Sallas said that this album was hailed as one of the best metal records of all time. It was motivated by the disagreeable character of cities and their partial inconspicuousness. He concludes that the songs on that album give us a dystopian vision of cities. This is in opposition to the city here in *Muerte en Mostar*. In the latter, this city is almost human, and also humane in suffering alongside the soldiers who are taking part in the war.

Lines 4 and 5 disclose examples of symbolism. The first of these is ‘white mists’. Given the rest of the song’s meaning, it can be said that this phrase symbolises confusion, the ‘white mists of the revolt’. It reminds us of the common phrase ‘red mist’. A similar phrase in Spanish to the meaning of ‘red mist’ or blind rage could be: *La sangre se me subió a la cabeza* (meaning ‘a rush of blood to the head that violently clouds one’s reason’). In the case of red mist, the phrase is used to denote blind rage, whereas here in the song white mists seem to denote confusion and the wandering around without knowing where one is going. These white mists are of the movement of the revolt and this gives the same idea of chaos – the revolt is currently chaos at this stage and indeed right through, until the end of the song. The white mists link to the overall message of the song that seems to be that the war is misleading, confusing, futile and unnecessary.

In line 6, the ‘red blood’ is mentioned in: ‘The red blood of his heart’. Literally, this is the red blood of the dying soldier who is the protagonist of the song. Then and additionally, the red blood functions as a symbol for the useless deaths of all soldiers, plus the blood spilt and lives lost in the senseless war described in the rest of this song. This is because the blood of the one soldier described in the song can be said to represent all soldiers’ blood and all wars. In the chorus, specifically in line seven, there is: ‘Sounded a bell, a gesture of pain’. This describes how the sound of a bell is a symbol of pain, because the bell is traditionally a device for marking the hour or the passing of time. Most times the sound of bells represents joyful occasions such as Christmas, but not here, however. Here the bell is

marking the passing of a life. Time passes slowly in the war in this song, and every minute more that the war lasts it gives more pain. Here the bell is also a symbol for increasing hurt. The imagery that follows is also all about pain and horror where the day awakens from a nightmare and so the lady moon is crying and hides herself. Then with the bell the call to battle is sounded. [Linguee \(2019, p. 1\)](#) explains the symbology of the bell and that the bell has been a religious symbol, also a symbol of churches and the voice of divinity. A bell can be a sign of mourning, or of alarm and to ward off evil spirits as well as a way of communicating with the dead. Bells help congregations clear their heads so as to become receptive and bells are a symbol of the voice of God. They are associated with giving information, storing and gathering information, pure wisdom, as well as a symbol of time passing. This links back to the message of the lyrics, which contain an almost religious crusade and seems to be about the humanitarian aid given by the soldiers in this song about the war in Mostar.

After that, in line 8, the unnamed protagonist appears properly in the song for the first time: 'To his squadron's flag he promised his loyalty'. He comes into a context that is described as an almost holy war in the next line, line 9: 'His heart of love would be called by God'. Here again there is a connection to Christianity in the lyrics. This line links back to the symbol of the bell. The meaning of the bell includes it being a symbol for the voice of God. So in effect the soldier is called here by the voice of God literally, as well as being called a second time by God symbolically as represented by the sound of the bell. Metal songs on holy wars include 'Holy Wars' by [Megadeth \(1990\)](#) about killing for religion.

Line 10 again shows personification in: 'The day wakes up from a nightmare'. The day here acts and subsists as if it were a person that sleeps and wakes. This reiterates the idea also found in line six, that time marches on. Waking and sleeping, and day and night all still occur even during wars.

Lines 22 and 23 describe the next scene of the battle and this brings us up to date and into modern-day times with modern-day arms: 'And through the viewfinder of a marksman...The blast rang out and there he lost his life'. This turn of events is somewhat unexpected in light of the beginning of the song. Perhaps at this point, a more peaceful outcome was expected such as a description of the end of the war. Instead, the protagonist – and unfortunately now deceased hero – even remains unnamed. However, the second person in the song does at least have a name – it is his girlfriend, and she is called Maria (line 25). As this is an extremely popular name in Spain, she could function here as a symbol of all girlfriends who have soldier boyfriends that die in wars. Additionally, the name Maria also has religious connotations being the name for Mary mother of Christ. This links back cyclically to the moon, seen before in the lyrics as perhaps portraying all mothers who mourn the loss of their sons. The Spanish National Institute for Statistics records that in the decade this song was written, the 1990s, María was top of the lists for the most popular baby names for girls. It is still a very popular name in Spain today.

The penultimate verse in the song talks of the uselessness of war (line 26): 'Three thousand years of history and all is still the same'. Next, battles are described as being guided by the devil: 'Waving banners that the devil's hand

will guide'. It is a pacific song and therefore these lines have a negative meaning. Battles are bad and even so, still do not seem to have been replaced by any other means of resolving conflict. Here the song is again related to religion as it was before with its symbol of blood. Ferber (2007, p. 31) gives a definition of this symbol. He says that blood is a symbol of sacrifice and the blood of Christ. Christianity, therefore, seems to play an important role in this song. This might be unexpected as metal is often against this religion, for example, we may say that the song called 'Hymns and crippled anthems' by the metal band Red Chord (2009) is against religion.

And cyclically the song comes back to the beginning as again movement is indicated, this time specifically by the image of the wheel. In this way, the wheel of fortune also rolls us back to the start of the song. This wheel spins: '...without stopping / Crushing in its wake hope and liberty'. This means that war is futile but mankind keeps provoking wars, again and again.

In line 34, the unnamed hero and his beloved can be seen as symbols for all humankind. This works jointly to support the personification in the rest of the song. So this is a type of universality or of making the two lone protagonists representative of the rest of mankind. Nevertheless, all of them are, as the lyrics say: 'Defeated losers' and this is because all lives here in war have been given to no avail. Yet again blood is mentioned and this time it is the blood of everyone that takes part in this battle. Once more this blood is the symbol used to represent lives and also deaths (line 35). The next line reads: 'Their blood will fall to no avail in a deprived land'. This final verse talks of the uselessness of war in terms of lost life and lost love, 'He lost his life, and she lost her beloved'. Obviously blood is also a traditional image, even a holy image and dating from times and use in the Bible. As a symbol it has been well-used throughout time and again is almost a cliché. Blood is used in other aspects of heavy metal music. For instance, DiGioia (2016) states that blood is converted into a feminist menstrual war-cry in Tori Amos' cover of Slayer's (1993) heavy metal song *Reign in Blood*. For DiGioia blood is a symbol that is essentially related to females. Ferber (2007, p. 31) stated that blood represents sacrifice and also represents the blood of Christ. This is very relevant to the meaning here and in the song as it in fact usefully bridges all the aforementioned information of death, life, humankind, wars, religion, females, and girlfriends. All may be related to the sacrifice of the war in this song.

Other poetic devices used in the song include examples of assonance – the rhyme of vowel sounds within a word. That is to say – the 'a' and 'a' sounds in *llamada a batalla* 'called to battle' (line 14). Additionally, there are instances of consonance, which is the rhyme of successive repetitions of consonant sounds with different vowel sounds between them. One example is line 2 with the three 'l' sounds: *La luna refleja* 'the moon reflects'. The effect of both repetitions here is one of emphasis, of pounding and of marching fitting to the war imagery in the song.

There is also anadiplosis. This is a poetic device where the last part of a unit is repeated at the beginning of the next part. A good example here is that in line 5 – here it is the 'bl' and 'bl' sounds underlined as follows in: *nieblas blancas*

'white mists'. This helps add intensity to the song. Waldman (2015) explains that anadiplosis was used by the poet Milton in order to heighten the effect of his words. Milton used it in his elegy, itself a specific type of poem for the dead. Anadiplosis gave the effect of a bell-like toll. Even anadiplosis links back again to the symbol of the bell present here in *Muerte en Mostar*. Anadiplosis is stately because it forces the rhythm to reduce its pace and then to work up to a climax.

There is para-rhyme or near-rhyme throughout the song too. One example can be seen in line 5 with the 'b' then the 'as' pattern found in *nieblas blancas* 'white mists'. Or there is partial rhyme, which is the rhyme located inside different words where the same pattern of consonants occurs but different vowels. This can be seen in line 1 with the 'c' then the 'n' consonants pattern in the first and antepenultimate positions, respectively: *comienza su lento caminar* 'begins its slow march'. Para-rhyme is used sometimes to avoid rhyming-clichés or to avoid tired rhymes that have been seen before and many times and in other places. Para-rhyme, thus, gives the writer greater liberty in shaping the lines of verse (Ousby, 1996).

The whole song is in effect rhymed. There are in fact especially end-rhymes, as the words at the majority of the ends of the lines rhyme all throughout the song. For example, the 'ar' and 'ar' sounds at the end of lines 1 and 2: *caminar* 'march' and *explicar* 'explain'. Or at the end of lines 5 and 6 with the 'ón' sounds in *rebelión* 'rebellion' and *corazón* 'heart'. The very last word in lines 16 and 19 also rhyme due to the 'ó' sound: *estalló* 'exploded' and *perdió* 'lost'. And the final words in lines 17 and 20 also rhyme: *francotirador* "marksman" and *amor* ("love"). Other examples of end-rhyme are at the finish of lines 7, 8, 9, and 10 where the final words in all of them end in the 'or' sound and are *dolor* 'pain', *honor* 'honour', *amor* 'love', and *horror* 'horror'. The sounds *ar*, *on*, *ó*, or *give* the impression of expressing pain and lamentation. It is often the case in poetics that these sounds are used for lamentation. Márquez Prieto (2016, p. 19) says that in Spanish, the sounds 'ah' and 'oh' represent the sounds produced when someone is in pain. This backs up the above reading.

And, the final poetic device is in line 35. Here there is an example of tautology, which means something that is self-evidently true. This device can be perceived in: 'Defeated losers'. In effect and in this way, the idea of loss has been doubled or expressed twofold. In this short song as a whole, the word 'love' has been mentioned three times, and the word blood has been mentioned twice. These two words sum up the main themes in the song: the blood and the love that have been lost. This repetition is another poetic device and it aims to emphasise the themes that are the most important in the song, the loss of love and the loss of blood.

Lexis

As to the analysis of the lexis in the song I have said that there are examples of bellicose vocabulary. This includes the following words: line 1: March, line 4: War, line 5: the Revolt, line 8: Swore loyalty to his squadron's flag, line 14: Call to battle, line 17: Through the viewfinder of a marksman, line 19: The blast rang

out, line 23: The wheel of war spins without stopping; line 24: He was shot in the head before dying, and, line 34: Defeated losers. Obviously, this lexis reinforces, over and over, the main action of the song, which is war. Sillars (2007, p. 49) talks about Edward Blunden's First World War poems and describes the vocabulary used there as genuinely ancient rather than affected archaism. Blunden's aim with this, instead of focussing on the soldiers, was to show how nature was displaced by war. In this way, Blunden attains a more strikingly brutal image of the war. Marsland (1991, p. 4) says that the readers of the First World War poetry would understand the special vocabulary of archaic expression because they were also an audience well accustomed to the nineteenth century medievalism. He goes on to say that the First World War poetry in fact contained the vocabulary of the nineteenth century medievalism and its readers understood it perfectly. Conversely, the song *Muerte en Mostar* is more simple and direct in its lexis and the bellicose vocabulary in it is also simple and direct. With this, the band brings it home to the listener in a very explicit way, that this is a song about war.

According to Ranker (2019), the topic of war seems to be a common one that runs throughout metal songs, including many classic metal songs such as the one by Metallica called *Disposable Heroes*. Other bands include Iron Maiden with songs like *Aces High* or *War Ensemble* by Slayer. Some metal rock songs about war are about particular battles. Others are about the consequences of a war, and the difficulties soldiers and their relations have after the war is ended. Morpork (2016) analysed the most commonly used words in metal lyrics. There are many on the list that can also be found in *Muerte in Mostar* such as war, evil, dreams, and hearts.

Liturgical lexis includes: line 2: The shadows of evil, line 7: Bell, line 9: Would be called by God, line 13: Prophets, line 22: Waving banners, line 22: That the hand of the Devil will guide, line 24: Hope and liberty, and line 26: Deprived land. This time the lexis highlights the aim of the war from this particular soldier's point of view, which is to stamp out evil and restore peace. Franklin (2018, p. 2) declares that metal music is more reliant on liturgical issues than its fans would like to admit. He gives many examples including the album *Electric Messiah* by the band High On Fire. He is of the opinion that metal has always combined items from world-faiths into its lyrics, and that the result of this may be that it appropriated religion but has also built a church of its own. In this particular church, its worshippers learn and practice discipline. The same author states that this is all related to the anti-authoritarian theme that also runs throughout metal music.

Therefore and overall, the song *Muerte en Mostar* contains poetical aspects – but it is not crowded with them. Some of the poetical aspects are even a little bit clichéd. On the other hand, this song does *not* seem to contain colloquial language. It does recount a modern-day war but in a religious and traditional way. This could be because it is evoking universal wars, ancient scenes with warriors, wars throughout time, and so on. The song accomplishes what Nord (1997) observes: the encapsulation of a complete meaning at the same time and this being found within a brief context. The context here is less brief than is usual in songs. This is because it is the *context* that is the main aim of this song and here that context

is the idea of universal, enduring wars that can never be eliminated completely. It conveys a complete meaning while capturing a moment and seems to reflect a pacifist ideology. The metal song *A Farewell to Arms* by [Machine Head \(2007\)](#) also reflects pacifism.

The song *Muerte en Mostar* also functions beyond the level of the sentence because it is a story or mini-narrative. Here, there is less communication of feelings and emotions than in most other songs – but the reason for this is probably that it is the *story* in the song that is more important. It is the description of the war that is highlighted rather than the description of emotions.

[Burch \(2019\)](#) agrees with this. He says that many poems also tell a story and are thus ‘Story poems’:

Some of the greatest poems ever written narrate a story. Thus, story poems can also be called “narrative poems”. When story poems are about important events and/or heroic actions, and are of considerable length, they are called epic poems. Lyric poems can also tell stories, but are usually much shorter.

Muerte en Mostar may therefore be called a ‘Song story poem’.

The language of Spanish in which the song is presented is culture bound to Spanish speaking countries and people. However, no other culture-bound references are present in the lyrics themselves, and the content is relevant to both Spanish, or English-speaking and any other culture in this case. Nevertheless, this song does display some interesting cultural-semantic content. The song covers cultural facets that will be described in the following section.

Cultural Content

From the title and lyrics, it is obvious that the song is about a town called Mostar. The lyrics are sung in Spanish but there is no town by the name of Mostar in Spain. It turns out that Mostar is in fact a town in Bosnia. Once this has been recognised and even though it is a song written in Spanish, its whole meaning is put into perspective. Giving names to songs or paintings is an art in itself and an important part of the creative process. The artist [Sarnat \(2019\)](#) gives some advice on naming paintings. She advises that a title is a central part of a work’s emotional facet. The title gives the listener or contemplator a window through which they can sense what the artist is expressing with his or her work. Sarnat sees giving a title as similar to writing poetry, in that the title or phrase communicates elusive moods and feelings. The title helps the listener later interpret the song.

In the same way, so much literary allusion found and described previously has revealed that in the end, the song is not about Spain at all but about events that took place during the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina in the 1990s. This is because Mostar is the place where in 1993 more than 2,000 combatant and civilian Bosnians died and a total of 6,000 were injured during a siege (Ground Army Bulletin of the Spanish Government, 2018). This song can, therefore, now be recognised as an account and narrative about these events.

However, there is one link to Spain and a reason for the song being sung in Spanish and written by Spanish musicians. The reason was one that I did not find until much further ahead in the year 2012. Apparently, in that same year, the former King of Spain was invited to and inaugurated the 'Plaza of Spain' in the town of Mostar. The reason for this was the tribute to the 20 Spanish soldiers fallen in the Spanish undertaking at Bosnia and Herzegovina (García, 2009, p. 132). A description of the naming of the square after Spain can be seen in the aforementioned Spanish publication and so the connection can, therefore, be deduced with the help of this.

For Spain and for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it seemed that the mission had meant a lot more than is usual. It is reported that the Spanish soldiers quickly integrated into the population there. They gave their rations when there was not enough food for the inhabitants. The Spanish soldiers gave sweets to the town's children (García, 2009, p. 131), and, after the town's bridge was destroyed, the soldiers re-built it with gangplanks. That meant the townspeople could locate their families and friends separated from them, in the other half of the city. Apparently, the Spanish soldiers there demonstrated a special empathy, and more than is customary even in international forces. Hence, years later in 2012 with the inaugural ceremony in the Plaza of Spain, the population of Mostar showed their appreciation of the sacrifice, effort, and respect that the Spanish soldiers had demonstrated. This was because, on the one hand, it was the hardest era that the citizens had ever lived through and, on the other hand, because it is the largest and most pleasant square in the town of Mostar. It was said, that due to these actions, what in effect had been the line of fire was, therefore, converted into a meeting point by the rebuilding of the bridge.

Another report from 1993 is relevant here. This time it is from the reliable Spanish newspaper, *El País* (05/12/1993), which reported the death of a Spanish captain also near Mostar, when a mine exploded on a reconnaissance mission. This report reveals that the soldier was in fact part of the Blue Helmets. Therefore, the Spanish military presence in Mostar at the time also seem to have been Blue Helmet, part of special division of the NATO United Nation's peacekeeping squadron.

Blue Helmets perform mediation exercises in countries which are broken by war to contribute to aiding the provisions for an enduring peace. The United Nations does not have its own force as such, and so the Blue Helmets always remain a division of their own separate nations and armies (Saenz de Santa María, 2002, p. 81). In the case of this captain, he was from the Madrid division of the Spanish squadron. These NATO peacekeeping services are supplied by associate countries and put forward by them, but on voluntary terms. Later the SFOR division (now the European Union Force) oversaw the military implementation there in Bosnia, of the Dayton Agreement in 1995 by which one part of the war had been ended, that of Bosnia.

The UN had partly been able to count on less man power than was necessary and apparently this included in that particular Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict. This consecutively paved the way for further improved UN efforts at global

arrangements and peace-building across the world. All this in turn, leads us here back to the song and explains why the main event in it is the death of the soldier, and why it is that these lyrics seems to be pro-peace. It is because the soldiers there, the Blue Helmets, were also part of special division of the NATO United Nation's peacekeeping squadron. The deaths of soldiers are avoidable if peace is kept but when there is war indeed soldiers die, even soldiers who are there to help keep the peace (Rieff, 1996, p. 15). This means that the song and its interpretation seem to be more about peacekeeping rather than war, as it portrays all wars as senseless and negative.

Summary and Conclusions

This song has similarities and differences to other metal songs. Comparable to other metal songs, this one by *Desafío* contains the themes and lexis, of war and religion. Like many other metal songs, this one seems to be anti-war. For example, *War Pigs* by Black Sabbath (1970), the entire album *Ashes of the Wake* by Lamb of God (2004), *One* by Metallica (1989), *Shallow Graves* by Body Count (1994), *Refuse/Resist* by Sepultura (1993), and *B. Y. O. B.* by System of a Down (2005), are all anti-war heavy metal songs.

It has been shown that this song *Muerte en Mostar* contains religious references but also that it is a crusade for peace. From the 'plot' or action throughout, the song it concludes with the fact that the blood of war-bound lovers is always shed – but to no avail. The song tells us how wars march onwards, wars are always breaking out, and how nothing has altered in this aspect over the course of history. Added to this cultural context described above, the military presence there was not that of soldiers of war either, but was from the peacekeeping squadron of the Blue Helmets.

Also in common with other metal songs, this one is about history. Some other metal songs about history include: *Run to the Hills* by Iron Maiden (1982), which is a song about the eradication of Native Americans by colonialists in the United States. *The Essential Salts* by Nile (2007), is a song about mummification and the ancient Egyptians. *Hold at All Costs* (July 2nd, 1863) by Iced Earth (2004) is a song about the battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War. *Wind of Change* by the Scorpions (1990) is a song about the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. And there are many, many more metal songs about history.

This particular song by *Desafío* contains contemporary or modern history, and especially of the years covering the decade of the 1990s to be exact. The present lyrics disclose the links between Spain and Europe and the United Nations at that time, and the action described takes place in the city of Mostar during the Bosnia–Herzegovina conflict. Around that time and still today, Spain is a country that is pro-European (Dzorr, 2019, p. 1). Spain had joined the European Union in 1986, and the Bosnia–Herzegovina conflict took place a short time later in the 1990s. Spain had sent soldiers into the United Nations' peacekeeping mission there and the song makes reference to those historic events of the time. Also, Casanova and Gil Andrés (2009, p. 357) say: 'A la altura de 1996 pocos podían cuestionar que España era un país moderno y desarrollado, bien integrado en la Europa

Comunitaria...’ ‘At the height of 1996 few could question that Spain was a modern, developed country, well-integrated into the European Community...’.¹

In conclusion, it is found that after all, this is not entirely a bellicose song. It does in fact seem to be a song promoting peace and it doubtless describes the peacekeeping efforts of a soldier from the mediating UN organisation. Consequently, in actual fact, it is an anti-war song and surprisingly this is the reason for it containing the aforementioned bellicose vocabulary. Finally, it effectively and specifically does seem to be a song about the Spanish fallen soldiers that gave their lives to help the people of the town of Mostar during the conflict in Bosnia–Herzegovina in the 1990s.

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¹At the start of this planned analysis of the song – *Muerte en Mostar* was the only song by the group *Desafío* to be found on YouTube. It had only about twenty views and it is fair to say that this song was little-known, even within Spain. However, just after the website for the ‘Multilingual Metal’ conference had been set up with the present abstract on it, and also a while after the conference, these views had increased in number and today stand at 432 views. I have participated in only a handful of these views, so the majority of these numbers have not been falsely overblown by myself, but are genuine views by other people from inside as well as outside the circle of conference attendees. In any case, I had heard and knew of the song many years before I decided to undertake this analysis of it. At the moment, not only have the views therefore increased, but other songs by *Desafío* have also recently been uploaded to YouTube.

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Chapter 7

Vocalizing a Troubled Past: A Case Study of Political Activism in Taiwanese Metal

Kevin Kai-wen Chiu

Abstract

This chapter offers a case study of the distinctive political activism in Taiwanese metal by analysing the intertextuality of *Just Not Meant to Be* (還君明珠) (2015) by Crescent Lament (恆月三途). From the perspective of a cultural insider, the author examines the socio-cultural dynamics underlying this activism and explains how Taiwanese metal attempts to tackle the troubled past of Taiwan. The author brings attention to *Just Not Meant to Be*'s commentary about the activism it takes part in, and reflects on problematics inherent to political activism in Taiwanese metal. Finally, the author explicates the problematics in the context of metal subculture in general. Pivotal throughout this chapter are the questions: Why does Taiwanese metal replicate forms of domination it seeks to counter? What can metal subculture in general learn from Taiwanese metal and its political activism?

Keywords: Taiwanese metal; political activism; Crescent Lament (恆月三途); Chthonic (閃靈); Taiwan; heavy metal

Introduction

In January 2016, Freddy Lim (林昶佐), frontman of the Taiwanese metal band Chthonic (閃靈), was elected a member of the Parliament of Taiwan. Many jaws dropped at Lim's successful entrance into Parliament. During the election, Lim had been constantly attacked as 'mentally abnormal, with his hair longer than a woman's' by his electoral opponent (Hsiao, 2016), an accusation that many Taiwanese thought would appeal to the relatively conservative voters in

Lim's precinct. While the general public's attention was drawn to Lim's so-called abnormality, the local Taiwanese metal community was also embroiled in heated debates of its own. Take, for instance, replies to the PTT post of Lim's announcement that he would be running for Parliament.¹ Some users criticize Lim's turn to politics as politically opportunistic; some others consider this a waste of a great musician (*Telemachus*, 2015). Common to both criticisms is metal's aesthetic purity that, in some people's eyes, will be tainted by the undignified sphere of politics.

The insistence on metal's status as great music, alongside a distrust of politics was once common in the Taiwanese metal community. Evidence of this can be found in *Extreme Metal in Taiwan* (2007) where I-Kai Liu interviewed members of the Taiwanese metal community about their opinions on the relationship between metal and politics. Jax Yeh (葉啟中), ex-bassist of the Taiwanese metal band Seraphim (六翼天使), expresses his distaste for political implications suggested by metal:

I think music should not be messed up with politics. I think music is music, politics is politics, they are two different concepts. I think if you want to play music, then you just concentrate on it. I don't like music with political connotations because that will debilitate music. I know some foreign bands glorify political implications, but that's their own business. For us, music is music, and I think musicians should not involve political ideas into music. (qtd. in Liu, 2007, p. 65)

In this 'music for music, politics for politics' (音樂歸音樂, 政治歸政治) line of thinking, politics is narrowly defined as the application of state power and the art of governance, or even the vicious, corruptive brawls between political parties. Still, it is noteworthy that the very phrase 'music for music, politics for politics' sounds very much like a variation on the all-purpose-formula 'X for X, politics for politics' (Liu, 2007, p. 63), the latter a product of the dictatorial indoctrination and intimidation pre-empting any inclination amongst the Taiwanese to meddle in state affairs.² That is to say, this very line of reasoning is already a submission to political oppression.

¹PTT (批踢踢實業坊) is a bulletin-board-system-based communication forum in Taiwan. Launched in 1997 by students of National Taiwan University, it has played a pivotal role in Taiwan's democratization, and is one of the most popular forms of social media among Taiwanese young people.

²By dictatorship, I am referring to the Martial Law (戒嚴令) from 1949 to 1987/1992 that banned public gatherings, suspended democratic elections, and launched political persecutions and massacres under KMT rulership (Kuomintang of China or Nationalist Party of China). Though partially lifted in 1987 and abolished in 1992, the legacy of the Martial Law, also known as the White Terror (白色恐怖), was still haunting Taiwan in the late 2010s after three decades of rapid democratization.

Formerly ruling China under the name of the Republic of China (ROC) from 1912 to 1949, the KMT party fled to Taiwan in 1949 after being defeated by the Communist

In contrast to the narrow definition expressed by Yeh, some other people have a broader understanding of politics, viewing it as the multiple power relations running through everyday life that affect both collectives and all individuals.³ This take is aptly summed up by Lim:

For me, politics and music are closely related. ... I think it's the essence of democracy that everybody regards politics as his personal matter. In my opinion, being engrossed in politics would just enhance the profundity of our democracy instead of ruining it. (qtd. in [Liu, 2007](#), p. 69)

This broader understanding is also captured by an increasingly widespread dictum: 'everything is political; no one stands outside politics' (沒有人是局外人). One more example of the expression of this sentiment comes from Louie Lu (呂鴻志), the frontman of Burning Island (火燒島). During the Hohaiyan Rock Festival in 2017, Lu called for the audience to actively participate in transitional justice with the phrase: 'everything is political; no one stands outside politics'. The position 'everything is political; no one stands outside politics' is more than just a constative description; it is already a political act that resists oppression and refuses to be silent. The shift towards the broader definition of politics, moreover, indicates a larger awakening among the Taiwanese people when it comes to tackling Taiwan's troubled past, whether from the Chinese, Japanese, or Western side.⁴

However, even for those with a broader understanding of politics, there was a discomfort with Lim's use of metal music in an electoral campaign and his self-branding as a 'rockstar Olympus' bringing 'change for Taiwan' (Wilms, 2018). This discomfort can be found in replies under iamrock's PTT post. Some questioned whether the promised transformation was mere rhetoric. Some others questioned whether Chthonic's music was Taiwanese enough and metal enough for the band to have serious political ambitions. Central to these questions is

Party of China. Though merely ruling Taiwan, the party nevertheless insisted (under the name of the ROC) that it was the embodiment of China's true sovereignty. The party used to be a member of the UN, until the ROC was replaced by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1971. The KMT party lost the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2016 and 2020, but is still the largest political force in Taiwan. Lim was re-elected a Parliament member in January 2020.

³See, for example, xdx520's PTT post (2013) arguing that no aspect of life is exempt from power struggles and that, in dealing with life experiences, music is political by nature.

⁴The major powers ruling Taiwan since the seventeenth century are: the Dutch colony of southern Taiwan (1624–1662) and the Spanish occupation of the northern part of Taiwan (1626–1642), the Kingdom of Tungning (1662–1683), the Qing dynasty (1683–1895), Japanese rule (1895–1945), and the ROC since 1945. Between 1951 and 1979, US troops were deployed in Taiwan to prevent offenses between the ROC and the PRC.

Chthonic's use of Taiwanese folk instruments, especially the *erhu* (二胡) played by Lim. Some members of the Taiwanese metal scene feel that Chthonic is not qualified to represent Taiwan because the band used to label itself as 'orient metal', a highly controversial term, since the term 'orient' evokes the history of the Western gaze on the East and thereby invokes images of the feminisation and emasculation of Asians in Western pop culture. At the same time, some also criticise Chthonic's emphasis on certain folk instruments for failing to account for the heterogeneity of Taiwan.

Political Activism in Taiwanese Metal

The case of Freddy Lim and the responses to his election bring attention to socio-political dynamics in the Taiwanese context. These have given rise to a unique practice: political activism in Taiwanese metal, aptly captured by Marco Willis's 2018 documentary, titled *Metal Politics Taiwan*, in which Willis traces the rise of Lim and Taiwanese metal amid conflicting forces.

Since its inception as late as in the 1960s, metal has been involved in politics in a strange manner. It was deemed responsible for deviance, because metal thrust youth discontent upon society in an unignorable volume; it had been sources of moral panic, because it allegedly enkindled behaviours upsetting notions of the so-called normalcy; in some regions of the world, metal and its participants are still subjected to censorship, even persecution, because they potentially endanger regimes. That is to say, if there is a political feature of metal in general, it would be the propensity to channel discontent and rage against machines of domination (Wallach, Berger, & Greene, 2011, p. 26). This feature, no doubt, is shared by Taiwanese metal that has broken away from the "X for X; politics for politics" doctrine.

Still, with the term 'political activism in Taiwanese metal', I also have in mind something more than an antagonistic propensity. I have in mind, first of all, an active intervention in the machines of domination, a difference observed by Randy Blythe, vocalist of Lamb of God:

In our world, a lot of people can yell and make angry music and be like, "The system sucks" ... But Freddy [Lim] did something. He took a concrete step to try and change things for the better. (Blythe, qtd. in Qin, 2017).

My second consideration relates to the question of whether the intervention 'changes things for the better'. By 'political activism in Taiwanese metal', I also refer to problematics accompanying the very activism, an issue touched upon earlier in my discussion of people taking a positive outlook on Lim's election, but not being comfortable with his use of metal in the electoral campaign. Before I pursue this issue, however, it is necessary to examine the ways in which Taiwanese metal actively takes part in politics.

Characteristic to the activism is a weaving together of metal music and folk tales/imageries/music, in accordance with the theme of a Taiwanese identity.

Bloody Tyrant (暴君), for instance, is known for the use of ink painting and the folk instrument pipa (琵琶) to recount the indigenous mythology. By way of a pig mask associative with the sacrificial god pig (神豬 / 豬公)⁵ and the folk instrument suona (嗩吶), associative with funeral rituals, Flesh Juicer (血肉果汁機) criticises capitalism and environmental damage. The most illustrative case is Chthonic's erhu playing such a central role in disputes surrounding Lim's election. According to Lim, during an interview with Chu Meng-tze, the band chose to incorporate the erhu because of its plaintive timbre. On the one hand, it distinguishes Chthonic's music from other metal music; on the other hand, it conveys an emotion that Taiwanese people easily relate to (Chu, 2001, pp. 18–19). The erhu not only appeals to Taiwanese people in general, but, as Wang Wei-shuo observes, has become an integral part of the band's retelling of stories of the repressed Taiwanese; this retelling also glorifies a subaltern identity because the erhu has become a symbol associated with a particular population of Taiwan (Wang, 2011, pp. 62–64). That is to say, Chthonic's erhu-playing valorises a certain identity of Taiwan that Wang cautions as susceptible to Han Taiwanese nationalism (p. 68). In turn, this Taiwanese folk identity construed through a series of linguistic, musical, and historical re-articulations plays a pivotal role in the band's advocacy for Taiwanese independence.

This chapter offers a case study of the politically charged intertextuality of Taiwanese metal through a closely reading of 2015 Taiwanese metal song *Just Not Meant to Be* (還君明珠) by Crescent Lament (恆月三途). A twofold consideration informs my choice of this specific song. It incorporates both the erhu and the pipa, folk instruments long established in Taiwanese metal's political activism. The song also refers to Chinese and Japanese cultures at the levels of the singing voice, lyrics, and images, and frames all these in a background story set during the Japanese colonial period. *Just Not Meant to Be* allows me to concretise the intertextual nuances. On the other hand, rather than the empowerment of forms of Taiwanese identity, a profound ambivalence is conveyed by *Just Not Meant to Be*. The song calls attention to the problematic inherent to Taiwanese metal's political activism. In my opinion, this problematic has broader implications for the metal subculture in general. In the following, I first present my methodology and illustration. This is followed by an analysis of *Just Not Meant to Be*. Finally, I reflect on the problematic. Central to my analysis and explication is the question: Why does Taiwanese metal replicate forms of domination it seeks to counter in the first place?

Methodology

For an analysis of metal music, one challenge is how to come to terms with the loud and distorted sounds constituting metal. More precisely, the music involves

⁵God pig, also known as holy pig, refers to pigs bred specifically for religious ceremonies in Taiwan. See also Jaddie Fang's interview with Flesh Juicer (2018) in which the vocalist credits god pig as inspiring his choice of pig mask.

several voices and sounds, several musical activities, and varying levels of loudness and distortion, all of which take place at the same time *as well as* over time, impacting the listener's sense of space. This temporal, spatial, and timbral density is what makes metal 'heavy'. The effect of this heaviness, as Wallach, Berger, and Greene (2011, pp. 12–13) put it, is that metal can impede one's ability to process musical sound accurately, and can fill one's awareness to the extent that it is difficult to derive meaning. Although scholars have studied how voices (e.g. Phillipov, 2014; Smialek, Depalle, & Brackett, 2012) and sounds (e.g. Walser, 1993; Williams, 2015) affect metal's meaning, so far, there has been relatively little study of these aspects together.

To better understand metal at levels of voices and sounds, music, lyrics, as well as extra-lyrical texts – that is to say, at an intertextual level – I have formulated an innovative methodology. Taking note of how metal's simultaneity, linearity, and timbre impact how people experience and make sense of metal, I propose to analyse metal through vertically and horizontally vectorised 'blocks' that 'sound' certain ways. More precisely, by a 'sound block', I mean how, during a part of a song, vocals, riffs, notes, chords, and drumbeats articulate, comment on, or disrupt each other, and how these activities together give a feeling that is of narrative significance. As an analytical tool, the sound block allows me to engage with musical nuances, and to consider them alongside a song's thematic and visual arrangements. I consider this eclectic methodology appropriate to study *Just Not Meant to Be*'s interrelated music, lyrics, and video.

Due to the levels involved, I have come up with a notational system that can also provide a visualisation of my analyses. Fig. 1 is an example of my visualisation of a sound block (hereinafter shortened to 'block').

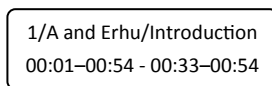


Fig. 1. The First Block of *Just Not Meant to Be*.

This part of *Just Not Meant to Be* takes place at 00:01–00:54, and offers a combination of sounds whose feeling I shorthand as 'A'. I will soon examine the song in full; for now, it suffices to say that 'A' feels emotionally heavy. As the sound of the erhu is politically connotated in Taiwanese metal; I note down 'erhu' and specify its time duration as 00:33–00:54. This part is also the song's introduction and the first narrative structure; I, thus, notate the block as '1/A' and specify its being the 'introduction'.

The other advantage of my methodology is that it takes account of the holistic understanding of voice/sound (聲, *siann* in the Taiwanese dialect). Wu Tsan-Cheng, the sound artist and coordinator of the *Taiwan Sound Map Project* (台灣聲音地圖), conceptualises this understanding as follows:

It is necessary to listen to and confront the place where we live.
It is necessary to sort out the voice of our everyday environment.
...
Sound [*sic*] all have a hidden latent strength. ... it activates space
and events, and forms an essential part of a personal inner life of
emotions, and the world of thinking and consciousness. ...
Resistance forgotten—through listening, evoking memories of the
debris and restructuring it again. (Wu, n.d.)

Voice is not the privileged possession of human beings. The environment that all beings exist within also speaks. People's voices, consequently, are *modulated* by and *interact* with environmental sounds.⁶ The sonorous co-presence, 'sound[s] all' in Wu's phrasing, is a field of dynamics that shapes people's way of acting and thinking in a powerful, but not immediately obvious manner. Voice/sound in the Taiwanese context is, thus, to be understood as collective, reciprocal, and subject formative. Furthermore, since the subject formation is not always perceptible, it is constantly in tension, wavering between the conscious and the unconscious, which Wu also phrases as one between remembering and forgetting.

I can reword the sonorous co-presence by way of a few everyday Taiwanese phrases. People and the environment create voices and sounds, 出聲 (*tshut-siann*), making their presence and concurrence known, 聲援 (*siann-uan*), in many manners. It can be a simple response given as an echo 應聲 (*in-siann*), in a coarse manner 稍聲 (*sau-siann*), or in a sharp way 含痔聲 (*ham-he-siann*). Together, voices and sounds form a kind of sonorous cosmos where beings of past, present, and future coexist. The latent tension at play at the site of the voice/sound (*siann*), too, is captured by the phrase, 尾聲 (*bue-siann*). On the one hand, this designates the endings of music, activity, and conversation; on the other hand, it connotes what these endings mean but do not make explicit (*Dictionary of Common Taiwanese Phrases*).

The 'sound block' in my analysis is analogous to the holistic voice/sound (*siann*) where forms of being, subjectivity, and consciousness converge. In the following analysis, to highlight its latent tension, I term *siann* an 'aural (un)consciousness'. Having mapped the politico-cultural overtone of my methodology, I now turn to *Just Not Meant to Be* and explain how it gives voice to Taiwan's troubled past.

A Troubled Past in Just Not Meant to Be

Just Not Meant to Be tells a love story in a turbulent time. Since this story is a meta-narrative frame tying together levels of music, lyrics, and video, I quote it in full as given by the band:

⁶For a case study of how environmental voices/sounds shape forms of identity of the Taiwanese people, see 'The Exploratory Research of Community Identity and Sound-scape Map: A Case Study of Taomi Community' (Hsu & Kuo, 2017).

In 1942, A-hiong encountered a young entrepreneur, Bing-hong. During the troubled times, the two, who had strong feelings for each other, considered each other as the soul mate. Leaving for Japan for business in 1943, Bing-hong bade a tearful farewell to A-hiong, promising he would return in a year to marry her. However, as the war situation deteriorated for Japan, and with the dominant presence of US submarines in waters between Taiwan and Japan, attacking vessels, Bing-hong had no choice but to stay in Japan a little longer. Without knowing when would see her loved one return, amid rapid changes in the political situation, A-hiong accepted the arrangements by the madam to marry to a rich man as his concubine in 1946. On the eve of the wedding, Bing-hong suddenly appeared, explaining to her that, he was trapped in Japan, and was only able to return to Taiwan after the war. However, the reunion was too late for A-hiong, holding Bing-hong's hands, A-hiong lamented that she had nothing left for him but tears, and prayers that they may find each other again in the next life. (Crescent Lament, 2015)

The story does not end well, with the protagonists eventually engulfed by the torrents of history. This is in line with Taiwanese popular music's overall melancholic tone (Chou, 2011, pp. 41–44). In a sense, the story is also somewhat clichéd; it reminds a younger Taiwanese generation of stories told by their grandparents, stories that they grow up listening to, become used to, but do not always relate to. Cliché as this story may be, however, *Just Not Meant to Be* also gives a voice to troubled histories and memories of Taiwan. These memories are vocalised through the insertion of the erhu and the pipa, both of which evoke a (un)consciousness that is shared by many Taiwanese people.

Commonly heard, listened to, learned, and played, the erhu and pipa are generally accepted as instruments that stand for Taiwan (Lu, 2001, pp. 11–12). In addition to these folk instruments, the insertion of the piano and the dialogue between the female protagonist and her lover are also of special interest. The piano was introduced to Taiwan by Catholic and other Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century, but it was during the Japanese colonial period (when practices of Western music were already established in Japan) that it became common (*Encyclopedia of Taiwan Music*, 2018, pp. 554–556). The pipa is an ancient instrument traceable to approximately 220 BC and is played in Eastern Asia, including China and Japan (pp. 263–267). The history of the erhu (aka *erxian*) is more ambiguous. Introduced to China between the seventh and tenth centuries from what is nowadays central Asia, this two-stringed instrument is especially popular in southern China, but when and how it was introduced to Taiwan remains a mystery (p. 225). Through the instruments, the song expresses historical complexity and a profound ambivalence.

To unpack this complexity, I first examine how these sounds (from the erhu, the pipa, and the piano) unite the song. I then discuss the aural (un)consciousness evoked by the erhu and the pipa by examining the sound blocks. Finally, I examine the music video.

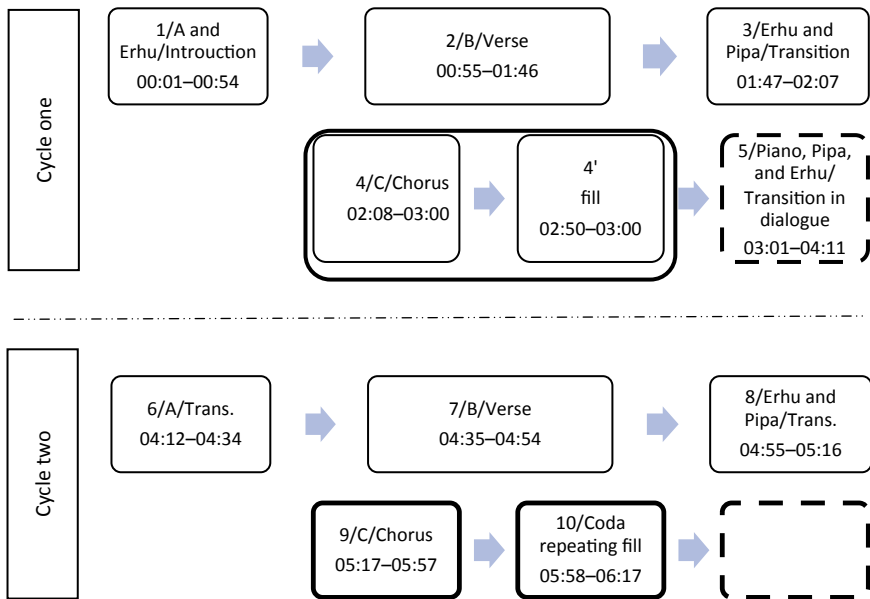


Fig. 2. Structure of *Just Not Meant to Be*.

1. Song Structure

An overview of the song's structure draws attention to the importance of the erhu, the pipa, and the piano. Below, I divide the song into two cycles; to highlight structural parallels and variations of certain blocks, I put them in dotted and bolded squares.

Two general observations can be derived from Fig. 2.

- The song's structure is simple, atypically repetitive, and incomplete. Its atypicality comes from block 5, an unusual transitional block in which a dialogue between the female narrator and her lover (A-hiong and Bîng-hong in the story) takes place. The incompleteness is detectable in block 10, which concludes the song by repeating a structurally ambiguous fill (indicated as 4' in cycle one). In other words, block 10 can also be considered part of 9/chorus, as such implying that cycle two is missing a final block +or element.
- The transitional blocks where the folk instruments are used are almost half the length of the primary blocks. Compared to the static metal-oriented primary blocks, these transitional blocks sound more dynamic. The gist and central element of *Just Not Meant to Be* lies in how the erhu and the pipa deliver wordless messages in these transitional blocks, and these messages are elaborated on by other elements and on other levels.

2. Sound Blocks

The opening of *Just Not Meant to Be* already gives a clue as to the (un)consciousness harboured in and through the sound of the erhu.

The erhu is here associated with metal heaviness. Fig. 3 first introduces the chunky A characteristic of prolonged and distorted riffs, accentuated by prolonged erhu notes at 00:33–00:54. Though not heavy in terms of sound quality, the erhu with its plaintive timbre denotes an emotional heaviness. Despite slight differences, both cycles can be summed as repetitions of a metal-erhu pattern (see Fig. 4.).

Central to the repetition of this pattern is also the accentuation of voices and sounds. The fills at 01:16–01:26 and 04:55–05:15, for example, consist of synchronised chunky riffs, cymbals, and bass drum beats. In C, following the erhu in 3 and 8/transitions, the metal elements are subordinated to the female vocals, their distortion often paralleling the singing voice. I read the erhu's emotional heaviness in relation to the female narrator of this song/story. The instrument speaks for her, expressing her wordless inner voice. This reading is supported by 5/transition where the dialogue is followed by an erhu solo. I unpack block 5 as in Fig. 5.

Notably, after the 30-s erhu solo in block 5, the storytelling in cycle two is fractured – part of the verse in 7 is omitted, and the song concludes with a fill in block 10. This is a form of repetitive, but incoherent and incomplete, storytelling,

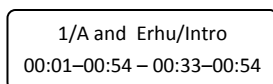


Fig. 3. Block 1 in *Just Not Meant to Be*.

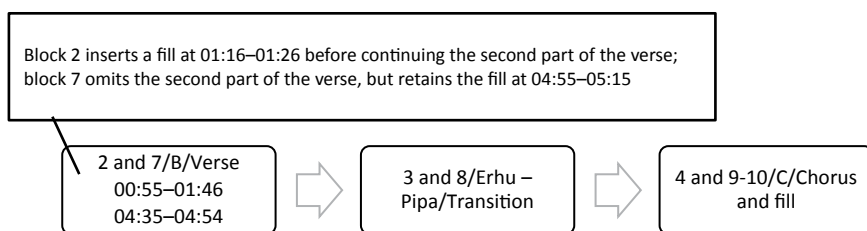


Fig. 4. Blocks 2–4 and 7–10 Repeating and Varying a Metal-Erhu Pattern in *Just Not Meant to Be*.

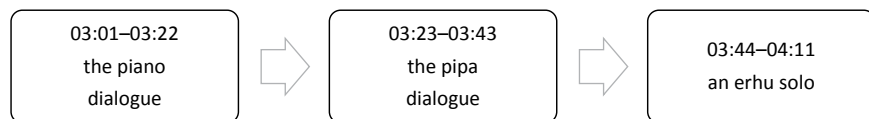


Fig. 5. Timings of the Piano, the Pipa, and the Erhu in Block 5 in *Just Not Meant to Be*.

as though the story is too heavy to be fully recounted. Whereas in metal scholarship the conventional interpretation of a solo is empowerment (Walser, 1993, p. 84), the effect of the erhu solo here is quite the opposite. The female narrator has no power to stand up to larger political and historical tides, such as the offensives between the United States and Japan in the song's story. The (un)consciousness of the erhu, thus, indexes heaviness as powerlessness.

Let me now consider the (un)consciousness of the pipa by examining the two ways the pipa is used. Notably, in both blocks 3 and 8, the pipa is subordinate to the erhu, as is shown in Fig. 6.

The pipa echoes the erhu by repeating and slightly varying the erhu's melodic lines. I read this echoing in the context of the sonorous co-presence of all beings. The two instruments together connote a collective inner voice, wordless, but not alone. In the light of the song's story, the erhu and the pipa are the 'voice' of the protagonists who have no control over their fates. Indeed, in this song, the pipa is also used for dramatic build up, such as in 5/transition, which accompanies the dialogue. In Fig. 7, I add the dramatic functions of the piano, the pipa, and the erhu in block 5; I also add important lines in the dialogue as given by the band and specify the time duration when the pipa (bolded) can be heard.

While the tranquil piano suggests that the female narrator does enjoy a moment of peacefulness, even happiness, in finally being reunited with her lover, this moment is all too brief. When she informs her lover that she has settled for becoming a concubine, the pipa appears, much more distorted than in transitions 3 and 8, and is echoed by a distorted guitar. The distorted pipa is associated with how the fates of the protagonists – and by implication, the Taiwanese – are distorted because of larger political tides. This reading is supported by the phrase

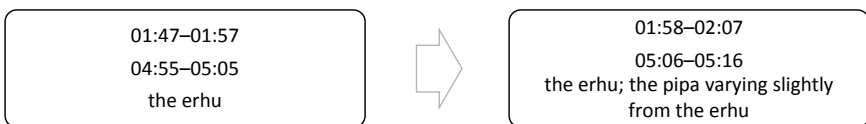


Fig. 6. The Erhu and the Pipa in Blocks 3 and 8 in *Just Not Meant to Be*.

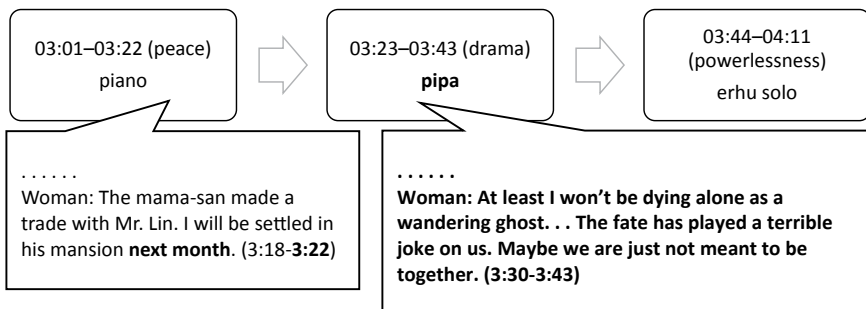


Fig. 7. Times and Connotations of the Piano, the Pipa, and the Erhu During the Conversation (block 5) in *Just Not Meant to Be*.

‘wandering ghost’, which is an intertextual reference to the lonely pipa-playing female figures in several Chinese literary and musical works.⁷ Earlier in the song, this figure appears in a relatively straightforward manner, through the line ‘playing the pipa alone in the coldness’,⁸ in 2/verse at 01:26–01:47. The erhu and the pipa then evoke an aural (un)consciousness that is suggestive of a collective powerlessness, as all are subjected to external, oppressive powers. The (un)consciousness of the erhu and the pipa tap into the destitute existence of the Taiwanese, individual as well as collective, their beings fractured and incomplete.

3. Music Video

The fractured identity due to Taiwan’s troubled histories and memories is reflected in the song’s linguistic and cultural hybridity. *Just Not Meant to Be* is sung in the Taiwanese dialect, imitating the singing style of a Japanese geisha. The lyrics are a mixture of classical Chinese and Japanese Haiku, with their characteristic metaphoric and metonymic imageries. These imageries not only function as intertextual references, but are contiguous with Taiwanese experiences. Take, for example, the very opening line 曉風殘月黃花堆 ‘dawning breeze, crescent moon, withering flowers’,⁹ imageries conveying an aura of desolation. This resonates with the album title *Elegy for the Blossoms* (花殤). A flower may be a metaphor for the brevity of life, or the female under the patriarchal gaze. In this case, both have one common referent: the classic song *Torment of a Flower/Rainy Night Flower* (雨夜花) (1934), which sets the melancholic tone of Taiwanese popular music (Zheng, 2010, p. 7:5; Chou, 2011, p. 41). In *Sedative Rain* (晴雨), the opening track of the album, the melody of *Torment of a Flower* is vocalised yet wordless. The reason for the canonical status of *Torment of a Flower*, indeed, lies in the rain, flower, and night-time imageries personifying memories of the Taiwanese, especially those of women and girls during the Japanese colonial period and the KMT dictatorship (Zheng, 2010, pp. 6: 1–8).

Similarly, the music video not only abounds in references to Japanese cultures, but comments on the tormented existence of living this hybridity. Aside from the realistic representation of the female protagonist, the music video is composed of four visual frames; the sequence of these frames has a particular meaning. In the first frame, the illustrated background and reference to *The Wave* suggest that the song is also a journey by sea. The second frame consists of shots where the

⁷To name two well-known works: a literary example would be *Song of the Pipa* (琵琶行) depicting the pipa playing by an out-of-favor sing-song girl (歌女); a musical one would be *Emperor Chu Shedding His Armor* (霸王卸甲) retelling the fatal defeat of a warlord from the perspective of his concubine.

⁸The translation is mine. In the official English lyrics that translate and re-tell the story, the lines are ‘the first thunder awakes torrential rainfall / It floods everything including my fading hope’.

⁹The translation is mine. In the official English lyrics, the line is ‘the first snow gives a death blow’.



Fig. 8. End Shot of *Just Not Meant to Be* (Crescent Lament, 2015).

musicians constantly split and reconfigure. This journey then becomes about split identity. The third frame, with a near blank background except for a few decorative leaves, appears ambivalent towards this split and confused hybrid identity. In contrast, the final frame, which starts with the erhu solo, is unmistakably emotionally heavy. Set in darkness, close-up shots of the musicians only reveal their performing bodies; similarly, the face of the female vocalist is only vaguely recognisable and does not appear to be a stable centre of identification. The music video, in brief, is an exploration of hybrid identity, involving torment and blankness, and ending in darkness. The final, closing shot is of the female protagonist standing by the sea, gradually fading away into a black screen – washed away by torrents of history (Fig. 8).

The superimposition of Crescent Lament's logo and the female protagonist makes explicit that her fractured being and incomplete story is an ongoing, collective one. The weight of scarred memories and histories combined with a continued struggle for an identity manifests itself in the music video's visual incongruity. Differing from metal's stylistic expectations, the female vocalist is in a kimono, whereas the male members conform to metal's expectations. The black-metal-style keyboardist is headbanging in corpse paint, while the guitarist sports industrial metal style, and the bassist a mask.

Arguably, Crescent Lament's choice to subordinate metal elements to the erhu and the pipa and the visual incongruity also carry a wordless message. For many Taiwanese people who grow up used to these folk voices and sounds, as well as these kinds of stories, *Just Not Meant to Be* cannot be listened to without a sense of ambivalence and pressing anxiety. What do the young Taiwanese population – I myself included in this – do with these stories, traumatic histories and memories that were once unspeakable in public due to the KMT's anti-Japanese propaganda? They accept that these stories are inevitably incoherent and incomplete. Yet they are confronted with an even more pressing doubt, concerning other stories that are omitted and forgotten (Chou, 2008, pp. 117–119). How do they

know if they can ever remember them? There is no answer to these doubts, just like these stories have no conclusive endings, but are repeated again and again in history, lived and experienced by the Taiwanese of past and present, as if being Taiwanese is also a 'terrible joke by the fate', to use the female narrator's phrasing (see Fig. 7). As there is no answer to the questions they raise, the band makes fun of itself – in by no means light-hearted melodramatisation. If history's weight is unbearable – a terrible joke played by fate – one can only respond with jokes. Yet, underlying this is a dim hope that, by continuing the journey and the story, we might still be able to rewrite the ending.

Problematics of Taiwanese Metal

Central to *Just Not Meant to Be* is how to come to terms with Taiwan as an incomplete, split, and hybrid entity, so that the search for an identity can continue, in line with Taiwanese metal's political activism. At the same time, the ambivalence differs from the convention of valorising forms of identity of Taiwan. As such, *Just Not Meant to Be* also comments on the political activism it takes part in.

In the light of the latent tension at the site of voice/sound (*siann*), the contrast between Crescent Lament's and Chthonic's erhu-playing, and the intertextual constructions of forms of Taiwanese folk identity, at stake here are a simultaneous powerlessness and empowerment carried in and through the erhu, the two poles, respectively, enacted by Taiwanese metal for different purposes. Put differently, at stake here is one more unanswerable question: Who is the once repressed subaltern Taiwanese individual, now empowered, capable of articulating a voice of Taiwan? And, on the other hand, who is forgotten and left out, again suffering oppression and silence?

I propose explicating the problematic in two trajectories: the metal subculture in general and the Taiwanese context. The appropriation of folk elements for political ideologies is certainly not an isolated phenomenon and is alarmingly common in metal around the world. Benjamin Noys (2011) argues that metal borders on a discursive void due to its use of loud and distorted sounds. Metal can only retain a consistency through constant discursive dis- and re-articulations that appeal to imaginary, narrowly or even singularly defined collectives that share a 'ground', the 'land', thus, forming a 'folk' (p. 115). For Noys, this explains why certain genres of metal easily give way to the extreme right, to Nazism, fascism, or ultra-nationalism (p. 105). Although Noys emphasises right-wing political extremity, this kind of discursive construction also takes place in the left wing. Scott Wilson (2010) cautions against the surging left-wing nationalism and racism in European metal and describes this as a form of nationalistic fetishism. What can propel such fetishisation are images and sounds that affectively work with a political unconscious. Yet, the danger is that specific images and sounds do not always match what they are idealised for, and can undermine the very mechanism they establish (pp. 150–152).

In the context of Taiwanese metal, the ethnic, cultural, social, and political dynamics involved are arguably extremely complex. In his study of the

formation the Taiwanese metal scene, Shuo Li (2007) observes the ambiguous position of Taiwanese metal. According to him, the majority of the members of the scene are male, usually of Han ethnicity, from the middle and upper classes who have benefitted from industrialisation (p. 94). This privileged background enables members of these classes to re-interpret the metal subculture in a Taiwanese context. That said, the political aspects of the 'origin' of metal in Taiwan are that it was introduced by US troops deployed in Taiwan, along with a cluster of genres like rock and punk, which the KMT dared not ban. Although these genres all contributed to the rapid democratisation since the late 1990s, rock and punk have become relatively mainstream. Taiwanese metal, on the other hand, holds on to an idealised elite identity, its deviance and marginality targeting larger political spheres, norms, and the mainstream as a whole. In his cross-examination of the news coverage of Chthonic winning Best Band at the 2003 Golden Melody Awards (金曲獎),¹⁰ Wu Jian-lian (2008) highlights this marginality. The majority of news agencies described Chthonic's music as noise and commented negatively on the band's winning of the award. Even among the few agencies that called it music, there was a sense of confusion about how the band could have won the award (pp. 10–13). This reception and overall bewilderment, as Wu points out, are related to the cultural-socio hegemony of a Han Taiwanese-Chinese sentiment represented by the award at that time (pp. 5–6, 12–13). In this context, Chthonic winning the award indicated that the band enjoyed certain socio-cultural privileges but remained marginal and deviant due to its political stance. As for this political stance, during the acceptance speech, Lim (in)famously called Taiwan the mother nation.

Due to the conflicting forces amid which Taiwanese metal rises, it is inevitable that empowerment and oppression always come hand in hand. In other words, Taiwanese metal does replicate forms of domination it seeks to counter. This is why Chu, Li, and Wang variously criticise Taiwanese metal for its cultural elitism (Chu, 2001, p. 125), intellectual elitism (Li, 2007, p.95), and Han nationalism (Wang, 2011, p. 88). Commenting on a dispute over the term Taiwanese metal as 'Taiwanese/localized metal' or the 'larger metal tradition in Taiwan', Li points out that this seemingly straightforward local versus global argument in fact encapsulates layers of power struggles in Taiwanese metal (Li, 2007, pp. 151–53). In my opinion, the very reoccurrence of this black-and-white dispute indicates that it is by nature symptomatic. Not unlike the fetishisation of folk elements, the dispute functions as a defence mechanism, through which

¹⁰The Golden Melody Awards are the Sinophone equivalent of the Grammy Awards. First held in 1990, the awards have been indicative of cultural, social, political trends in Taiwan. Major reforms to the award include: awards for music performed in the Taiwanese dialect in 1991; the abolishment of nominee's citizenship restriction in 1998; awards for music performed in the Hakka dialect and indigenous languages in 2005.

scene members unleash their anxieties about how their political acts also oppress their fellow Taiwanese.

Underlying *Just Not Meant to Be*'s visual incongruity that I earlier termed a 'by no means light-hearted melodramatisation', as should be clear, is a mixture of anxiety and playfulness. The practice of playing with imagery is not exclusive to Taiwanese metal. As Keith Kahn-Harris (2007, p. 147), Owen Coggins (2018, p. 62), and Karl Farrugia (this volume, Chapter 10), respectively, point out, the camp and the ridiculous are integral to metal subculture. Kahn-Harris (2007), moreover, cautions against a wholehearted reading of scene playfulness, as it fails to challenge the scene's power relations.

[Playfulness] allows members to draw on almost any image or discourse within the scene, however offensive it may be to some members, while at the same time allowing them to "back away" from the full implications of their actions. It may be that much of the racist, sexist and homophobic discourse within the scene is not entirely "serious," yet this does not lessen the pain it might cause to members. (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 151)

The target of criticism in this passage is scene elitism that, as many metal scholars have argued, is predominantly white, masculine, and heteronormative. Given the dynamics and persistent anxiety in Taiwanese metal, it is not surprising that the practice of playfulness has a distinctive intertextual-political character, its effect cutting both ways.

Whereas the self-derision in *Just Not Meant to Be* is relatively harmless, in other cases, playfulness can be hurtful. Take, for example, two *once prevalent* instances of bad taste puns in the scene (惡趣味): gay-假, which I came across, and homo-猴魔, which Li came across in his interviews with scene members. In the Taiwanese dialect, fake 假 is pronounced similarly to gay in English; it refers to members who pretend to be interested in politics, often used in combination with the phrase Li observed: 迷弟 or 迷妹, meaning juniors (弟 or 妹) who are fans/lost (迷) (Li, 2007, p. 128). Homo-猴魔, then, is a reference to the monkey king/devil in the classic *Journey to the West*, which is pronounced in Mandarin similarly to homo (shortened from homosexual); it refers to elite members who sincerely or authentically engage with politics (Li, 2007, p. 127). In both cases, the diminishment of masculinity and human subjectivity reverses the commonly-heard political rhetoric in Taiwan that political oppression is castration, but retains the rhetoric's power to hurt. Importantly, the two phrases relate to the Western feminisation and emasculation of Asians, and are also central to disputes surrounding Lim and Chthonic. The bad taste puns no doubt helped the majority of the Taiwanese scene members to come to term with feeling misrepresented and oppressed; yet, being queer myself, I found these puns far from amusing. As such, they also exemplify the political problematic of metal subculture Kahn-Harris observes, and reveal the layers of conflicting forces, internal as well as external, in which Taiwanese metal is enmeshed.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, by closely examining *Just Not Meant to Be* from an intertextual perspective, I have illustrated how Taiwanese metal actively engages with politics, contextualised its complexity, and reflected on its problematics.

Clearly, active engagement with politics does not exempt Taiwanese metal from redoubling oppression. To sum up by way of Lim's and Kahn-Harris's phrasings, being 'engrossed in politics' (Lim, qtd. in Liu, 2007, p. 69), Taiwanese metal 'walks a knife-edge' (Kahn-Harris, 2007, p. 166), between pairs of conflicting forces: empowerment and oppression, remembering and forgetting, consciousness and unconsciousness. On the other hand, acute awareness of one's potential role as an accomplice to oppression means that the majority of Taiwanese metal members are willing to address, discuss, and rectify issues often shunned in the larger metal subculture. The two bad taste puns, for example, have now lost currency, in accordance with the overall scene support for the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Taiwan.

Such a willingness to engage in often uncomfortable dialogues and to actualise changes is, indeed, why Lim insists on metal politics in Taiwan: it 'enhance[s] the profundity of our democracy instead of ruining it' (qtd. in Liu, 2007, p. 69). This political mobility is what distinguishes Taiwanese metal and stimulates ongoing transformations. It offers insight into metal's complexity on a global scale, and might inspire metal scenes around the world that rage against machines of domination.

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Chapter 8

***Til Opalsøens Dyb* ‘To the Depths of Opal Lake’: On Bereavement, Locality, and Intimacy in Danish Black Metal Lyrics by Orm**

Tore Tvarnø Lind

Abstract

Through the prism of intimacy, this chapter discusses how experiences of pain and loss in relation to bereavement by suicide is expressed in the black metal music and lyrics by Danish band Orm. Orm’s 2019-album *Ir verdigris*, entangles the emotional complex and personal relations to the local, natural surroundings of the island Bornholm, including a named tree and lake, as well as local folklore and Norse mythology. As part of fieldwork, the author muddles with intimacy to define an approach sensitive enough to deal with strong and unspeakable emotions, including the idea of cultural intimacy and public embarrassment related to the issue of suicide. The author also reflects on how my participation in the pain of others informs the interpretation. The chapter suggests that Orm’s black metal is doing important pain work, opening to listeners a path towards disembarassment.

Keywords: Heavy metal lyrics; Danish black metal; suicide; bereavement; cultural intimacy; Orm

Introduction

Through the prism of intimacy, this chapter discusses how experiences of pain and loss in relation to bereavement by suicide is expressed in the black metal

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music and lyrics by Danish band Orm. In light of intimacy theory, I ask in this chapter what Orm's black metal album *Ir* does, as the music expresses emotions related to bereavement and the specific site of the island of Bornholm, rather than nationalist identity questions. In the sub-sections following the introductory remarks I turn to the question of suicide and the sequestration of death in modern society, and the idea of cultural intimacy and embarrassment following right after. I then directly focus on the subterranean world, Bornholm's nature, and look at how these relate to Orm's music. I then reflect on how doing fieldwork in black metal and working with intimacy influences my understanding. In the last sub-section, I discuss how Orm's music offers a means to cope with bereavement and the idea of death.

Orm, 'beast, serpent, worm', is a black metal quartet based in Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark, but the majority of the quartet are born and raised at Bornholm, the easternmost Danish island, located south of Sweden in the Baltic Sea. One band member, Troels (bass), has recently relocated to the island, the other three, Simon (guitar, vocals), Theis (guitar, vocals), and Adam (drums) stay in the capital centre, where the band has their rehearsal facility adjacent to Simon's sound studio (Full Moon Studio). Bornholm itself is important to mention, as it is an actor on the album. Orm established itself in 2015. Orm has played at the Roskilde Festival (2016) and Scandinavia's biggest metal music festival, Copenhell, twice (2018 and 2020), and joined the local metal festival, Raise Your Horns, in the town of Rønne at Bornholm in 2019, a few weeks after the release of *Ir*. Before venturing into black metal music the band was playing death metal as By the Patient (2006-2015), with which they released a handful of albums, played countless live shows in Denmark and abroad. The band changed their name and began playing black metal shortly after the suicide tragedy that inspired the band to compose *Ir*. As Simon explained to me, they found in black metal a better way of expressing feelings of *vemod*, 'sadness', or *Wehmut* as in German, than in death metal.

In this chapter, I turn to the lyrics and music of the black metal band Orm. The lyrics in question portray a narrative in which named natural and topographical phenomena, Norse mythology and a folkloric, hidden underground folk called Underjordiske 'Subterranean', are actors, which point to locality and space as important. Although such material readily implies notions of belonging to some sense of the north, I argue in this chapter that Nordic-ness is not central to the musical message. The narrative of the album concerns the suicide of a close family member of one of the musicians in Orm, a tragedy that positions the band as survivors, bereaved by suicide. The delicate theme calls for an approach sensitive enough to take into account the affects and emotions entwined. In order to do so, I draw on the so-called 'intimate turn' (Donovan & Moss, 2017, p. 5) of feminist geography, and others based in philosophy and literary studies, to find ways of approaching intimacy and to reveal nuances to understanding bereavement and black metal. The idea is not simply to 'personalise' fieldwork, rather, 'it is a demonstration of how a critical engagement with emotions can offer novel epistemological techniques for studying the politics of knowledge production' (Laliberté & Schurr, 2015, p. 2). Substantial parts of my

fieldwork then deal with sharing emotions such as loss, loneliness, anger, sorrow, and others: 'Muddling intimacy in research means attending to sensations in the body, intensities of feeling, resonance between entities and connections among people, nonhuman beings and non-living things' (Donovan & Moss, 2010, p. 12). In addition, the concept of 'cultural intimacy' provides the basis for understanding bereavement by suicide in terms of embarrassment. While masculinity and related 'toxic practices' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), such as performative aggression or expressive sorrow in black metal, is obviously relevant to understanding emotions related to bereavement, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a detailed discussion of the gender aspect of it (see Payne, Swami, & Stanistreet, 2008).

My study of Orm's work is part of an ongoing fieldwork in the Danish black metal scene (see Lind, 2020). Of relevance to this case, I employ experiences from participating in the music as a listener and as part of the promotion of the album as a writer. Both ways of participation affected me intimately. Ultimately, I argue that the turn to Danish lyrics in black metal relates to intimacy and existential concerns. With their album, Orm challenges the taboo of bereavement by suicide, in lyrics that weave together the trauma with intimate emotions and relations with plants and non-human things and creatures from the underworld.

*Da stemmerne kaldte dit navn,
fra klippens lyse hal
En fakkel i havets dyb, som bringer
dig hjem
I oplyste gange, kom hid

Berig dette folk af længsel, berig dem
med din sjæl
I afsavn af lyset, skal I leve for jer selv

I ensomhed!
Fra Syvmaster-stammen, blandt
urskog og krat
Skyder den ottende stamme, et kim
til evigt liv
Dybt under højens muld
Kvinde i rodens net
For evigt kaldt til hvile
I klippens lyse hal
Fra skovens tinder, til Opalsøens dyb

Kan øen høre, din røst på ny.*

'When the voices called your name,
from the light hall of the rock
A torch in the deep sea, which
brings you home
In lighted [subterranean] paths, come
forth
Enrich this people of longing,
enrich them with your soul
Without the light, you must now see to
yourselves
In loneliness!
From the Seven Mast-Stem, in
ancient woods and scrub
Grows the eighth stem, a germ
of eternal life
Deep in the mould below the barrow
Woman entangled in the roots
Called to rest eternally
In the light hall of the rock
From the forest peaks, to the depths of
Opal Lake
The island hears your voice anew'

Opening part of the lyrics, *Klippens lyse hal* 'the light hall of the rock', the opening part of the first chapter of the album *Ir* (2019). original lyrics in Danish to the left; English translation mine. Used with permission.

Verdigris and the Tale that is *Ir*

On their second album, *Ir* (2019), Orm tells their black metal tale in their mother tongue, Danish. *Ir* refers to the blue-green encrustation on copper, brass or bronze when weathered as in natural exposure to air, rain, and seawater, known as verdigris. The word, verdigris, in essence *vert-de-Grèce*, ‘green from Greece’, refers to the greenish pigment used in paintings and decoration, which was historically imported from Greece. The Danish vernacular of the term, *ir*, is an old Nordic word, *eir* or *eirg*, which derives from ancient Germanic and Indo-European words etymologically denoting ‘that which belongs to copper’ (Katlev, 2000, p. 328). Verdigris, commonly celebrated for its patina, renders aesthetic beauty to that which is old and worthwhile. Decay is a source from where ‘the awareness of things past’ derives (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 125), and *ir* is such a visible sign of aging, the process of a slow destruction. Orm’s album suggests an attitude towards ageing, which, by use of Lowenthal’s (1985, p. 127) words ‘suppose a similitude between human beings and things of natural and human make’. The decaying sword, an image of material senescence imposed on the familiar temporal experience of the life cycle, refers to a final stage of change in our lives. Representations of bronze-age swords are used by other Danish black metal outfits such as on the front cover to *EP II* (2018) and a T-shirt by Jordslået ‘moldy’ and the sleeve layout of the *DEMO* (2019) by Nyredolk ‘kidney-dagger’.

Ir is composed with a particular medium in mind, the vinyl long playing record, which has seen a revival in the Danish metal music scene. In 2016, vinyl record sales in Denmark doubled (all genres), and in 2017, they exceeded those of CDs (Nielsen, 2017). *Ir* is structured as two pieces for practical reasons only: Sides A and B of *Ir* are referred to as *første kapitel* and *sidste kapitel*, ‘first chapter’ and ‘last chapter’, rather than songs or tracks, hence the notion of storytelling. *Ir* is a retelling of the intimate relations between people, the natural environment, and a subterranean folk in context of the suicide. What kind of story, then, is *Ir*?

Musically, *Ir* (listen to *Ir* on Bandcamp or Spotify) is conceptualised as a coherent, associative piece consisting of different sections that each has their particular nature and nuance. At live shows, Orm performs the piece in its entirety only and do not add other songs from their catalogue, a practice pointing to *Ir* as a complete work. Orm takes the tendency to writing lengthy songs to an extreme in writing a two-chapter piece. The structure of the album, therefore, is not a series of songs, rather a musical path leading through the various emotional states that relate to the experience of a loved one who died by suicide.

For a black metal album, *Ir* is diverse in musical expression, and includes heavy riffing, one of Orm’s hallmarks; distorted and reverbed sections with tremolo picking guitars and blast beating drums, typical of the genre; atmospheric, ambient, and vegetating sections; clean sound parts that almost sound acoustic. The opening of *Ir* is an intensely sorrowful guitar sound, although it might sound like some indeterminable folk music instrument. There is even a trumpet, reminiscent of a spaghetti western movie soundtrack. It works almost as a *Tuba mirum*, a poetic sequence from the *Dies Irae* part of the Requiem Mass, the day of wrath, suggesting world destruction and judgement day. Casting its wondrous

sound in tombs (note the notion of an underworld), the trumpet summons all before the throne. The vocals are growling, shrieking, gnarling, and shouting; at times double vocals, at other only one voice. Simon's voice is high pitched, Theis' low. The end part of the album has a calm and epic quality, suggesting some kind of resolution. The aspect of light and potential redemption is also part of the *Dies Irae*.

Lyrically, *Ir* addresses another in the second person 'you' in the opening, 'When the voices called your name', but the position turns to direct speech, an implied first person voice, addressing a plural 'you' (the capital *I*, in Danish), 'Without the light, you must now see to yourselves in loneliness', that is, the bereaved. References to nature are frequent throughout the lyrics: the cliffs, the ocean with salt and seaweed, the burial mounds, a named tree and lake, the woods, the mires, the lit, secret halls, etc. The lyrics build up a mythical framework, but ends up destroying it, as it fails to provide any comfort. There is a female protagonist: 'Woman entangled in the roots'. However, later the third person pronoun 'he' and 'his' alternates with the voice of a narrator. This suggests a plurality of ways to read and engage in the story, which seems to entangle not only a woman, but also multiple human relations. The deceased is the 'sun', which is carried out – the title of the last chapter is *Bær solen ud* 'carry out the sun' – suggesting a darkening of the souls of the bereaved in facing the loss, but also a positive light in the memory of the deceased.

The album is issued as a gatefold, decorated with old black and white photographs of the cliffs, the ocean, a church, and a burning house from Bornholms Ø-Arkiv, the local island-archives at Bornholm. These complement photos of the band taken during the recording session, pointing to a close affinity between the music and the surroundings, as I argue in this chapter. The cover, which I return to below, presents the photograph of ice-skating people from a distance, framed by a drawing of the Midgard Serpent, *Miðgardsormr* in Old Norse, eating its own tail, the classic Ouroboros (Fig. 1).

A number of studies make convincing arguments about 'whiteness and white (Aryan, heathen, racist) identity' construction (Spracklen, 2015, p. 82) and 'pagan nationalism' (Hagen, 2011, p. 193) in various parts of the black metal scene, as well as about whiteness and Aryan past-ness in hegemonic masculinity construction in folk metal (Spracklen, 2015). Yet, as Spracklen (2010) shows, attitudes towards romantic nationalism and racial purity differ greatly within both folk metal and black metal. Even though Orm is all white and male, and the album themes include mythology, the underworld, and natural surroundings, all pointing to notions of Nordic-ness, the turn to the vernacular Danish in their music is not concerned with issues relating to 'exclusory ethnic belonging' (Hoad & Whiting, 2017).

As Orm's music is about suicide bereavement and conflicting sentiments related to grief and loss, rather than about nationalism, it is imperative to divorce it from homogenous constructions of the Nordic. Here, I embrace Hoad and Whiting's call for greater critical interrogation and plurality of the notion of *det norrøne*, 'the Nordic' in metal music research, arguing that Nordic-ness is 'articulated in diverse and contradictory ways in extreme metal contexts' (Hoad & Whiting,



Fig. 1. Orm (2019) *Ir*, Album Cover. Used with Permission.

2017). In black metal, existential and philosophical issues concerning the nature of being and not being are mostly at stake, as also black metal theoretical writing witnesses (Connole, 2017; Masciandaro, 2010; Silk, 2013). Belonging is nonetheless relevant in *Ir*, as the memory of the deceased is tied to the specific topographical places on Bornholm portrayed in the lyrics. To understand the album, however, it is important to ask what it is *about* and what it *does*. I aim at understanding the sentiments of bereavement expressed in Orm's music in terms of 'intimacy' as conceptualised in philosophy and feminist geography, and anthropologist Michael Herzfeld's idea of 'cultural intimacy' and the related notion of 'embarrassment'.

Suicide and Sequestration of Death

Suicide is a recurring theme in black metal, black metal scholarship (Coggins, 2019; Yavuz, 2015), and black metal theory (Silk, 2013), often centring on the subgenre 'depressive and suicidal black metal' (DSBM). A handful of bands from Denmark identify with the related term 'depressive black metal' (DBM), including Afsky, who released a widely acclaimed album called *Sorg* 'grief' (Afsky, 2018).

As one of few bands to identify with DSBM, Saxtorph tells openly about the lyrical themes: 'depression, suicide, psychosis, anxiety, death and destruction' (Saxtorph on Facebook; Saxtorph, 2014). Saxtorph describes his music as 'Depressiv Dansk Selvmords Sort Metal' [sic], that is 'depressive Danish suicide black metal' (Saxtorph on Bandcamp). The use of the vernacular *sort metal* is uncommon; most bands would identify their music as 'black metal', pronouncing 'black' as in English, and 'metal' in Danish. Orm's *Ir* differs from DSBM in that it deals with the departure of a relative by way of suicide, and the emotional complex of bereavement.

Sociologist Philip Mellor have since the 1990s aimed at directing attention to 'the sequestration of death from the public domain, the absence of considerations of death from social life' (Mellor, 1992, p. 11). Mellor and Shilling notes that '[modern] society is, in the last resort, people standing alone in the face of death', because 'modernity has deprived increasing numbers of people with the means of containing it [death] in an overarching, existentially meaningful, ritual structure' (Mellor & Shilling, 1993, p. 427). By extension, the 'deconstruction of religious orders leave modern individuals exposed and unprotected in the face of their inevitable demise' (p. 427). Regardless of the modern secularisation-narrative, religious beliefs keep influence people's lives. In Denmark, funerals are the domain of *Den danske Folkekirke*, 'the Danish folk church'. More importantly, the idea of afterlife, central to religious dogmas, portrays in a sense also a denying of death (afterlife is a lifeform), which challenges normative ontological security (see below) in situations of bereavement. The album, *Redemption at the Puritan's Hand* (Primordial, 2011) is a reflection on the idea of death reminiscent of Orm's work and the Dies Irae mentioned above, in the sense that 'occasionally a chink of light breaks through' (vocalist of Primordial Alan 'Nemtheanga' Averill; Blabermouth, 2011). This 'chink of light' relates to the potential of redemption and absolution in the face of great suffering and wrath in the overall death theme. Rather than dismantling the logic of death denial, neither Primordial, nor Orm, seem to be able to escape it entirely.

A recent psychiatric study shows how '[suicide] bereavement is perceived differently from natural loss, at times producing a deeply profound effect on the family, friends and associates of the victim, which goes beyond the immediate loss; indeed, one of the discriminating elements observed in suicide bereavement is the stigma experienced by survivors' (Carpiniello & Pinna, 2017, p. 75). The study points to the 'complex psychological impact of the suicide on those close to the victim, fostered by a societal perception that self-given death is considered a failure' (2017, p. 75). The sense of society blaming the survivors for their losses is often internalised: 'Indeed, significantly higher feelings of shame, and an increased sense of responsibility and guilt are commonly found in those bereaved by suicide' (Carpiniello & Pinna, 2017, p. 75; see also Pitman, Osborn, Rantell, & King, 2016). Atte Oksanen (2011) studies shame in relation to self-destructive drinking in Finnish metal lyrics, which is related to the discussion here. Although shame and embarrassment are not explicit themes in Orm's lyrics, they are part of the theoretical framework I construct to understand *Ir*.

The occasional debate on suicide in the Danish context point to the stigmatisation of suicide and suicide bereavement, as indicated in news articles such as

Selv mord er tabu ‘Suicide is taboo’ (Jensen, 2015), and *Selv mord er stadig tabu: kan vi tale om selv mord med vores børn?* ‘Suicide is still taboo: Can we talk about suicide with our children?’ (Groth-Brodersen, 2018). Both writers discuss the private character of suicide bereavement and the general difficulties for society openly to address suicide. Denmark is repeatedly announced the happiest or second-most happy country in the world (Helweg-Larsen, 2018; The Local, 2019). Ironically enough, the paradoxes of high suicide rates in ‘happy places’ has also been noted (Oswald, Daly, Wilson, & Wu, 2011), emphasising how happiness and conventional meaningfulness is under constant threat of disorder and disruption. Selim Yavuz applies Anthony Giddens’s theory of ‘ontological security’ to explore DSBM songs from what he calls ‘a taboo breaking perspective’ (Yavuz, 2015, p. 8). That is, particular forms of black metal is understood in terms of breaking the silence imposed by the suicide-taboo, at least for those who make and listen to the music (assuming that DSBM is not a mass-popular genre). Ontological security can be defined as ‘persons having a sense of order and continuity in relation to events in which they participate’ (Mellor, 1992, p. 12; Yavuz, 2015, p. 8, 16). Suicide is a disruption of order; the confrontation with death is a ‘shattering [of] ontological security’ (Mellor, 1992, p. 13).

Cultural Intimacy and Embarrassment

The ideas of intimacy in fieldwork and cultural intimacy are related. Cultural intimacy is the ‘recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality, the familiarity with the bases of power that may at one moment assure the disenfranchised a degree of creative irreverence and at the next moment reinforce the effectiveness of intimidation’ (Herzfeld, 1997, p.3). The ‘key markers’ of cultural intimacy, ‘embarrassment’ and ‘rueful self-recognition’ (Herzfeld, 1997, p. 7; Stokes, 2010, p. 33), are related to the study of the nation-state, violation of rites, collective identities, etc., and have found use in ethnomusicological studies of sentimental Turkish love songs (Stokes, 2010) and Greek *rebetiko*-music and dissent (Tragaki, 2015). The idea of embarrassment is also useful in the context of black metal and the taboo-character of bereavement by suicide, as the nation-state engages, even if tacit, in the relation between public and private. As professor of literature Lauren Berlant has it, ‘the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness’ (Berlant, 1998, p. 281), ‘intimate lives absorb and repel the rhetorics, laws, ethics, and ideologies of the hegemonic public sphere, but also personalize the effects of the public sphere’ (p. 282). Linking the public and the private, this is a dynamic that ‘through serialization and the persistence of identifiable patterns over time underpins a common sense that this is *how things are* and this is *how we do things*’ (Edensor, 2006, p. 529, italics original). However, it is not the ‘intrinsic properties’ of these practices but rather the ‘shifting modalities through which meaning is attached to them’ (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008, p. 552) that distinguishes the public and the national from the private.

Feelings of desertion, anxiety, and guilt relate to suicide: could something or someone have prevented it from happening? The feeling of guilt is intimidating. Perhaps *Ir* results from a moment of 'creative irreverence', or perhaps it expresses the will not to keep silent and not to merely accept things in the face of what Herzfeld calls the 'effectiveness of intimidation'? Intimidation is present in the dramatic setting in Orm's music, and confrontation with one of modern society's saddest taboos (suicide), when participating in the music, *is* intimidating.

Orm's music, especially on the album *Ir* (2019), portrays a sense of belonging, which has romantic, nostalgic and epic overtones, well known to a variety of metal music expressions, but it also inscribes very personal experiences of loss or bereavement into the local topography and mythology of Bornholm. Orm's self-titled album (2017) was also about personal, dark sentiments and difficult situations in life, but the lyrical themes were cloaked in mythology to tell the story in a universal way. The cover art featured a painting of a burning Hammershus (the ruin of the famous medieval castle on Bornholm) and the Midgard Serpent in the stormy sea beneath (Fig. 2). It is an iconic, eschatological image related to the myth of Ragnarok, 'destiny of the gods', the final demise. The Ragnarok is described in *Völuspá*, or *Völvens spådom* in Danish, from the poetic Edda, a compilation of sources from the 13th century, and Snurri Sturluson's prose Edda, also the thirteenth century. On both their albums, Orm creatively ties the mythological to the locality of Bornholm and to life's struggle of a more intimate and everyday character.



Fig. 2. Orm: *s/t*, Note the Burning Castle, Hammershus, and the Worm Approaching the Coast. Used with Permission.

People's life unfolds in particular places (Obeid, 2013, p. 369; Rømer, 2018, p. 69). Even pain is contingent and place-bound, as 'the language of pain operates through signs' (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 20–21), which in the case of *Ir* convey a story involving trauma and landscape. The pain Orm experiences entangles itself with specific locations in the natural setting and local folklore. Pain is not confined to psychological or bodily trauma, 'it also resists or even 'shatters' language and communication' (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 22; Scarry, 1985, p. 5). For the pain-experience not to slip away through inadequate language and shattered speech, the black metal of Orm is doing pain work. The solitary experience of pain 'is linked to the experience of being with others' (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 29), it is disclosed to an audience. Intimacy might be an unorthodox approach in black metal research, but a turn to intimacy is a way to discuss some of the unspoken experiences of black metal and tacit alterations of genre conventions.

The vernacular works (at least) on two different levels: first, to Orm, the turn to Danish gives their linguistic palette more nuances when writing lyrics, they feel an appreciation of older uses of the language, and they are more confident about how particular expressions work lyrically. Their relation to Danish is, in a word, intimate. Second, the vernacular refers also to a particular expression of black metal contingent on locality, musical experience and specific situations. In discourses concerning 'trve' or 'kult' black metal, certain generic ideas about black metal take rather fixed semiotic forms, such as lo-fi, necro sound, frostbitten, Norse mythology, a climate 'hostile and inhospitable' (von Helden, 2015, p. 130), etc. Following Herzfeld, 'the more fixed the semiotic forms, the greater is the play of ambiguity and the more surprising are the possibilities for violating the code itself' (Herzfeld, 1997, p. 20). I am using the idea to understand how the turn to Danish lyrics relates to the issue of intimacy, and how the suicide tragedy and bereavement is conveyed in dialogue with the dominant, generic traits of the genre. Ambiguity and ambivalence are part of the result, who is who and what is what is not carved out in any simple fashion. This is due to the ways intimacy works, as Berlant has it: 'Conventionally, in its expression through language, intimacy relies heavily on the shifting registers of unspoken ambivalence. It is inferred with by metadiscourse [...] and [...] there would be a flowing reiteration where the intimate is' (Berlant, 1998, pp. 286–287). A defining juxtaposition of the idea of cultural intimacy is that between 'official' and 'vernacular' cultural forms. In Orm's music, there is a tension between the 'official' (generic) black metal reference to Nordic mythology and musical tropes of black metal, and the 'vernacular' (nomadic; cf. Braidotti, 2011) reference to the Subterraneans and flora of Bornholm and the intimate relations and emotions of the personal trauma alongside their particular take on black metal. When addressing issues of cultural intimacy, 'the vernacular is used to valorize and dignify the local or subordinate and, by contrast, to denigrate the central and official' (Cohen, 1998, p. 7).

The cover art on Orm's record includes a black and white photograph a few years before 1900, an engagement akin to Michael Taussig's 'optical tactility, plunging us into the plane where the object and the visual copy merge' (Edwards, 2005; Rømer, 2018, p. 135; Taussig, 1993, p. 35). As opposed to high mythology,

fin de siècle pictures are from an immediate past rather than mythological infiniteness. The photograph pictures an ice-covered lake on the front cover, yet it is not lifeless. There is movement in the photo; silhouettes of people are ice-skating. The growling voices imagine the deceased sprouting anew as the eighth stem on the historic, if not legendary, tree on Bornholm, a spruce, known as *Syv-masteren* 'the seven-mast', in Orm's lyrics called *Syv-master-stammen* 'the seven mast-stem' (cf. lyrics above).

Thus, the memory of the deceased aligns with a named tree, a topographical marker on a map, of a life. In this way, the deceased becomes a path along which one can walk. Perhaps they used to walk there together. Perhaps there is comfort in walking the path that leads to the tree and the lake. Fact has it that the tree *Syv-masteren* fell to the ground during a storm in 1995; it is rotting, withering away. The Danish Nature Agency notes the status of the tree as 'dead'.

The death of this tree is linked to the departure of the family member. In the lyrics, the deceased is bestowed new life as the eight stem of the 'seven mast stem'. Memories of the deceased are thus entangled with the legendary tree, the lyrical 'woman' is a continuation and reinvigoration of it, as a kind of a guardian of the tree, that is, of life and death. In this way, Orm unite memories of the deceased and the intimacy of loss and sorrow with named localities in Bornholm's nature. It is a wilful way of not-forgetting, the tree *must* live anew! This reanimation of the environment seems to be important to the way that the deceased is remembered.

In the light of the suicide tragedy conveyed on *Ir*, 'the downfall and rebirth of the world' (von Helden, 2015, p. 85) of Ragnarok, in which Odin reinstalls the world order anew, becomes a personal downfall localised in the nature of Bornholm. The local tree, *Syv-masteren*, is the burning *Yggdrasil*, in Danish, *livets træ*, 'the tree of life', and the Opal Lake is the wells that flow beneath and nurture *Yggdrasil*. The phrase 'from the forest peaks to the depths of Opal Lake, the island hears your voice anew', points to the unknown of the underworld while tying the voice of the deceased to the lake, to the island's bedrock.

Fieldwork and Intimacy: Participating in Loss

This chapter is based on conversations with the members of the band Orm about their music and lyrics, as well as participation in their music and musical narrative, which is part of larger musico-anthropological fieldwork in the Danish black metal underground scene that I initiated in 2014 (Lind, forthcoming), and which I cannot unfold here in its entirety. I got involved in Orm's sophomore album, as the band asked me if I would help them out with the press material. When Simon told me about the tragedy that inspired Orm to make the album, I felt deeply moved. I did not know the deceased, and I do not have a long history with the band – we made friends over the last couple of years. I remember I turned off my recorder, as I found the situation too intimate for a recording. As Simon's story moved me, the situation in the studio made it clear to me that conversation is a way of participation (cf. Caretta & Riaño, 2016, p. 2; Rubow, 2003). The nature of my participation changed and widened into an intimate level I could not ignore.

The caution not to mention the identity of the deceased draws a delicate balance between what can be shared and what not in my academic prose.

The story and the music animated a sense of participating in the loss, the pain, the uncertainties tied to questions concerning the suicide that will remain unanswered. Reminded of my own personal losses and pains some of which I have never spoken, participating in black metal have come to encompass an 'investigation' of depression, darkness, desertion and death in terms of music and ideas that were new to me. In other words, I attend to the 'intimate spaces and the emotional geographies' (Laliberté & Schurr, 2015, p. 2) of black metal as part of my research.

When at fieldwork, it often occurs to me that I am *sharing* feelings with others, or even sharing others' feelings. The move 'towards emotions as embodied experiences of social relations' (Laliberté & Schurr, 2015, p. 2) offers for fieldwork the possibility to think or rethink 'emotional encounters', and to understand the work emotions or affects in black metal encounters. In other words, fieldwork becomes a 'contact zone of impressions' (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 30). Loss and feelings of loneliness are all experiences, which hold worldwide relevance, unspeakable, as they often are. An experience that challenges the assumption that emotions are a private matter, while at the same time they remain intimate. In allowing emotion and feelings a part of the affective, Brennan speaks of 'transmission of affect' to capture a process that is both social and bodily: 'The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without' (Brennan, 2004, p. 3). As Clare Madge has it, 'intimate experiences of (im)mortality locate us in a web of relations with others [...] and broader contextual factors [...] in which there is 'a mutual enfolding of self and world that inevitably moves us beyond the singular personal experience' (Madge, 2017, p. 81, quoting Hawkins, 2011, p. 467). Madge uses what she terms 'creative practice' to express the unspeakable in various situations (in her case pregnancy and breast cancer) and externalise visceral pain (Madge, 2017, p. 75–77). *It* might be understood in terms of such a creative practice.

Inspired by Ahmed's (2004a, 2004b) work, the feminist geographers, Nicole Laliberté and Carolin Schurr (2015, p. 1) develop the concept of 'emotional entanglement', arguing for the potential for paying attention to emotions in fieldwork. How does one gain access to the intimate lives of black metal musicians? One answer is that you just might get to know parts of it little by little if you let yourself known to others. I have myself experienced that some things are better learned through friendship (cf. Laliberté & Schurr, 2015, p. 2).

In her feminist autoethnographic account on black metal, Jasmine Shadrack (2017) courageously engages her own traumatic experiences of domestic abuse in a transforming process, as she through interpretive performance becomes Denigrata Herself, guitarist and vocalist of the black metal band Denigrata Cervorum. That means bringing into the ethnography intimate experiences of fear, hate, violence, and a range of degrading experiences. To Shadrack, it is difficult at times to recall the accuracy of the events because of the pain caused by remembering (Shadrack, 2017, p. 6). It is clear that intimacy and connectedness is 'not something blissful': 'Intimate acts of self-disclosure, including intimacy

and intimate writing, are precarious and at times uncomfortable, unpleasant and perhaps even violent' (Donovan & Moss, 2010, p. 11). Yavuz (2015, p. 58) shows how for DSBM musicians 'that the music they create is intensely personal', and that the lyrics express 'what they are feeling'. This is very much in line with Orm's self-biographical trauma. Yet, when thinking with intimacy, the music they play and the story the lyrics deals in alongside all that is the unspeakable and painful, the resulting phenomena is part of a variety of emotional entanglements bound in social relations.

Coping

Sociologist Clive Seale suggests three stages of grief of death (Seale, 1998, p. 105; Yavuz, 2015, p. 17) consisting of 'an initial stage of shock, numbness and denial', followed by 'a period of pining, in which the reality of the loss is faced, involving a range of emotions, including anger and despair'. After these, there is an eventual stage of recovery, which 'involves acceptance and adjustment'. On *Ir*, void of life makes room for new life. This is a part of the accepting phase of the grief work: to accept the will of the other and move forward. To carry out the sun suggest a darkening of life due to the loss, but the light of the rock cave promises new life following death. In other parts of the lyrics a whole range of conflicting feelings speak of denial (first stage) and pining (second stage): anger, despair, sorrow, solemn moments of myth creating, coupled by world-shattering moments of rage, doubt, deceit. When talking to Orm about these, it was clear that the mythology construction in the story shows an initial attempt to find meaning in facing the suicide, when meaning has ceased. It fails. In the lyrics and the music the mythology is dismantled, because of the lies it proposes. At this moment, Orm turns to Bornholm's natural setting and local folklore to find the ability to look beyond oneself.

The ending lines suggest a mourning of death itself, 'not the death of someone, or something or some lost past, but for death itself' (Yavuz, 2015, p. 8 quoting Wilson, 2014). It is the image of the dissolving sword, a reminder of mortality, a musical *memento mori*. Following historian David Lowenthal, 'Such signs of decay also betoken imminent extinction. No product of man or nature endures forever' (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 125).

Frem drog vaners væbning, vis på sejren

'Weapons in our hand, victory was certain.

Men sværdets blanke klinge, ædes af ir

Alas, the shiny blade of the sword corroded by verdigris.'

The closing lines of the last chapter, 'Bær Solen Ud' ['carry out the sun']. Original lyrics to the left, English translation to the right. Used with permission.

In a 'death denying' society, as sociologist Clive Seale has it, 'the construction of a meaningful approach to social life is rooted in a 'denial', or at least a turning away from the problem of death. Attempts to transform death into hope, life and fertility are seen in a variety of practices which combine to 'kill' death and

resurrect optimism about continuation in life in spite of loss and certain knowledge of one's own future death' (Seale, 1998, p. 3). Along these lines, Orm's music and lyrics is a way of managing mortality. Maintaining the bonds between people (family, friends, scene members) in black metal 'in the face of death is a continual resurrector practice permeating everyday life' (Seale, 1998, back cover).

In an interview in the Danish music magazine, *Gaffa*, Theis tells about the reactions from audiences the band have received:

People have told us how our music touched and moved them. I have experienced audiences who approached the stage and told me how they were crying during our show. People have written to us, telling about their loved ones who were suffering from being ill, and that our music helped them to cope with it. I like that our music is able to do that, it is gratifying. (Nielsen, 2020, my translation)

This reaction suggests the potential of the music to embrace the unspeakable, as if Orm created a suicide 'postvention' (i.e. counselling or support for the bereaved) of their own in the shape of black metal music. I am not arguing that black metal is therapy, but I do suggest that black metal might do quasi-therapeutic work in some listeners and musicians in specific contexts, such as processing grief. In a study on the needs for individuals bereaved by suicide, Gall, Henneberry, and Eyre (2014, p. 435) outlines a suicide postvention. Quite a few of the reactions in the bereaved individual, can be read into *Ir*, such as the experience of 'pain of the loss', the musical passages that sound like 'venting' strong emotions, the gradual 'atmosphere' changes. As Simon speaks of 'channelizing destructive energy into something constructive', the album can be seen as a way for Orm to 'reframe the suicide', and 'understand the decision' of the diseased (p. 435). A study published in *Death Studies*, shows that participants who are 'reminded about mortality [...] reported less individual sadness than expected' (Koca-Atabey & Öner-Özkan, 2014, p. 662). This to suggest that when preoccupying oneself with mortality as for example in music, literature or art, it becomes easier to cope with the *idea* of death (Yavuz, 2015, p. 60).

Conclusion: Black Metal as Disembarrassment

In this chapter, I argue that the increasing devotion to Danish lyrics in black metal deals with intimacy in relation to death, suicide and bereavement of suicide, in case of Orm's album *Ir* the specific situation of a meaning-shattering experience of the loss of a close family member. The chapter suggests that approaches sensitive to intimate feelings, emotions, and affects may open up for new understandings of the meaning of the unspeakable and that which is not directly shown or expressed in black metal lyrics or visuals. I found such sensitivity in a range of approaches to intimacy in feminist geography, in a few studies on black metal and on affective intensities, and an anthropological work on underground landscapes. Allowing emotion a part of black metal research, is all about taking seriously interpersonal contact and allowing the surrounding world including

objects, non-human beings, and the natural environment an active part in the musical analysis. This chapter discusses suicide as related to cultural embarrassment and how black metal music might help break the suicide-taboo in a death-denying society, and help listeners in managing mortality and other hardships of life. Orm express in their music a complex affective state of bereavement, a world in-between grief and sorrow, anger and tenderness, and open a path towards disembarrassment.

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Part IV

Local, Global, Authentic, and Funny

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Chapter 9

I Custodi dell'Accaio Inox: Language as an Interface Between the Global and the Local in Italian 'Heavy Metal Demenziale'

Karl Farrugia

Abstract

Comedy and parody in rock and metal music have been around since the genre's inception. The Italian comedic music genre known as rock demenziale employs the use of nonsense and surrealism which turns conventions upside down. The demenziale has also attracted a slew of bands that employ this humour within the heavy metal genre, most famous of which is the Roman band Nanowar of Steel. With their jabs at Manowar and power metal bands, they place mundane activities and characters into the grandiose medievalist and fantasy worlds commonly used by those bands to the point of absurdity. However, with humour being deeply culture-specific, jokes that draw from a country's pop culture and makes extensive use of puns may be lost to an audience not familiar with that culture. Nanowar of Steel's unique position of having songs written in seven languages, primarily English and Italian, allows us to take a deeper look at how language and humour interfaces with the local and global metal scenes.

Keywords: Parody; humour; Italian heavy metal; global; local; heavy metal lyrics; Italian

Introduction

'Does humor belong in music?', Zappa mused in his 1995 live album of that name. Certainly, the presence of humour in rock 'n' roll music dates back to the early years

Multilingual Metal Music: Sociocultural, Linguistic and Literary Perspectives on Heavy Metal Lyrics, 153–170

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of the genre's very existence. A few months after Elvis released *Heartbreak Hotel* (1956), Stan Freberg released his parody version which lampooned the excessive use of reverb in the original song. Freberg, alongside other performers like Allan Sherman and Spike Jones, was a precursor to the pseudo-genre of comedy rock, which arguably culminated in the vast output of Frank Zappa, commonly regarded as its godfather. Today the commercial success of comedy musical acts made artists like Weird Al Yankovic and Tenacious D international household names, and a multitude of local artists in several countries have borrowed the formula to deliver more localised works that tap into local cultural references and use the native tongue/s. Italy is no exception to this, yet exceptionally developed an indigenous form of comedy rock that is known locally as *rock demenziale*¹ (Cardinale, 2007, p. 81). In this paper, I will look into this phenomenon by showing how the heavy metal branch of *rock demenziale* utilises language to deliver its flavour of comedy. The primary focus will be on the bands' engagement with lyrical content, language and cultural references, both in terms of local and subcultural references, and how the relationship between these elements relate to the discussion on localisation and globalisation in heavy metal. I will illustrate this by using the output of the Roman band Nanowar of Steel.

Rock Demenziale

Before getting into the analysis of that band, however, it is worth looking at a brief history of *rock demenziale* and its characteristics. The term itself was coined by Roberto Antoni (1954–2014), better known by his stage-name Freak Antoni, himself a pioneer of the genre as the frontman of the band Skiantos. The *demenziale* part of the name derives from the eponymous brand of comedy, *umorismo demenziale*, which presents itself in a nonsensical, surreal manner that aims at turning conventions upside down. Whereas parody aims at producing an exaggerated and humorous picture of a convention, be it a musical genre, movies, celebrities, etc., the *demenziale* places the subject matter out of place and presents a wrong application of the convention. To the international reader, this may be reminiscent of a Pythonesque style of comedy; one may point to the crucifixion scene in *Life of Brian* (1979), which is given a feel-good conclusion with the aid of the cheerful musical number *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* (1979) at the most inappropriate moment, i.e. when Brian and others are awaiting their deaths on the cross. In his monograph *Badilate di Cultura*, Antoni (1995) succinctly, and somewhat aptly confusingly, characterises *demenziale* as:

[...] a cocktail of pseudo-futurism, dada, goliardery, improvisation, pyrotechnic animation, provocation with the irony of avanspettacolo², surreal and above all cretinous poetry.³

¹While *demenziale* literally translated to 'demential', it could also take on the meaning of 'absurd' or 'nonsensical'.

²Avanspettacolo is a form of revue that was developed in Italy, and originally performed at cinemas as entertainment before screenings.

³All translations mine unless otherwise stated.

Antoni (2007) has admitted the difficulty in defining the genre, penning a tongue-in-cheek blog post on the Skiantos website on the topic, concluding with the following attempt at a definition:

Characterized by the prevalent use of distortions in the performance, by the repetitiveness of the musical motif, by the apparent logical disconnection of the texts written in a general stylistic context of mocking and deliberately rude cultural desecration.

One does not need to look further than their cult classic album *Kinotto* (1979) for numerous examples of the practical application of this philosophy. In their song *Fagioli* (1979) 'Beans', set to a funk tune, Antoni laments his inability to eat beans because they make him vomit and would lead to his ruin. In a now-infamous show in their hometown Bologna in 1979, the band set up a kitchen on stage, prepared a plate of pasta and ate it, without playing a single note (Righi, 2016, p. 44).

Although gaining widespread popularity, or rather notoriety, in Italy, Skiantos never achieved any significant commercial success. The same cannot be said of Elio e le Storie Tese (EelST). Forming in 1980 in Milan, they went on to reach a mainstream audience with their composition and recording of the theme song for the soccer-themed comedy show *Mai Dire Gol* for 4 consecutive seasons starting from the 1992 to 1993 season, as well as its various offshoots. The turning point, however, was arguably their performance at the 1996 Sanremo Music Festival. EelST entered the competition with their song *La Terra dei Cachi* (1996) 'The Land of Persimmon', a surrealist critique of Italian culture that Lorenzo Coveri defined as 'a grotesque, but bitterly truthful, picture of our country' (in Riva, 2011, p. 74). The song finished in the second place at the main event in addition to winning the *Mia Martini Critics' Award*. The band's popularity allowed them to recruit a host of guests to play on their albums, including drummer Vinnie Colaiuta on *Eat the Phikis* (1996) and guitarist Ike Willis on *Cicciput* (2003), both members of Frank Zappa's band, revealing EelST's source of inspiration, both musically and lyrically. Musically, in fact, EelST play an eclectic mix of jazz, rock, funk, pop, and any form of music that would fit the theme of the song. On their album *Studentessi* (2008), they recorded a song in five movements called *Suicidio a Sorpresa* (2008) 'Surprise Suicide', which parodies elitism in metal. The opening movement comprises a list of black and death metal bands with a parodical discussion on their over-commercialisation and, thus, their perceived loss of 'kvlt-ness', as defined by Hagen (2016). The second and third movements, subtitled *Allegretto* (2008) and *Andante con Moto* (2008), turn the idea of hidden Satanic messages using backmasking upside-down, arguing that, reversed death metal would sound exactly the same, but black metal, already having Satanic lyrics, would reveal sweet lyrics and a *ventata di ottimismo* 'wave of optimism' when played backwards.

Although EelST's foray into metal is a one-off occurrence, the growth of *rock demenziale* has led to artists producing *heavy metal demenziale*, using the same form of musical comedy in a heavy metal context both musically and lyrically, which will be the primary focus of this paper. Already in 1990, Trombe di

Falloppio (a play on the term *tuba di falloppio*, ‘fallopian tube’, replacing ‘tuba’ for ‘trumpet’, which is also a *double-entendre* for coitus) from Torino, released their first demo tape *Demotape dal vivo interamente registrato in studiolo ma comunque live in Palinsesto 6* (1990). The same year, the Roman band Prophylax started playing traditional heavy and power metal with sexually explicit lyrics in a thick Roman accent. Since then, a large number of heavy metal bands have emerged that work with comedic and ‘demential’ themes. Currently, the most successful band within this genre, both within Italy and outside of its shores, is Nanowar of Steel, having been signed to Napalm Records soon after the success of their single *Norwegian Reggaeton*, which garnered almost 5 million views on YouTube at the time of writing. They formed in 2003 as simply Nanowar, before adding ‘of Steel’ soon after the Italian power metal band Rhapsody added ‘of Fire’ due to a copyright dispute. A particular characteristic of this band that makes it especially relevant to this present study is the fact that apart from the obligatory songs in Italian, they have a substantial repertoire in English, as well as a handful of songs in other languages, which makes them an appropriate focus of my examination on the dynamic between language and thematic subject matters, and the juggling between the local and global musical landscapes. The first issue to tackle is an attempt at framing the generic *modus operandi* of the genre, that is to say, the common traits or common apparatus used in *heavy metal demenziale* that give it its humour. Brandon Konecny (2015), in his analysis of the ‘heavy metal horror cycle’, has identified a common trait of self-referential parody and satirisation of the subculture, pointing out that they ‘recontextualize earnest criticisms espoused by metal’s harshest detractors and situate them in hyperbolic scenarios so as to appear ridiculous’ (p. 17). A similar trait of self-referential satire can be seen in the music of Nanowar of Steel.

Parody through Music

As Nanowar of Steel’s name reveals, the band takes aim at power metal, referring to both Manowar and Rhapsody of Fire as previously mentioned. This is immediately evident in the music itself, which attempts to mimic the sound of that genre as well as of traditional heavy metal. Generally speaking, the sound is used as a vehicle for the lyrics, where the interplay, or rather the deliberate disconnect, between the musical genre and the lyrical content forms the bulk of the humour. There is, nonetheless, something to be said about the delivery of humour solely via the music. In their first full-length release, *Other Bands Play, Nanowar Gay!* (2005), the song *Introducing the Power (Potentia Magni Gladi Vobis)* (2005) consists of a mix of Renaissance-era harpsichord and organ music reminiscent of, amongst others, the English composer William Byrd’s music, and electric guitars, with a choir singing non-lexical vocables (‘la la’) and *potentia magni gladi vobis*. The subtitle and only lyric is Latin for ‘Power of our great sword’, although ‘gladius’ was also used as slang for ‘penis’ and thus could be interpreted as ‘Power of our large penis’. This song runs at 2:08, and meant to introduce the song *Power of the Power of the Power (Of the Great Sword)* (2005), which only runs at 8 seconds. This is meant to parody the long, medieval-sounding introductions of Rhapsody of Fire, as seen in, for example, the 2 min long, quasi-Wagnerian

Lux Triumphans (2000) on the album *Dawn of Victory* (2000) introducing the title track. In other cases, humour is expressed by including music that is unexpected or out of place within the composition as a whole. The song *Blood of the Queens* (2010), off their sophomore album *Into Gay Pride Ride* (2010), which parodies Manowar's *Blood of the Kings* (1988) from their album *Kings of Metal* (1988), mimics Manowar's music but is interrupted by *What a Wonderful World* (1967) by Louis Armstrong, with one singer mimicking Armstrong's voice and the other mimicking Manowar's singer Eric Adams. In another case, the musical 'interruption' is culturally specific. The song *Tutte Cagne* (2016) from their EP *Tourmentone Vol. I* (2016), is a parody of Pantera's music, but instead of retaining a Dimebag Darrell-style solo, they play a rendition of the theme song to the Italian sitcom *Casa Vianello*. In these cases, it brings forward the point that despite the linguistic barrier that might be presented in the lyrical humour, the music itself could transcend those barriers and allow some of the humour to be delivered effectively.

The use of non-lyrical, instrumental humour is hardly a novelty and has been the subject of numerous studies for decades focussing on the use of instrumental humour in classical music. Rossana Dalmonte (1995) gives an example in Rossini's tendency to 'produce a comical contrast between the listener's expectations and the musical conclusions offered, even when there is no verbal or dramatic text involved', describing it as a 'Kantian sense of falling short of people's expectations' (p. 173). She gives examples of how a musical piece might lead a listener to believe that a conclusion is imminent but is deceived by a repetition of bars (Dalmonte, 1995, p. 173), or how the 'wrong' or unexpected instrument is used for a particular sequence (Dalmonte, 1995, p. 185). Victor Ravizza (1974) summarises this by saying that 'humour thus presupposes a particular set of norms. If this is missing, then humour fails to work' (p. 150). In the case of heavy metal humour, what constitutes an understanding of the 'norm' is the implicit requirement to understand heavy metal music and subculture to understand its conventions and references, and, thus, a break from those expectations. The globalisation of metal has allowed that transcendence from language and borders to happen. *Tutte Cagne*, however, gives us a glimpse of how humour, even when delivered non-verbally, could require a more local cultural understanding that would require a blending of the global cultural capital provided by the heavy metal and the local cultural capital in country- or region-specific elements.

Parody through Lyrics

The theme of the global versus the local provides an important framework to understand Manowar's repertoire when moving into the analysis of their lyrical content. Although there is some work done on the search for a universal form of humour that transcends culture-specificity (see McGraw & Warner, 2014), 'humour is notoriously culture-specific' (Kuipers, 2011, p. 68). Giseline Kuipers' (2011) study on the Danish cartoon issue, where a cartoon deemed offensive by Muslims worldwide sparked a global diplomatic row, shows that despite it being an outlier in terms of its extremity, it highlights the dramatic differences between

what cultures deem as humorous. Localised humour may be either in terms of a culture-specific form of humour, as *demenziale* is, or in terms of cultural references, which requires an intimate ‘insider’ knowledge of the cultural capital of that society (Davis, 2013). This cultural capital may come in the form of, for example, pop culture or political discourse, and may require specific skills to access it, including, as is most relevant to this paper, language.

With metal (sub)culture spreading worldwide while retaining a common (sub)cultural understanding, the blend of global, yet culture-specific, humour is theoretically possible. Agnes Jasper (2004) commented extensively on this phenomenon as it manifests in Goth culture, primarily within the Dutch scene but also on a global scale. She uses the term ‘inside jokes’ when detailing self-parodying humour, meant to appeal to members of the subculture exclusively and arguing that ‘through the adaptation of humour, insiders can laugh about those stereotypes, incorporate them, and supply them with their own epistemological, inside humour’ (Jasper, 2004, pp. 103–104). As with Goth culture, in metal culture, on a global scale, a number of tropes or uniform expressions are not inhibited by local specificity and can be seen occurring globally either cross-genre or, in some case, dependent primarily on the sub-genre.

Elitism

In his study on self-destruction in heavy metal culture, Daniel Frandsen (2010) devotes a lengthy discussion on the tropes of authenticity and elitism within it. Here he explains:

The terms ‘true’ and ‘poser’ are often found used in Heavy Metal (sub)cultures. They are used to distinguish those who are said to be authentic to the culture, from the people who are merely pretending (or trying) to be part of the culture, but for one reason or another are unable to live up to the standards. (pp. 12–13)

He continues to explain how the definition of authenticity that qualifies ‘true’ may range from the listening to the ‘correct’ bands, to listening to the ‘correct’, more often than not earlier, albums from a certain band. Metallica’s *Load* (1996) and *ReLoad* (1997), for example, tend to be ‘decanonised’ from the band’s repertoire when compared to their earlier output (Smialek, 2016, pp. 110–111). To this, I would add having a wide range of knowledge within the fandom that would be a mark of dedication to the sub-culture or ‘neo-tribe’ as opposed to being a ‘casual’ listener (Kahn-Harris, 2006).

Perhaps the most notorious purveyor of this trope is the band Manowar, who have crowned themselves *Kings of Metal* in the album of that name, and claimed in their song *Warriors of the World United* (2002) from the album *Warriors of the World* (2002), ‘We alone are fighting / For metal that is true’. This idea of Manowar being the sole custodians of ‘true metal’ has become somewhat of a trademark of that band. In a 1998 interview, Joey DeMaio was quizzed on the meaning of this term, to which he responded:

True Metal is music that's true to the style of classic Heavy Metal. It's not diluted. It's not pussied out. It's not wimped out. It's played from the heart, one hundred per cent. (MB, 1998)

Quantifying 'trueness' is, unsurprisingly, a futile exercise due in no small part to the subjectivity of the matter. The same claim is made by a range of artists across the heavy metal spectrum. The *True Norwegian Black Metal* milieu claim that their authenticity lies in the idea that they were 'as extreme as the music and lyrics implied – no one were to believe that this was theatrics' (Steen, 2005), as opposed to death metal becoming 'a trend' (Spracklen, 2006, p. 34). Frandsen (2010) suggests how death and black metal fans claim authenticity due to their 'extreme, and 'dirty sounding' music as being the 'real thing' within the culture,' with derision targeted towards power metal (p. 13). A discussion on the causes of the perceptions that lead to claims of authenticity is beyond the scope of this paper (see Moore, 2002). However, despite the subjective foundations upon which these claims are made, its existence has become part of the parlance of heavy metal culture (Kahn-Harris 2006; Spracklen, 2006, 2014, 2018).

With Nanowar building its image, and its own name, on a parody of Manowar, the use and lampooning of 'true' and 'poser' plays a significant role in their humour. On *Other Bands Play, Nanowar Gay!*, the intro and outro tracks are dubbed *InTrue* (2005) and *OuTrue* (2005), both of which list metals from the periodic table along with stereotypical Manowar-style catchphrases, suggesting that nothing is more 'true metal' than actual, physical metals:

Metal! Nickel! Iron! / Fire And Steel
Zinc! Uranium! Titanium! / Metal's their will

The banalisation of the 'true' and 'poser' tropes is furthered in *Metal-La-La-Lal!* (2005), a song about showering, which includes 'I wash my hands from the poser's blood' and 'perfume my true hair'. The aptly named *Poser* (2014), from *A Knight at the Opera* (2014), tackles the various accusations of 'poser-dom' as mentioned by Frandsen. This power ballad is framed as a conversation between Nanowar's singer and a poser, with the former accusing the latter of listening to Tokyo Hotel and Korn, representing the 'wrong bands', wearing a *ReLoad* shirt and liking Iron Maiden's *Virtual XI* (1998), representing the 'wrong albums', and not knowing 'the difference between Bruce Dickinson [...] and Blaze Bayley' as accusations of casual participation. By taking on the motifs of 'true' and 'poser' as a theme for their humour, Nanowar taps into a culture-specific trope that is globally comprehensible within the heavy metal milieu, acting as an 'inside joke', to use Jasper's characterisation, thus acting as a globalising vehicle for their music.

Medievalism, Fantasy, and Warfare

When focussing on power and traditional heavy metal specifically, an overarching theme of Tolkienesque and medievalist fantasy is immediately evident. Exploring

the reasons for this fascination with fantasy and the medieval in power metal, along with its implications of hyper-masculinity and cismativity, is beyond the scope of this paper. However, its existence is pivotal to understanding this trope, which has been used and abused by Manowar. As [Trafford and Pluskowski \(2007\)](#) showed, the image of the medieval, particularly Viking, warrior has been a presence in metal since the beginning, with Manowar being the prime example (see also [Von Helden, 2010](#)). Beyond merely making music that is *about* medieval warriors and warfare, there is a widespread tendency to equate the bands and their fans with said warriors, imagining themselves as a hypermasculine, marauding horde or defenders of the (metal) faith ([Hill, 2010](#)).

Already on their first full-length release, *Battle Hymns* (1982), Manowar presented themselves as medieval warriors in the final track *Battle Hymn* (1982), which opens with:

By moonlight we ride / Ten thousand side by side
With swords drawn held high / Our whips and armor shine

Power metal bands like Helloween, who are considered to be the founders of the genre, ‘takes the NWOBHM⁴ sound and exaggerates its powerful tenor vocals and melodicism, while continuing the mystical/mythical/sci-fi themes’ ([Weinstein, 2011](#), p. 40). Much like Manowar before them, they frequently imagine themselves and metalheads as medieval/fantasy warriors, as in the song *Metal Invaders* (1985) off their debut album *Walls of Jericho* (1985):

Metal invaders, the gods on their ride
Sworn to bring metal, mayhem tonight

Rhapsody of Fire, another of the preferred targets of lampooning by Nanowar, writes music that is exclusively fantasy-themed, including stock fantasy characters reminiscent of Tolkien or Dungeons & Dragons™ lore, like paladins, dragons, elves, etc. The prevalence of this trope in the genre, therefore, leads to its inevitable use when parodying the genre.

Nanowar, in fact, use this trope *ad absurdum* and *ad ridiculum*, to quote [Konecny \(2015\)](#). In true *demenziale* style, this trope is used out of place and out of the expected context, fulfilling its role to apply the wrong application of the convention, as mentioned earlier. Thus, while Manowar and other bands attempt to present themselves, a band wielding guitars and drumsticks, and the audience, both arguably mundane activities, as mythical medieval warriors, Nanowar extend the range of mundanity that could be fantasised and ‘medievalised’. On *Stairway to Valhalla* (2018), a reference to Led Zeppelin’s *Stairway to Heaven* (1971), they give this treatment to Barbie™ in their song *Barbie, MILF Princess*

⁴New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) is the term used for the movement of heavy metal bands from the United Kingdom from the late 1970s, including Judas Priest and Iron Maiden (Weinstein, 2011, p. 38).

of the *Twilight* (2018), set to a Rhapsody of Fire-like tune and featuring that band's former singer Fabio Lione as a guest artist. Here, Barbie™ is characterised as a fantasy warrior princess yet maintaining the gender stereotypes and hyper-femininity associated with the doll (Murnen, Greenfield, Younger, & Boyd, 2016). For example, she is shown as 'a sorceress trapped in a luxury spa', going out 'to reach the divine shopping mall' to find 'mighty handbags of amber'. The song is otherwise peppered with references to other dolls, including Winx™, Bratz™, and Polly Pocket™, and a list of imaginary Barbie™ varieties that would arguably be appealing to a heavy metal and fantasy enthusiast, such as 'Barbie Rob Halford' and 'Barbie Dungeon, Barbie and Dragons'. This is an insightful commentary on the overlap between the metal and fantasy fandoms. Trafford and Pluskowski (2007) have attributed this to the parallel growth of two genres that appealed to the same demographic, which converged and mutually recruited fans, resulting in the fact that 'members of the metal audience tend to be highly conversant in the norms and topoi of swords 'n' sorcery fantasy' (p. 60). In other cases, very mundane activities are given a medieval twist to a level of absurdity. On *Other Bands Play, Nanowar Gay!*, the skit *Burger* (2005) has a king ordering his chamberlain to bring him a Happy Meal™, which turns out to be cold and sentences him to decapitation. This is the introduction to the song *King* (2005), together referring to Burger King™, which has said king 'Walking on the hill, with the crown of steel / Going to McDonald (*sic*), to eat an (*sic*) happy meal.' These songs turn the expectation of the medieval/fantasy genre upside down by stripping away the sheen of the medieval and fantasy narratives while maintaining the form and language, highlighting its banality.

That is not to say that the aim is to negatively criticise or mock the practice of bands like Rhapsody, but it rather acts as a form of self-parody where fans of the genre, and indeed artists, can make fun of themselves, as Fabio Lione's aforementioned involvement demonstrates. The humour is delivered by the absurdity of what Doniger (2005) calls 'self-impersonification', or the act of embracing and performing an imitation or parody of oneself (pp. 10–12). Fabio Lione, through his involvement in Rhapsody, was parodied and imitated by Nanowar by lampooning his over-the-top fantasy persona, and, in turn, Lione steps in to perform that parody as himself. The appeal of self-parody in the *demenziale*, however, goes beyond the boundaries of the music genre, despite the music acting as the vehicle for it. As an overarching pseudo-genre, its comedic value can be appreciated by outside observers who may not necessarily understand the sub-cultural-specific references generally required to get the 'inside joke'. Arguably Nanowar's most popular song within their native Italy is *Giorgio Mastrota (The Keeper of Inox Steel)* (2014). Similarly to *Barbie, MILF Princess of the Twilight*, the song recontextualises a non-metal character, in this case, the popular TV personality Giorgio Mastrota, known primarily for his infomercials for mattress company Eminflex™ and cookware company Mondial Casa™, as a fantasy paladin who uses cookware as weapons and armour while riding on elephants, Eminflex™'s logo, with a liberal use of his best known catch-phrases. This song has garnered a lot of mainstream attention, with Mastrota himself being interviewed about it on radio and TV. On the October 31, 2018, during

a performance at the Lucca Comics Convention, Giorgio Mastrota joined the band on-stage for a surprise cameo, where he came on-stage in a medieval helmet and sang along with the band.

The superimposition of the medieval and fantasy tropes of heavy and power metal and the mundanity of modern culture became one of the most identifiable features of the band's brand of humour. The rebellious and escapist function of heavy metal (Walser, 1993, p. 19) and 'fantastic neomedievalism' aimed at 'transporting the participant or reader into the realm of "non-ordinary"' (Selling, 2004, p. 212) is broken by injecting the ordinary back into it. This, in turn, highlights and exaggerates the perceived absurdity of the already present superimposition of the mundanity of modern music with medievalist imagery.

Localisation and Language

With the exception of *Giorgio Mastrota*, all of the songs I have cited so far are in English, which points towards a willingness to reach a wider, international audience, and the humour follows suit by sticking to the globally-identifiable tropes of elitism, medievalism, and hypermasculinity. When switching to Italian, although the global aspects are often retained, the cultural references to Italian culture are employed as an additional tool. In his study on the use of the vernacular in hip-hop music around the world, Tony Mitchell (2000) identifies language as one of the major tools used by artists to localise a global genre, allowing them to speak directly to and identify with the target audience. Alastair Pennycook (2007) attributes this to a phenomenon he dubs 'the global spread of authenticity', where hip-hop's focus on authenticity and loyalty to the everyday experience of urban life, or 'keepin' it real', is exported to the local scenes around the world (p. 103). The need for representing authenticity, thus, requires a reinterpretation of what is authentic in a local context and the use of local language and slang provides a useful tool to present local representation. When looking at comedy Finnish rap music, Mervi Tervo and Juha Ridanpää (2016) identify a curious twist on the same process. With Finnish not being seen as a language suitable for rapping, the use of Finnish itself was a comedic statement exacerbated by the juxtaposition of the tropes associated with the urban, African American sensitivities of hip-hop and white, middle-class, Finnish realities. This is achieved, for example, with a 'hyperbolic exaggeration of [Stig Dogg's] lack of authenticity' (Tervo & Ridanpää, 2016, p. 10), or by highlighting the contrast between the flaunting of excessive wealth in American hip-hop with the Finnish restraint in showing off one's wealth (Tervo & Ridanpää, 2016, p. 11). Likewise, the *Giorgio Mastrota* example highlights an important aspect of localisation of humour while retaining the global aspects that are pivotal to its identity. To the listener outside of Italy, or at least not intimately familiar with Italian pop-culture, the references to a series of daytime infomercials for Italian brands and their presenter are lost, and, thus, the humour is not conveyed. The interfacing factor between the local and the global, in a vast majority of their repertoire, is language. Due to the difficulty, and possibly futility, of translating and explaining culturally specific jokes, I will be rather summary in providing examples, and by no means covering the totality

of their Italian repertoire. However, skimming over the general tendencies of the humour when singing in Italian will provide a good overview of how the interplay between the local and the global scenes are handled.

Their *Tourmentone Vol. I* EP consists of five songs in Italian and gave the band an opportunity to experiment with drawing inspiration from other genres of metal. This includes a Slayer parody in *Pollocausto (Vallespluga of Death)* (2016), a play on *Angel of Death* (1986) but centred around chicken dishes while using catchphrases from adverts for chicken and rice brands. The song *V per Vienne* (2016), a play on 'V for Vendetta' while using the popular ice cream product, is a power ballad speaking of an unfaithful partner and the singer's wish for revenge and is chock full of puns that use ice cream products popular in Italy. He claims that her infidelity has left him *sconfitto come Alessandro Magnum* 'defeated like Alexander the Great' (the Italian name for Alexander is Alessandro Magno, replacing his epithet with the ice cream Magnum™), and *mi son sentito un cornetto* 'I felt like an ice cream cone' (*cornetto* is a pun on *cornuto*, Italian for 'cuckold'). These examples show retention of the topos of relocating mundane, 'non-metal', themes into a metal setting. However, switching to Italian, which one would assume would appeal to a primarily Italian audience, gives them the liberty to sprinkle the lyrics with Italian cultural references. Interestingly, this is highlighted in some songs in English, in which a cultural reference is delivered in Italian. *Barbie, MILF Princess of the Twilight*, although primarily in English, contains the line *Jerry Calà in controtempo* 'Jerry Calà in syncopation', referring to the Italian comedian Jerry Calà. In *Master of Pizza* (2003), a rendition of Metallica's *Master of Puppets* (1986), from *Triumph of True Metal of Steel* (2003), which employs various negative stereotypes of Naples (Benigno, Marmo, Pugliese & Corona, 2009), the lyrics switch to Italian when referring to Naples's football team, and Neapolitan when quoting popular Neapolitan songs and sayings.

As mentioned in the introduction to *rock demenziale*, the formula to use themes out of place to the level of banalisation is a standard topos in that genre. In fact, the same formula is used by other artists who bring that comical genre to heavy metal. Gli Atroci, one of the earliest bands to do this, having formed in 1995, only produce music in Italian. Although they do not focus on medieval and fantasy themes to the extent that Nanowar does, the same subculturally specific *topoi* mentioned above are employed. The rhetoric of elitism can be seen in the title for their album *Metallo o Morte* (2009) 'Metal or Death', in the song *Morte alla Techno* (2009) 'Death to Techno' from that same album, and *I Dieci Metallamenti* (2004) 'The Ten Metal Commandments' from *L'Armata del Metallo* (2004) 'The Army of Metal', in which the first commandment is *Non avrai altra musica all'infuori del metallo* 'Thou shalt have no other music outside of metal'. The imagery of battle and warriors is also widely used, as seen in *L'Armata del Metallo* and the two-part song *I Guerrieri del Metallo* (1999) 'The Warriors of Metal' from their self-titled debut. Being in Italian, the same penchant for culturally specific references and humour is common in their music. In one of their most popular songs, *Pennellen* (2009), they parody Rammstein musically as a vehicle for the German stereotypes of cleanliness, organisation, and punctuality, amongst others (see Marvinetz, 2017, pp. 31–47), using a grossly exaggerated

German accent and adding a ‘German-sounding’ affix *-en* to the end of every line. These include such maxims as *La roba non si butta dal finestrinen* ‘rubbish is not to be thrown out of the window’ and *Non oltrepassare la riga giallen* ‘Do not go beyond the yellow line’. The chorus inexplicably switches to the tag-line of a famous advert for a brand of paintbrushes in Italy, Pennelli Cinghiale™, *Per fare una grande parete, ci vuole un grande pennellen*, followed by its translation ‘To make a real big wall, you need a big paintbrush’. These examples show how the comedic two-pronged punchline could only work completely if the audience is in possession of the awareness of two culturally specific cultural capitals: the subcultural knowledge that is required to understand the *topoi* associated with heavy metal, as well as specifically Italian cultural knowledge. When observing a similar mechanic in Finnish humorous hip-hop, Tervo and Ridanpää (2016) claim that ‘humor always carries cultural references, and we argue that the humor in Finnish rap music videos rests upon the intersection of Finnish culture and African-American hip hop conventions’ (p. 8). Likewise, Italian-language heavy metal *demenziale* exists in an analogous intersection between Italian culture and heavy metal conventions.

Nanowar, being sharply aware of these factors and their position, have sought to expand the band from being a local manifestation of the music to a global one beyond the frequent use of English. Edoardo Carlesi, the band’s bassist and founder known by his stage-name Gatto Panceri 666, happens to be a polyglot who claims to be somewhat fluent in ten languages (personal communication, June 2018) and has lived in a variety of countries, which allowed him to become intimately familiar with their cultures. With the awareness that two-pronged jokes are limited to a limited audience, part of their repertoire could only be understood if, like I have done in this paper so far, the joke is explained, and as the famous maxim by White and White (1941) goes, ‘humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind’ (p. xvii). The solution, therefore, was to go local globally by penning a song in four languages: German (*Schwanzwald*), Spanish (*Campo de Nabos*), Russian (*Хызбекучман*), and Bosnian–Croatian–Montenegrin–Serbian (BCMS) (*Kitograd*). Carlesi points out that these songs are not translations of each other, but rather independently written lyrics that centre around the same idea of a ‘forest full of penises’, each using untranslatable puns and reference to local slang, local culture and the local sense of humour (personal communication, September 2018). The German title, for example, is a reference to Schwarzwald, the German name for the Black Forest, with *schwanz*, a vulgar word for penis.

This pattern of being acutely aware of implications of the humour as it travels from the local to the global stage is reflected in the setlist for concerts in Italy and elsewhere. At the time of my communication with Carlesi, the primary focus of the concerts in Italy was from the Italian-lyric-heavy *Tourmentone Vol. I*, whereas international concerts focussed more on the first three LPs. In the setlist for their show in Kassel in Germany, with the exception of *Feudalesimo e Libertà*, all other songs were non-Italian, with an addition of the German *Schwanzwald*. Conversely, the majority of the songs on an Italian setlist are in Italian, with a few English songs thrown in (personal communication, September 2018).

Carlesi also points out how the banter between songs refers to local culture wherever they play: in Germany, for example, they take jabs at the far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* (personal communication, September 2018). The aim, ultimately, is to successfully deliver the comedy routine to an ‘implied audience’ (Livingstone, 1998) by providing them with an adaptation of the comedy, rather than a mere translation, which allows them to receive the ‘punchline’ effectively. This is a technique used in Nanowar’s native Italy to localise American TV series. ‘Supposedly obscure original’ references to American culture are replaced with analogous references in Italian culture, such as *The Simpsons* injecting references to and punchlines from the aforementioned *Casa Vianello* to replace references to American sit-coms (Barra, 2009, p. 513–514). Much like Nanowar’s setlists, this move eliminates references that may be unfamiliar to the ‘implied audience’ and plugs in an adapted version that appeals to them.

Juggling the Global and the Local

This awareness makes an interesting point on the notoriously fluid demarcation between the local and the global in heavy metal. Keith Harris’s (2000) study on Sepultura’s experience along this border points out how the local and the global scenes at the earlier stages of their career ‘were “quasi-autonomous” from each other in that they were dependant on each other, yet contained practices, texts, institutions and forms of capital that were unique to each’ (p. 17). Yet the fluidity of this demarcation has allowed for local ‘capital’ to flow into the global in such a way that it loses its locality. Harris (2000), in fact, mentions how local manifestations of a genre became subgenres that are globally recognised without the need for the local characterisation, citing black metal as one such case where, despite its origins in Norway, has become a global genre that is not necessarily dependant on the local specificities of Norway (p. 16). However, other cases prove more ambiguous. Viking metal, having started as a local spin-off of black metal in Scandinavian countries, which incorporated elements of local history and folk music, has now become a *bona fide* global genre (Hoad, 2013). Only around 18% of bands labelled as Viking metal on Metal-Archives are from Scandinavian countries, with entries for bands as far-flung as Japan and Uruguay (Viking Metal – Advanced Search). Catherine Hoad’s (2013) study on this phenomenon reveals how this relates back to the medievalist fascination of heavy metal long before the advent of Viking metal, and the image of Viking warriors proved to be an ideal that could be appropriated globally without the need for the anchoring in a ‘genuine’ local context. This flow from the local to the global resulted in a subsequent flow back to the local, galvanising claims of authenticity amongst bands in Scandinavia. Deena Weinstein (2011), on her part, points out the phenomenon of ‘glocalisation’, where a global scene like black or Viking metal could become localised globally, with local bands taking the blueprint of the genre but exchanging foreign local elements for local elements (pp. 54–55). Reference to Vikings and Scandinavian folk music, for example, could be exchanged for Gaelic references and Celtic music in Ireland, or Mongolian throat singing in Mongolia.

The extent of this glocalisation, however, raises the question of what is truly global in the heavy metal scene today. Has glocalisation become so common that

localisation became an integral part of the global? In other words, has glocalisation become the norm in globalisation, rather than a footnote? Indeed, one could argue that bands that exhibit local elements garner success on a worldwide scale *because* of their local specificity, rather than *in spite* of it. Folk metal, by definition, requires folk elements, but the term is ambiguous as to what folk is the correct folk for the genre, and therefore could comfortably be any form that is 'appropriate' to the artist making it. Localisation is, therefore, a hallmark of folk metal globally. The appeal of local specificities, however, is not limited to folk metal. A recent example is that of New Zealand's Alien Weaponry, which infused thrash metal, a genre that is seldom localised as compared to folk metal, having 'emerged as standardised genres [along with death metal] within a rapidly solidifying set of scenic institutions' (Harris, 2000, p. 17), with Māori music, lyrics, history and culture. Their meteoric success following the release of their first video, for the song *Rū Ana Te Whenua* (2018) 'The Earth Trembles', lead to their signing with Napalm Records and earning them spots at Wacken and other European summer festivals before releasing their debut album. Although speculative at best, one could argue that their global success was due to the localising element in their music, which made them stand out of the oversaturated scene of 'standardised' thrash metal. If true, the local specificity does not lock it into the local scene, but rather becomes the key to its global appeal rather than hinder it. Whereas bands like Brazil's Sepultura and Iraq's Acrassicauda opted to sing in English to anchor themselves to the global scene (Harris, 2000; Weinstein, 2011), it may very well be that, in today's scene, the opposite may be true.

Metal demenziale, however, adds an extra layer of localisation in the form of humour. As discussed earlier, humour is deeply culture specific, and, thus, may prove to be a hindrance to its global appeal. The result of that is that bands like Nanowar are required to be aware of their situation when flirting with international audiences. As a comedy act, the success of their performance is dependent on the delivery of the joke, and presenting a foreign audience with a joke referring to an advert for mattresses on Italian TV has an infinitesimally small chance of landing. Nanowar's solution to this problem, then, was to (1) produce music in English that may appeal to a more global audience, (2) tailor the live shows for the market, and (3) go local globally. The latter highlights the extent to which comedy metal, while drawing on a global scene and its cultural capital, will only flow back into it if it is not localised. Once localised, it seldom manages to flow back into the global, unless it is adapted to appeal to other local scenes specifically. In addition, although language does not generally seem to pose any significant hindrance to the global appeal of bands, as seen in the Alien Weaponry example, or with the myriad black metal bands singing in Norwegian, for non-Anglophone comedy bands the language may be the very border wall that divides the territories of Global and Local.

Conclusion

Looking at the Nanowar's juggling act between the different scenes and carefully managing and catering to its implied audience, it is tempting to look at its

comedy output and attempt to decipher a motive, be it political or societal criticism, behind it. However, the *demenziale*, as Milani (2019) summarises in her article on Skiantos, makes ‘already banal lyrics stupid’ and ‘drags us to an upside-down world’, where the meaning becomes to ‘send back to the sender [...] his unacceptable (senseless) search for meaning’. When asked about the reasoning behind their navigation in the local/global landscape, Carlesi simply answers that ‘generally, when we write the lyrics, we only think about one thing: does it make us laugh? If the answer is yes, then we write the song’ (personal communication, September 2018). In an interview for Metalforce.it, guitarist Valerio Storch replies to a question about choosing their themes by saying that ‘it is hard to have a process of creation of ideas that makes sense when the aim is to make something that makes no sense’ (Metalforce.it, 2019). Much like John Cleese’s assessment of the ‘meaningless’ fish-slapping gag in Monty Python’s Flying Circus (1972) (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2015), silliness is the reason for humour. The *modus operandi*, therefore, is to absorb the cultural capital provided by global metal scene and local, Italian pop culture, turn the conventions upside down and, to quote one of their own lyrics from Bum Voyage (2018), ‘to explore new sense of humour, to seek out puns and hahahaha. To find the joke that no man has made before’, before giving way to Uranus (2018).

Although the number of studies on local metal scenes is too vast to list, there is a marked lack of studies on comedy metal acts from around the world. Apart from widely known American artists like Green Jelly, GWAR and Deathklok, local scenes around the world boast a wealth of comedy bands, from Brazil’s Massacration to Germany’s Knorkator, Austria’s Alkbottle (see Peter Pichler’s contribution in this volume) and Norway’s Black Debbath, each having a unique take on the genre. In all these cases, the interplay among language, local culture, and the global metal capital produce uniquely local creations that defy globalisation despite their reliance on it. Nanowar’s penchant for catering for both a local and a global scene while maintaining a hard border between the two allows us to see the differentiation between them, affording us a clear-cut peek into a relationship that is otherwise ‘of complex, fluid negotiation’ (Hoad, 2013, p. 2). While localisations of metal tend to be an expression of the artists’ identity (see Von Helden, 2010), rather than a calculated effort at appealing to a primarily local audience, localised (non-Anglophone) comedy metal does not, and cannot, hope to reach an audience outside of a local one unless the calculated effort is aimed at such a result. Their unique circumstances could open new avenues in understanding local scenes in their local contexts. It is, thus, hoped that others may present us with the innards of their comedy metal frogs for the scientific minds to rummage through.

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Chapter 10

The Paradoxical Usage of Austrian Dialects of German in Metal Music

Peter Pichler

Abstract

This chapter focusses on current debates on ‘locating metal’ and on the demand for more theoretical and methodological rigor in metal studies. As an example of the usage of a non-English language in metal, the author examines the empirical case of the usage of Austrian German and Austrian dialects in metal music since around 1990. Herein, the author will be using the disciplinary methodologies of history and analyse the two Austrian bands Alkbottle and Varulv. According to the theory of ‘sonic knowledge’, the case study is interpreted as an example of ‘locating metal’ that occurred in the Austrian metal scene. The chapter shows that the seemingly contradictory coexistence of both deconstructive irony and essentialist nationalism is characteristic of the usage of Austrian German in metal. To conclude, the author proposes that this paradox is a result of the broad cultural history of Austrian nation-building after 1945. The paradox of the usage of Austrian dialects in metal is the metal scene’s attempt at coping with the frictions of Austria’s twentieth century history.

Keywords: Sonic knowledge; cultural history; Austrian German; sound history; Austria; heavy metal

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the usage of Austrian German and Austrian dialects in heavy metal music since around 1990 as a case study of ‘locating metal’.¹ I understand locating metal as discursively assigning to metal clearly distinguishable and clearly identifiable spatial and/or temporal places in our world. In metal studies’ current stage of developing clearer contours, such acts of ‘localisation’ have become an important research topic (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, & Scott, 2016; Gardenour Walter, Riches, Snell, & Bardine, 2016; Savigny & Schaap, 2018). Also recent discussion on origins and ‘sounds of origins’ in metal research are a point of reference (DiGioia, 2018; Karjalainen, 2018)

Hence, to reflect upon locating metal means to reflect upon the place(s), both spatial and temporal, that metal occupies in our world. For a cultural historian with a focus in metal studies (Pichler, 2018, 2020), before everything else, the past temporal dimension of metal is significant when researching heavy metal. How is the past experienced in the scene (Pichler, 2018, 2020)? How is history presented in metal (Brown, 2011; Elflein, 2010; Hickam, 2015; Meller, 2018; Pichler, 2017, 2018, 2020; Roccor, 1998; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000)? How can we write an accurate history of metal, also in terms of localising metal? The questions touch upon the topic of the usage of Austrian German in metal, as using such a local language is always an act of localisation. It locates metal in places of ‘Austrianness’.

Now, what is Austrianness (Bushell, 2013; Johnston, 2010)? Situated in Central Europe, Austria is a small country of about eight million inhabitants. The country and the Austrian populace are generally associated with the Alps, with Mozart and other classical music, perhaps furthermore with the Habsburg monarchy as a glorified empire of a past era. On a global scale, the film *The Sound of Music* (1965) has created images of Austrianness, too. Geographically, the present Second Republic of Austria covers a subregion of a much bigger, dominantly German-language area in Central and Western Europe. The country borders four countries of the former ‘Eastern bloc’ – Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic – and it has historically encouraged relationships with them. A history of building bridges to Eastern Europe is significant in terms of Austria’s self-image (Bushell, 2013; Johnston, 2010).

Until the late nineteenth century, it was not common to think of a distinct Austrian nation. As an imagined community (Anderson, 1983), the Austrian nation is a product of the twentieth century history, mostly the second half of the twentieth century (Rathkolb, 2010; Steininger, Bischof, & Gehler, 2008).² Hence, one can say that Austria and Austrians, as we know them today, were ‘invented’

¹I thank the editors of this edited volume – Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi, Amada DiGioia, and Charlotte Doesburg – for their highly helpful inputs on the drafts for this chapter.

²Following, my argumentation on Austrian nation-building history draws on these sources.

only after the Second World War. The *Homo Austriacus* is a recent phenomenon in European history – so likewise in European metal history.

In the decades following the Second World War, Austrian nation-building took place as part of a conflict-rich confrontation with the German nation-building process. To develop a stable collective self, Austrians looked on the citizens of the German Federal Republic (and sometimes furthermore the citizens of the German Democratic Republic) as the stereotypical ‘others’, and from that the cliché of their shared Austrianness could be made distinctive. Anti-German othering, in the form of a shared stereotype of ‘the German’ (the ‘*Piefke*’), is deeply rooted in the country’s identity (Godeysen, 2010). However, paradoxical it may sound, in Germany and Austria, there is a saying: ‘what separates the two countries is their common language’. Even for German-language native speakers, Austria’s dialects are sometimes a tough challenge when it comes to understanding (Muhr et al., 1995; Russ, 2004).

A part of the National Socialist ‘Third Reich’ from 1938 to 1945, thus, officially not existing during those 7 years, the collective entity that Austria was a part of was defeated in the Second World War in May of 1945. Full domestic sovereignty was regained with the State Treaty in 1955. After that restart, Austrian nation-building initiatives also shaped a distinct national language policy. This policy framed the construction of an official Austrian version of the German language, that is, Austrian German. This language delineation is constructed, yet, it is real. Enforcing the policy, the ministry of education coordinated the publication of an official dictionary of the Austrian German language (*Österreichischer Bundesverlag*, 2016) in the 1950s. Even today, that dictionary normalises and regulates the usage of Austrian German in state institutions and schools.

This history of the construction of its own national language has also influenced the appearance of local idioms and local dialects in metal. On the one hand, there are artists like the hard rock formation Alkbottle (n.d.), and more recently also the thrash metal group Drescher (n.d.), that have made prominent use of their dialects in creating parodies of working-class and rural cultures in Austria. This is coherent with the metal studies diagnosis that, together with various other forms of identity codes, metal has had a working-class identity since the 1970s (Roccor, 1998; Weinstein, 2000). In the cases of Alkbottle and Descher, those are ironic working-class identities constructed via the usage of Austrian language. On the other hand, groups like the black metal project Varulv (2016, 2017a) abuse Alpine folk mythologies and their specific linguistic resources in a promotion of far-right nationalism.

All in all, the Austrian metal community is alive and well (Pichler, 2020). There are dense networks of concert venues, markets, bands, and digital forums devoted to metal culture. Collective consumption of metal products happens at concert venues, in shops, in pubs and in other locales (Pichler, 2020; Wallach & Levine, 2011). Napalm Records (2019) is a powerful genre-specific label from Styria that operates on a global scale. In terms of a statistic of active artists, the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* (2019) database, as the most relevant online resource, mentions 596 currently active bands from Austria. The distinct culture of the Austrian scene comes from a ‘glocal’ (in a sense of a ‘hybridisation’ of local and global cultural

elements) amalgamation of local patriotism, local traditions, and global metal culture. The local use of language is key in understanding the local scene's distinctness. Structurally, the paradoxical, seemingly odd coexistence of deconstructive parody and essentialist nationalism in the usage of Austrian German is a characteristic feature of the scene's distinct culture.

In my upcoming book on the cultural history of metal in Europe (Pichler, 2020), I elaborate upon how what I call the 'historian's gaze' could enrich current debates in metal studies, and also debates surrounding localising metal. It could do so in creating interdisciplinary links to already existing results of research on European cultural and in nurturing our awareness of historical contexts. In current scholarship, both discourses – historiography and metal studies – lack a real awareness of their interconnections (Pichler, 2020). Our field is in a state of gaining more sophisticated contours as an independent academic discourse. Recently, Savigny and Schaap (2018) have reminded us about 'putting the "studies" back into metal music studies.' They have demanded more theoretical and methodological rigor. I feel scholarship by trained historians, a requisite in the field, could be important in making this ambition become reality.

In the following section, I take up a cultural–historical theory which I coined 'sonic knowledge' (Pichler, 2018, 2020). I use this concept as the theoretical lens through which to look at my case study. This requires me to take three steps. As a first step, I briefly consider the position of history as a discipline in metal music research and introduce my notion of sonic knowledge. Then, in the following section, an empirical discussion of two of the mentioned bands, Alkbottle and Varulv, illuminates the paradoxical structure of the usage of Austrian German in metal. In my conclusion, as a third step, I try to resolve the paradox and position my results in the broader field of multilingual metal.

Metal Studies and Sound History: The Theory of 'Sonic Knowledge'

History as a discipline has the aim of explaining scientifically why and how the present world has come to be (Budde et al., 2008; Burke, 2004; Howell & Prevenier 2001). History examines how it has developed from the past to the present. In metal studies, the theories and methodologies from history as a discipline (with its distinct 'historical method') (Budde et al., 2008; Howell & Prevenier, 2001) bring a potential innovation. As the major discipline of telling the past according to scientific standards, history can add to the promotion of self-reflexivity in metal studies (Kahn-Harris, 2016).

We already do have an eclectic range of reflections on metal history (Brown, 2011; Elflein, 2010; Hickam, 2015; Rocco, 1998; Walser, 1993; Weinstein, 2000). However, so far, all such historical examinations have been conducted by sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, musicologists, or scholars from other disciplines. Now, trained historians are asking their own questions. Of course, their questions are not 'better' per se than the ones formulated in the various other disciplines in metal studies, but they differ theoretically as well as empirically. Their research is solidly grounded in the mentioned disciplinary expertise of historians

(Budde et al., 2008; Burke, 2004; Howell & Prevenier, 2001). In this respect, I have introduced the notion of ‘sonic knowledge’ (Pichler, 2018, 2020). The notion is a proposed theoretical way of interpreting metal culture from the point of view of a trained historian. My conceptual starting point is the recent research discourse of ‘sound history’ (Garrioch, 2003; Hendy, 2013; Langenbruch, 2018; Paul & Schock, 2013; Schrage, 2011).

Results from research on popular music cultures have become significant facets of our knowledge of the cultural history of the twentieth century (Langenbruch, 2018; Nathaus, 2018). Diachronically, those music cultures have structured that century (Nathaus, 2018). They provided crucial parts of its ‘sound’. A fruit of the ‘new cultural history’ (cf. Burke, 2004; Hunt, 1989), research in sound history (Garrioch, 2003; Grund, 2015; Hendy, 2013; Langenbruch, 2018; Paul & Schock, 2013; Schrage, 2011) has shown that the popular ear of music listeners and also of the artists themselves has changed significantly over longer periods in the twentieth century due to structural changes in terms of media, culture and society. To grasp the history of the cultural ear, it is pivotal to look at the *long durée* dimension of the cultural transformations of listening and hearing over years and decades (Pichler, 2020).

In metal sound history, the structural situation of the popular metal ear in 2020 is very different from that of the early 1970s, that is, when metal was ‘invented’. In 1970, fans listened to Black Sabbath’s debut on vinyl albums, at live concerts or on the radio. Today, we can listen to the debut and to their last LP *13* (and all of other recordings in their back catalogue) on one of the digital, globally available music platforms that are available via our smartphones. If we grow tired of Sabbath, it takes just a moment to jump to Rihanna, to Miley Cyrus or even to spoken content like comedy or audiobooks. Thus, our medial and structural situation of listening to metal and hearing metal today involves overwhelmingly more cross-genre and cross-media jumps, and hence there is also much more fluidness and transgression. Arguably, this affects the cultural metal ear (Pichler, 2020).

How it affects the metal ear has not been researched sufficiently at this point (Pichler, 2020). An illuminating example of how the *longue durée* of the cultural ear, as a means of cultural sense-making, changes and affects our worldview, can be given when following Garrioch’s (2003) approach in his study of the soundscapes of early modern European towns. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the new sounds of car engines, motorised traffic and all other acoustic phenomena of the new sonic sphere of the ‘automobilisation’ of urban spaces drastically changed peoples’ experience of their direct urban environment. These new sounds significantly contributed to the new image of the industrialised, loud, and rational modern world, paradigmatically shown in Charlie Chaplin’s classic movie *Modern Times* from 1936. In 1936, the cultural ear was significantly different from 1900, so we can suppose that the metal ear in 2020 is also significantly different from 1970.

Thinking along these lines, we must ask how hearing metal and listening to metal have changed over almost five decades of metal history since around 1970 (Cope, 2010; Pichler, 2020). The theories from sound history (Hendy, 2013;

Langenbruch, 2018; Paul & Schock, 2013; Schrage, 2011) aim at answering these questions. In a special issue of *Studies in Contemporary History* devoted to the sound history of the twentieth century, Dominik Schrage wrote:

The musical mode of hearing enables us as subjects to experience comprehensibly the effects of sounds and rhythms, be it contemplatively or expressively – plunging into music or dancing to it. Like images, sounds cannot be transferred to linguistic meaning without fractures; but both are experienced as being in harmony with each other, correspond with moods, affections, and emotions in the experiencing subject. Sounds, melodies, chords, and rhythms share a fundament across cultures, but in different musical cultures they are encoded, systematized and linked to harmony theories in different ways. (author's translation, from Schrage 2011, pp. 269–276)

Following this approach, I propose the notion of 'sonic knowledge' to grasp the diachronic dynamics of metal sound history over decades (Pichler, 2018, 2020). Sonic knowledge can be understood as the (intuitive) knowledge of the concepts (e.g. heaviness, the 'riff', loudness, tempo, metaphors, images, idioms, linguistic elements, etc.) that have characterised the history of the metal ear in the period since about 1970. Though this form of knowledge also includes images, narratives, physical practices, and so on, historically it is 'sonic' knowledge because music and sound define this culture (cf. Berger, 1999, 2009; Elflein, 2010; Walser, 1993). It is the long-term cultural knowledge of the sound history of heavy metal. Seeing, tasting, smelling, moving in metal spaces form a network with the experience of auditory stimuli (Berger, 1999, 2009; Diaz-Bohne, 2010; Elflein, 2010).

Herein, 'knowledge' does not mean well-defined and logically coherent results of intellectual reflection and inquiry. Much more, it means the often-intuitive knowledge that results from this sound history in metalheads' bodies, minds, and their shared consciousness since the early 1970s. Such knowledge is learned and taught via cultural experiences (Berger, 1999, 2009; Diaz-Bohne, 2010; Kahn-Harris, 2007). Analysing this knowledge diachronically in terms of its history over years and decades reveals just how the metal ear has changed (Cope, 2010; Pichler, 2018, 2020). The perspective of the *longue durée* is pivotal.

Crucially, scene building depends on sonic knowledge because as the diachronic frame such knowledge predetermines what cultural resources actually exist in individual historic constellations of scene formation. The usage of Austrian dialects in metal is a local facet of that sound history. Researching this usage tells us about one empirical case, in that sonic knowledge has been practiced and developed locally. In this specific case, locating metal in culture, spatially and temporally, happened via the usage of such linguistic elements. In those micro-histories, local and regional resources were exploited in constructing Austrian metalness. The amalgamation of nation-building, anti-German resentment and global metal knowledge created a strange yet paradoxically coherent brew.

We examine two examples within this discourse. Oscillating between parody and ‘blood-and-soil’ nationalism, they characterise the spectrum of that usage.

Agents of a Paradox: Alkbottle and Varulv

In this section, I discuss two bands whose usage of Austrian traditions and dialect discourse in metal music reflects the local scene. Each of the bands represents one outer pole of a graduated spectrum. At the liberal and deconstructive pole, we find irony and parody. Irony and parody are written in an Austrian working-class dialect to entertain and construct metalness. There, the global sonic knowledge of metal history is used in a local scene. Those global forms are blended with local idioms.

At the second extreme end of the spectrum, we find toxic and essentialist nationalism. There, the linguistic resources of a local form of traditional folk tales are abused in constructing an Austrian hyper-nationalism. In that way, the global sonic knowledge of black metal is transformed into a toxic and dangerous form of essentialism. Analysing this misuse can deconstruct this process. The paradoxical coexistence of both forms in a single discourse is paradigmatic of the usage of the Austrian German language in metal.

We start with the positive pole of parody, which – as we will see – has a serious core to it. On this first end of the spectrum, the Viennese hard rock band Alkbottle is representative of the liberal use of Austrian German. Founded in 1990, the group had their most successful phase in the first half of the 1990s (Alkbottle, n.d.). The band uses the cultural resources of Vienna’s dialect in parodically depicting lower-class and working-class lives. For them, the language of Austria has become a deconstructive, satirical force that locates metalness in working-class spaces.

Until a preliminary split in 1998, Alkbottle had released four studio albums and a live record, making them well known in the country’s metal scene (Alkbottle, n.d.). Coming back in 2006, the group has remained active until today. Their songs tell satirical short stories as they rework two key motifs of global metal culture: alcohol as the drug of choice and a blue-collar cult of maleness (cf. [Roccor 1998](#); [Walser, 1993](#); [Weinstein, 2000](#)). What renders them distinct from other artists is their use of the spoken Viennese dialect. The following quote of five lines of the lyrics to the title song ‘No Sleep till Meidling’ from their debut album (1993) is illustrative:

Original lyrics:

Mir san mir, mir san mir
Wir saufn täglich unsa Bier
Wir saufn, wäu wir hoit so san
Wäu wir so vü tschechan tan (...)
Meidling, oh yeah, no sleep till Meidling!

Approximate English translation:

We are who we are, we are who we are
We drink our beer each day
We drink because this is how we are
Because we drink so much (...)
Meidling, oh yeah, no sleep till Meidling!

(author’s translation, from [Alkbottle, 1993](#))

Of course, in this rough translation, the irony, puns and playfulness cannot be captured fully. However, it illustrates how the group's discourse works. In the song, Alkbottle re-worked a well-known linguistic element from global metal culture, the phrase 'No Sleep till [...]'. That short catchphrase had been an established, verbal molecule of metal culture since Motörhead's successful live recording of *No Sleep 'til Hammersmith* (1981). Later on, the element also was used on records such as the Beastie Boys' song 'No Sleep Till Brooklyn' (1986). In 'No Sleep till Meidling', Alkbottle took up the idea of the catchphrase, refashioned it in their Austrian language and introduced it into their local cultural environment. 'Meidling' refers to a district of Vienna that is considered to be predominantly working-class. The same is true for Brooklyn, as a part of New York City (DeSena & Shortell 2012).

What keeps that odd mixture of local and global elements together is irony. In metal music, irony has both entertaining and deconstructive functions. On the one hand, the irony in 'No Sleep till Meidling' does make listeners laugh when they listen to the song. On the other hand, the usage of irony also has deconstructive functions, as it exposes the clichés of working-class life to criticism. This is similar to what Hayden White (1973) observed about the role of irony in historiographical writing. In Alkbottle's discourse, metalness has been located in the working-class space of Meidling, Vienna; originally in 1993, and now everywhere and every time the song has been played or listened to since. The locating has happened satirically, blending Austrian German, established metal key codes and a traditional text element of metal history. In this way, they created a new template of sonic knowledge: Austrian ironic metalness.

Our paradigmatic example from the second pole, that is, toxic nationalism, is Varulv. They are a black metal band founded in Styria and Carinthia in the Southeast of Austria in 2006. Until today, they have released two split albums and three full-length albums. Among those, the most recent long-player, *Sagenlieder* (2017c), gets our attention. *Sagen* is the name of a genre of traditional folk tales that imaginatively and fantastically tell the history of the country's Alpine regions (Hofbauer, 2007; Petzoldt, 2002). In Austria, *Sagen* are important books on children's reading lists, both in primary school and at home.

Like many other discourses involving traditional folk tales, these stories tell of monsters, magic, dragons, treasures, dwarves, the landscapes of the region and the people living there along with their traditions. On *Sagenlieder*, Varulv abuse the linguistic resources of this genre to create a 'blood-and-soil' ideology of an extreme right-wing Austrian nationalism. They do so by strategically exploiting the identity-building potential of the local language and the content of these Alpine folk mythologies in constructing a xenophobic form of Austrianness. At the first glance, a quote on patriotism from an interview with the group that took place around the release date of *Sagenlieder* appears innocent or, at least not necessarily harmful:

Of course, there is a patriotic side in all of us, living in such a beautiful and diverse country with the giant Alps, streams, rivers, caverns and castles. I love the nature of this country and certainly

I am glad to live here. All photographs on our new album are a testament to Austria's beauty. If you get involved with it [author comment: that beauty], this flower devours you [...] (author's translation, from Adam, 2017)

All innocence is smashed when reading on their Facebook site (Varulv, 2016, 2017a) that two of their concerts in Graz were cancelled due to their ideological commitment to far-right extremism. Varulv (2017a) themselves claim to be proud of that, and they intend to stick to their ideology. Pictures of one of the members showing a tattoo of the Austrian national flag in the shape of an 'iron cross' on his left upper arm (Varulv, 2018a), and another post in which the band provocatively invites their audience to have a barbecue in the daytime during Ramadan (Varulv, 2018b) leave no room for doubt. Varulv promote a far-right, toxic 'blood-and-soil' nationalism in their music. The usage of local and regional language is a part of their agenda.

Here, it is important to see the Austrian scene in comparison to other black metal and extreme metal scenes, among which the Nordic scenes are the most thoroughly researched (Chaker et al., 2017; Kahn-Harris, 2007). Like in the Norwegian case, the exploitation of local languages – many 'classic' black metal songs of the 'second wave' of the genre since the early 1990s feature lyrics in Norwegian or even ancient Norwegian languages – seems to prepare the ground for the construction of extreme political ideologies (Chaker et al., 2017; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Olson, 2007).

Varulv's cheaply produced video clip for the track 'Irrlichter' (i.e. will-o'-the-wisps) from *Sagenlieder* portrays landscape shots of the wintry Alps, mixed with some material of the group performing live (Varulv, 2017b). In the title of and the lyrics to 'Irrlichter' (a concept from *Sagen* discourse), they abuse that form from Austrian mythology to promote their hyper-nationalist message.

Again, in that second and dangerous case, traditional key facets of the black metal genre (winter, mountains, corpse paint) (Chaker et al., 2017; Kahn-Harris, 2007) are combined with such linguistic motifs. In contrast to Alkbottle, there is no trace of satire. Varulv abuse Austrian local folk tales and combine them with black metal's traditional sonic knowledge, creating a dangerous and toxic discourse of intolerant metalness.

The post black metal project Karg (2018) is situated somewhere in the middle of the graduated span between both extremes. The project follows a highly romanticised and non-distancing approach to local dialects and topics, but it does not have an explicit right-wing agenda of promoting toxic nationalism. In addition, several other Austrian groups, for example, Heathen Foray (2019), Alphayn (2019), Bifröst (2016), Rauhnacht (2019), or Flammensturm (2014), have worked with Austrian traditions and/or elements from local dialect discourse in their music. Most of them play in the subgenres of pagan metal, folk metal, death metal, or black metal. It is clear that the usage of Austrian language elements has become an integral element of the Austrian scene and its distinct culture.

On balance, this spectrum of the varying ways Austrian German is used in metal constituted a field, in that new templates of metal culture (i.e. new sonic

knowledge) could emerge. Those templates are ‘glocal’ because they merge global metal key codes with local traditions and patriotism. This spawned a scene discourse as this Austrian German language became a local and national form of sonic knowledge. As a discursive structure, this field is characterised by deconstructive irony (as in Alkbottle’s case) on the one pole and essentialist nationalism (i.e. dogmatic, aggressive, and xenophobic, paradigmatically illustrated by Varulv).

Conclusion: Resolving the Paradox

In this conclusion, I try to resolve the paradox we just outlined. We start with a summarising characterisation of the usage of Austrian language and dialects in metal culture using my theory of sonic knowledge.

Above, I have described sonic knowledge as the often intuitive, practical knowledge of the cultural concepts that have characterised metal over the long term since around 1970 (Pichler, 2018, 2020). This knowledge has been shaping metalheads’ practices, identities, and attitudes ever since. When looking at the usage of Austrian language elements from this perspective, they can be interpreted as a modification of and an addition to the already existing forms of sonic knowledge in metal culture since around 1990. Artists such as Alkbottle and Varulv added new templates of knowledge.

Those new templates blended global metal elements with local language and local traditions. The result was the spawning of a new ‘glocal’ discourse. Starting with Alkbottle’s first appearance on the scene in the early 1990s and continuing until today, that entire process of spawning a new discourse relied significantly on the usage of Austrian German. The crucial question is how the usage of such elements of language has changed or remained the same over those almost thirty years since 1990.

The key facet of this history of three decades is the diagnosed paradox, the puzzling co-existence of both deconstructive irony (e.g. Alkbottle) and toxic hyper-nationalism (e.g. Varulv) in a single scene history. How can both make sense in a single field of cultural sense-making? Understanding this paradox of sonic knowledge is key, because it characterises this history in a lasting way. Decrypting the paradox requires us to read this discourse before the backdrop of Austrian nation-building history after the Second World War. We do not have to go into great detail here (for a more detailed discussion see Rathkolb, 2010; Steininger et al., 2008); instead, we can focus on a specific year: 1986.

Austria’s Second Republic since 1955 cultivated a founding myth of seeing itself as the ‘first victim’ of the Nazis due to the country’s annexation in 1938, even though in truth many Austrians were also active Nazis or Nazi sympathisers. That founding myth crumbled in 1986 when former United Nations general secretary Kurt Waldheim was elected Austrian Federal President. At that time, it was revealed that he had served in the Balkans during the war, and was rather well informed about the atrocities that took place there. He denied any form of responsibility, presenting himself in the sense of the victim narrative. That evident lie made people question Austria’s founding narrative. Since 1986, discourse

has gradually changed, and today the country also sees itself as a nation of war-time perpetrators.

What does that paradigm shift have to do with our case study? First, the irony in Alkbottle's use of Viennese dialect surfaced in exactly that era of the renegotiation of Austria's identity after 1986. Founded in 1990, the band reached their climax in popularity before 1998. Their approach, which deconstructively ridiculed Austrian identity, could only lead to success in a period when the country's identity was being renegotiated on a large scale. Moreover, Varulv's nationalism can be understood as nothing more than a shot at safeguarding Austria's founding myth. It can only make sense because traces of the victim myth are still intact.

So, my concluding hypothesis is that based on the theory of sonic knowledge, this paradox can be read as the one of a scene that still struggles with the Austrian founding myth until the present day. Nonetheless, it does so in a metal way. Metal culture took up the myth, transferred it to the realm of metal, and tried to handle it. With the usage of Austrian language and dialects as forms of multilingual metal, the artists and the scene responded to this history of Austrian identity after the Second World War. More globally, Edensor's (2002) analysis of national symbols in popular cultures could likely give us a useful heuristic tool in understanding such processes in coming research. In a nutshell, producing and keeping up the paradox was the best way of constituting Austrian metalness in this broader context.

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Chapter 11

Delusions of Grandeur? Producing Authentic Metal Music in the Soviet Union

Dawn Hazle

Abstract

Wicke and Shepherd (1993) stated that socialist rock (and, by extension, metal) is more authentic than its capitalist counterpart because authenticity is tied to commercialism. This is, however, a very Western view of authenticity. Cushman's (1995) interviews suggest that rock musicians were themselves discussing authenticity in the late 1980s and with this comes notions of a socialist authenticity hitherto unexplored, related not to the official and unofficial cultures of Soviet Russia but rather to culture beyond that dichotomy. Other markers of authenticity also become more important: the Russian language is paramount here as the style of metal most prevalent at the time required clear lyrics, and so being able to be identified as a local, Russian, metal musician adds credence to one's status as an authentic, and particularly Russian, metal scene member. This chapter explores the precise circumstances in the early-mid-1980s which brought about metal music in Soviet Russia and how authenticity was determined among scene participants. It highlights the genesis of Russian metal in Russian rock and Western metal music. Then, a replacement is proposed for commercialism, the main marker of authenticity, in the Soviet Russian context, based on Yurchak's (2005) concept of *vnye* (meaning, approximately, to exist outside of or beyond Soviet society), as well as investigating other, less important markers of authenticity in their uniquely Russian context. One exemplar band, Aria, held both official and unofficial statuses, is used to illustrate the difficulty of making metal music in the Soviet period, as well as how certain aspects of authenticity could vary among rock and metal bands.

Keywords: Russia; Soviet Union; metal music; authenticity; Russian language; socialist music

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Introduction

Soviet Russia was heavily regulated, meaning culture was restricted to official output on media channels, with unregulated unofficial culture relegated to the underground and unofficial gatherings (see especially Kan, 2016; Steinholt, 2004). Against this background, metal music emerged in the late 1970s, with the first metal bands being formed in the first years of the 1980s. But metal music was unable to authenticate itself in this context, since no commercial apparatus was available to socialist musicians like those in Soviet Russia. In this chapter, I propose an alternate form of authenticity related to Alexei Yurchak's concept of *vnye* meaning 'outside' or 'beyond' Soviet society, as well as the importance of other, softer markers of authenticity used in the West.

Music in Soviet Russia

In the Soviet Union, cultural policy restricted output and distribution of music and other cultural products, although the degree of restriction varied by state. In Russia, Western radio broadcasts were blocked, albums smuggled in from the West were confiscated, and only sanctioned musicians were allowed to perform professionally (Cushman, 1995, p. 18). To be an official musician, one had to be employed as a musician, play songs written by the Union of Composers and perform at official concerts organised by the state. In general, these were pop singers, classical artists, and bands known as VIAs (*vokal'no-instrumen'tal'nyi ansambl'*, 'vocal-instrumental ensemble') which eventually played every style from jazz to heavy metal. This was how rock and metal music reached the audience officially. For a VIA to receive official permission to perform, its lyrics had to be non-critical and, as a result, VIA lyrics were generally dull, and sometimes completely ill-fitting, but the music styles themselves were varied enough to acquaint the Soviet public with the sounds of the unofficial bands. Unofficial bands would still play concerts, but in basements, private apartments, at school discos and local Komsomol (*Vsesoiuznyi leninskii kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi*, 'All-Union Leninist Young Communist League', the Soviet political youth organisation) clubs and cafes, where officials could be bribed if necessary (Steinholt, 2004, pp. 20–21). This was a common practice in the Soviet Union, and it was normal for amateur bands of all music styles to play in restaurants, at school discos and private apartments of friends (McMichael, 2005, p. 665). They could be paid a small and unofficial fee for these concerts, but these sessions were a useful medium to disseminate their sound, especially as they could also be used to trade tapes, both copied Western albums and the band's own music (Troï, Troegubov & Pushkina, 2000, p. 35). Not being paid for their work (concerts or albums) was not so much of a monetary problem for socialist rockers: due to the exceptional welfare state, it was possible to live on a few roubles a week, and many amateur musicians took up part time jobs as night watchmen or boiler stokers; others were students and so exempt from working (Cushman, 1995, pp. 56–58). Being unofficial was often viewed as preferable to becoming professional, as this was seen as transgressing against the state without directly opposing it, which appealed

especially to Soviet rock musicians (Cushman, 1995, pp. 91–92). Working only a few times in the week also left the remainder of the time free for immersing oneself in musical creativity, contributing to one's authenticity by spending time more exclusively on music.

In the same way that unofficial Soviet music was performed and distributed underground, Western music was also not unknown to Soviet ears. Music from the West entered sporadically via physical records and tapes carried by people entering the Soviet Union from abroad, such as tourists, athletes, and diplomats, meaning some artists became very famous among Russian fans whereas others were hardly known (Cushman, 1995, p. 42). One album could, of course, reach many people as it could be copied multiple times, so long as it was not confiscated before being copied. From the late 1950s until the mid-1960s, records were copied on to X-ray film in a process known as *rentgenizdat*, because vinyl was difficult to come by and X-ray film was easy to acquire from hospitals, as well as being simple to cut with scissors and similar enough to vinyl that music could be recorded on to it in much the same way. It was only good for a few plays, but was an important interim measure for distributing music before tape recorders became more affordable and widely available in the mid-1960s, at which time *rentgenizdat* was superseded by *magnitizdat* (Troitsky, 1987, p. 19). Reel-to-reel tapes and, from the mid-1980s cassettes, could be bought at recording kiosks and traded at concerts and among friends and family, as well as re-recorded for onward distribution (Kan, 2016, p. 272; Steinholt, 2004, p. 18). Rock bands even released their own studio tapes: in the same way that authors self-published their works as *samizdat*, musical artists recorded their own *magnitizdat* albums. Informal distribution like this, of local or foreign, original or re-recorded music, added a further layer of transgression to underground music with the evasion of state censorship and 'borderline illegality' (McMichael, 2009, p. 335).

The unofficial status of rock music also caused problems for rock musicians with regard to Soviet social policy: it was mandatory to be employed (Yurchak, 2005, p. 153). Unemployment was effectively outlawed with those not in education or work branded as *tuneiadets* (Prezidium Verkhnego Soveta RSFSR, 1961, n.p.). All Soviet citizens carried a *trudovaia knizhka*, 'work book', which displayed their occupation and place of work, and failure to be employed was punishable by imprisonment (Cushman, 1995, p. 57). How many hours per week one was employed was not important, as long as work was undertaken to cover one's living costs.

Unofficial music was not, however, directly illegal: a philosophy of ignorance of unofficial music was prevalent in all Soviet Russia until 1984, when Moscow's Ministry of Culture circulated at least one list of banned Russian and Western artists (Kan, 2016, p. 271). Outside of Moscow, much remained the same, with unofficial bands even forming a rock club in Leningrad (St. Petersburg today). It is important to note, however, that only musicians were banned, not music styles. All banned musicians immediately became unofficial artists and it became very difficult for them to perform and record: Kruiz, a progressive rock VIA, were forcibly disbanded and some members formed metal band EVM (Pushkina, 1990, p. 371). Kruiz reformed out of EVM in 1986, when Gorbachev's reforms

of perestroika and glasnost began to take hold and the administrative structures regulating music began to fall apart (Cushman, 1995, p. 229).

Metal Music in Soviet Russia

Metal music is considered to have begun in the early 1970s in Birmingham, UK, with strong influences from American hard rock, and requires technology only available from the mid-late 1960s onwards: as a minimum, a distorted electric guitar, highly-amplified bass guitar and full drumkit (Walser, 2014, p. xix; Weinstein, 2000, pp. 22–27). In the same way as Western music entered the Soviet Union, metal music is primarily disseminated by physical copies crossing borders, with the first wave spreading through Western Europe and Anglophone countries around the world at its inception, followed by a second wave to Japan, China, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the final wave encompassing South-East Asia, East and North Africa, and the Middle East in the early 1990s (Weinstein, 2011, pp. 43–44). Once metal music has entered into a culture, it is first copied by local performers before being translated into the local language, then original songs are written and performed in the local language before, especially in a number of extreme metal subgenres including black metal, English returns as the dominant language of the style (cf. Ferrarese, 2015, p.216).

In Soviet Russia, metal music did not wholly emerge in this way: it was also partly born out of rock music, much like in the West. It was, in fact, rock music which arrived in this manner. Rock music was not accepted at first but such was its popularity among the youth that the authorities relented and created the VIAs in an attempt to make rock music conform to Soviet standards. Official rock music was generally lyrically dull, since lyrics would need to be approved by Soviet censors before performance, but the music and performance were certainly on par with any Western rock concert (Troitskii, 1991, n.p.). Not all musicians wished to conform and so did not pursue official status, but by having rock music played at official concerts, the general public were exposed to rock and, later, metal music.

Authenticity

Unlike in contemporary Western culture, where artists such as Bob Dylan sold out to technology and the likes of Cream and Led Zeppelin were considered to be too commercial, Soviet Russian rock retained its association with authenticity which helped to keep Soviet Russian metal closer to rock. Authenticity is integral to heavy metal, moreso even than the debate around what is or is not heavy metal and does not simply refer to what is good or bad music, although this is always the starting point for any discussion about authenticity (Frith, 2007, p. 260). Authenticity concerns the band more than the music, as it is to do more with ways of making music and acting within the culture than purely the music itself.

The main marker of authenticity in music generally is commercial success: wishing to become a commercial success, whether it be to sell more records, to attract more fans, or to play bigger concerts, is inauthentic (Frith, 2007, p. 260). The fact that commercial success may find you is less important, since metal bands like Iron Maiden who are very big commercial successes are still generally considered authentic bands because they have not sought commercial success. Puri (2015) contrasts Iron Maiden with Metallica, another immensely successful metal band. Metallica are sometimes considered inauthentic because they changed their style to attract more (non-metal) fans (Puri, 2015, p. 70).

This highlights another relatively important marker of authenticity: remaining within the metal 'code'. This 'code' encompasses metal music's key purpose, transgression, and includes what style of song is appropriate, from lyric themes to instruments, as well as the sort of costumes, performances and artwork that are appropriate for a metal band. Weinstein (2000) recommends that lyric themes should be dark, about death and destruction, or euphoric, about sex and drink (pp. 34–35). Other ideas can be expressed within these themes, for example, abhorrence of war but it must still fall into the idea of, in this case, destruction.

Less-important markers of authenticity include originality, craft, and language. Most bands begin by copying other bands, but to be authentic means to produce something original (Weinstein, 2000, p. 62). Once a band has established an original sound and style, it is possible to cover songs in tribute, but exclusive cover bands are regarded as outside of the scene. Craft encompasses the idea of working hard to make the music, which can be contradicted by overusing technology: use of electronic drum machines and sometimes keyboards can be inauthentic, because it is seen as cheating rather than working hard. Having to use full drum kits, on the other hand, risks denying the working class roots of heavy metal by excluding new bands who do not have access to funds to rent or buy such costly pieces of equipment or vehicles to carry them around, leaving only bands who have the disposable income to accommodate such expenses (Walser, 2014, p. xix).

Authenticity of Language

As mentioned earlier, global metal music sometimes returns to English after a period of experimenting in the local language. Contemporary with the emergence of Russian metal, German band Scorpions preferred English because their leader, Klaus Meine, thought German inadequate at expressing metal feelings and themes (Weinstein, 2011, p. 45). This can be problematic as it may be considered selling out since English is more commercially viable, especially for cultures with a language restricted to a single small country or even only part of a country, such as Slovene or Iraqi. For cultures and countries like these, singing in English is practically the only way to attempt to become famous outside of the local language area. In Slovenia, for example, metal bands who sing in Slovene find their notoriety limited to their local area, usually around their hometown and its surrounding villages, whereas those singing in English tend to find fame

across Slovenia and very occasionally outside (Muršič, 2011, pp. 302 and 304). In Iraq, the band Acrassicauda sing in English because it both provides them with a chance to be known globally and to be transgressive, because English is the language of the enemy (Weinstein, 2011, p. 35). This supports the themes and purpose behind metal music and culture.

In Soviet Russia, Russian rock had already explored the transgressive nature of English, thus, Russian metal had no reason to return to it, especially because the music and scene culture were very transgressive already. In fact, Russian rock had had a difficult transition to Russophone lyrics, with the use of Russian initially being labelled as conformist to the Soviet system before being cited as an excuse for poor musicianship and then dismissed as impossible, because Russian's words were incompatible with rock music's rhythms (Troitskii, 1991, n.p.). Only in the late 1970s did Russian rock join Russian bard song and folk music in Russophone writing, making lyrics and song meaning relatively more important than in Western rock (Steinholt, 2004, p. 19). The Russian language became crucial to convey a songwriter's complicated thoughts and intricate feelings about existence, learned from Russia's long literary history and woven into the poetic, crafted art that rock music had become (Cushman, 1995, p. 104). It was from this melodic style that Russian metal emerged and to which it remained faithful until the late 1980s, taking inspiration from bands such as Iron Maiden, whose output includes epic poems set to metal music, combining metaphor and complex ideas with virtuosic performance and pitch-perfect, clear vocals.

Even in metal music with clear, perfect vocals, however, lyrics are less important than in other styles of music, especially Russian rock. In metal music, the vocal line is given no more importance than any other instrument in the band and in melodic styles such as Iron Maiden's, the vocal line occupies the same sonic space as the rhythm guitar, opposing and supporting the bass guitar and drums (Walser, 2014, p. 149). This could make language discussion a moot point, and less important to authenticity than the other markers discussed in this chapter, but it is essential to consider the context of language use even in metal given the very particular circumstances around Russian metal's emergence.

Authenticity in the Socialist Context

In socialist societies, there is no commercial apparatus for a band to join and hence no commercial status to aspire to. Wicke and Shepherd (1993), therefore, suggested that this makes socialist rock music (and by extension, metal) automatically more authentic than that produced in societies with commercial systems in place (p. 26). Regardless of the relative authenticity between socialist and non-socialist music, it is true that, without a commercial system with which to primarily judge authenticity, the other markers of craft, originality, code and even language become more important.

At the time of metal music's emergence in Russia, equipment to create metal music was difficult to obtain. The very precise effects required by metal music meant that, while DIY electric guitars made from piano strings, sofa carcasses and public telephone pickups were fine for a café rock band, they did not come

close to the sophistication needed to play precise riffs and complicated progressions in the essential guitar solos of metal songs (Steinholt, 2004, pp. 19–20). Only official VIAs had access to the quality of equipment metal bands needed, but joining a VIA was considered by Russian rock musicians to be the Soviet version of going commercial (Cushman, 1995, p. 80). Generally, however, it was individuals who joined VIAs, not whole groups: Russian metal bands who did attempt to become VIAs in their own right largely had to make too many compromises and, as such, existed for some time as non-metal bands who occasionally played metal songs.

The remaining two markers, code and originality, are essentially related. Russian bands' knowledge of metal music was very much influenced by the music that made it across the border, which directed their choice of music style. To keep within the metal code, they adhered closely to what they had heard since they were aware not all music styles made it past the censors. For most metal bands starting in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, and Deep Purple were the Western metal bands who were considered fundamental to emulate, with non-metal bands such as Grand Funk Railroad and Nazareth also influencing the metal style to a more progressive character. These influential Western bands were all clear singing groups, who used metaphor in their lyrics and complicated musicianship in their styles, and this worked well with the popular Russian rock styles from which metal music emerged.

Authenticity and *vnye*

In his study of late Soviet Russian youth culture, anthropologist Alexei Yurchak (2005) coined the term '*vnye*', meaning 'beyond' in the sense of outside, or not part of (pp. 127–128). He uses it to describe people, usually young people, who were not part of official Soviet life and chose not to participate in official activities such as Komsomol meetings or political gatherings. Instead, they 'hung out' in cafés or gathered in apartments, talking about music, life, and fashion. Unofficial musicians who played in restaurants and apartments rather than at official concerts or on the radio can be considered to exist *vnye*: this ties in with unofficial not equating to illegal, since they were not anti-Soviet because they were not opposing the system, rather simply not participating in it. To be anti-Soviet requires acknowledgement of the system, whereas those living *vnye* existed outside of or beyond the Soviet and anti-Soviet dichotomy.

Tied in with *vnye* is *istina*, one of the two Russian words for 'truth'. *Istina* carries with it the ideas of sincerity, honesty, and being true to oneself, whereas *pravda* is more like everyday truth, embodying the true and false, factual sort of truth, but packaged within official or state truth (Cushman, 1995, pp. 107–110). *Vnye* and *istina* are all about living honestly and sincerely, in a way that is true to oneself, and this is seen by Soviet Russian youth as an authentic way to live. If, as mentioned earlier, participating in the system by joining a VIA is the Soviet Russian version of 'going commercial', then it follows that remaining outside of the system, playing unofficially but not directly opposing the state, must be authentic.

I propose that this uniquely socialist condition of *vnye* is the replacement for non-socialist societies' authenticity of non-commercialism within such societies as it exists, especially Soviet Russia. By not being illegal unofficial bands are not truly interacting with the system, and since musicians can join VIAs as individuals, a whole band does not need to join for one person to get the benefits of access to technology for their friends, albeit with scope for bribery to be required.

A Special Case: Aria

Aria officially formed in Moscow in 1985 when the band released its first album, *Maniia velichiia* (*Megalomania* or *Delusions of Grandeur*) and is still going strong today. Aria has a very similar style to Iron Maiden and is also influenced by Judas Priest, Black Sabbath, and Grand Funk Railroad. The band is known as the 'Russian Iron Maiden' and has been accused of simply copying Iron Maiden (Troitskii, 1991, n.p.). It is possible to compare both bands' outputs, for example, the introductions to Iron Maiden's 'The Trooper' and Aria's 'Bivni chernykh skal' ('Tusks of black rocks') and hear that they are both similar and could even be from the same band, but the sound is not identical. In response to accusations of copying Iron Maiden and German metal band Accept, Aria's leader and lead guitarist Vladimir Kholstinin pointed out that Yngwie Malmsteen, a virtuoso Swedish guitarist of the mid-late 1980s, sounds very similar to Rainbow leader and founding member of Deep Purple, Ritchie Blackmore, but no-one says anything about it (Glebov, 2015, n.p.).

Aria was not just one of the most accomplished unofficial metal bands of the mid-1980s, its members were also professional musicians and part of an official VIA, Poiushchie Serdtsa ('Singing Hearts'). Poiushchie Serdtsa performed bland pop hits, including some covers of Western music, in the *estrada* (similar to pop) style, perfect for restaurants and as background music. The manager, Viktor Vekshtein, wanted to change direction so the metal-oriented members persuaded him to let them try their brand of new music, and Aria was released on to the world, although few knew it at the time: only their unofficial tape album, *Maniia velichiia*, carried the name Aria, all performances were strictly as Poiushchie Serdtsa (until May 1986) even if they dressed and sounded different for the metal part of the concert (Trois et al., 2000, pp. 34–36). By being part of an official VIA, the members of Aria could record relatively professional tape albums and use the sophisticated technology their music required. Indeed, many Soviet Russian metal bands and musicians pursued official status precisely because they could not otherwise access the drumkits, electric guitars, and bass amplifiers their style needed and, consequently, being part of a VIA was seen as less inauthentic among metal and harder rock bands than in other music styles including rock and new wave, since it was essentially a prerequisite to existence.

The metal code, especially themes in lyrics, might seem to be impossible to perform officially in Soviet Russia, but the culture of official ignorance permeated far enough that only lyrics were scrutinised, not music styles or dress. Fans and musicians did encounter problems with how they dressed and especially the length of their hair, but no more so than the hippies and *stiliagi* (1950s followers

of Western, especially American, fashion and lifestyle) before them. Lyrics were usually written by a rock poet or similarly experienced writer, which meant that a lot of metaphor could be easily added to mask any explicitly anti-Soviet themes. Soviet Russian metal artists avoided the euphoric (sex and drink) and focussed instead on the darker themes, especially anti-war songs which already had a long pedigree in Soviet youth culture and music.

Aria's opening song on the *Maniia velichiia* album is 'Eto Rok', a play on words meaning 'This is Fate' as well as 'This is Rock' and an anti-war song. The sound of the song is quite normal at first, like any metal song of the same style, with the verses in a minor key with a desperate voice, but then the chorus arrives in a major key and a very bouncy, almost jolly, rhythm. The effect is to make the chorus quite unsettling, which is likely the whole point of the song: a façade of joyous glory in an otherwise terrifying setting. Musically, 'Eto Rok' is similar to a lot of Judas Priest's output although the start is very much like 'Speed King' from *Deep Purple in Rock* by Deep Purple (NausikaDalazBlindaz, 2015, n.p.). The chorus closes with 'And no-one answers now, / Why and for what' which draws on the classic heavy metal theme of hopelessness as it sounds as if, despite the band's call for peace, war will continue unabated as no-one takes responsibility for what is going on.

Furthermore, some songs appear to be very pro- or anti-Soviet. Aria's 'Pozadi Amerika' ('America is Behind'), the last song on the *Maniia velichiia* album, seems very anti-Western until the last verse, but much less directly anti-Western than a true pro-Soviet song: the 'behind' simply refers to a place that has been passed on a journey, in this case nothing more than a man browsing a travel magazine at bedtime. The throwaway last line of the final verse, 'And sometimes it is difficult to obtain a visa', could either be a warning not to aggravate the official system, or as a suggestion to not bother getting involved in anything official. The lack of ability to travel freely as a Soviet citizen, exemplified by this necessity to not only acquire visas to enter foreign countries but also to obtain the 'foreign' passport required to leave the Soviet Union, meant that this cruise was very much restricted to the mind's eye of the reader (Gorsuch, 2013, pp. 81–82). Foreign travel, especially outside of the Eastern Bloc and other allies of the Soviet Union, was off-limits to most ordinary citizens, and even those citizens who were allowed to go abroad had to endure months of bureaucracy at the offices of numerous state departments (Gorsuch, 2013, pp. 82–83). The track's original title of 'Vokrug sveta za 20 minut' is, indeed, much more descriptive (Troï et al., 2000, p. 28). *Vokrug sveta* is, in fact, the title of a Russian geographic magazine that has been published since 1861 and was an important source of information about the world outside the USSR during the Soviet period (see <http://www.vokrugsveta.ru>).

The lyrical banality of 'Pozadi Amerika' is contrasted with its progressive musicality ('kluseba', 2011, n.p.; 'naverhtrad', 2015, n.p.). This track falls firmly into the heavy metal genre, starting with the sound of metal being struck before the bass guitar starts driving and rhythm guitar comes in. The vocal line, though, seems at odds with the other instruments during the verse, with the voice calm and melodic against the harsh and distorted guitar and drums, much more so than in the rest of the album's tracks. The voice is counterpointed by the rhythm

guitar during the verses too, just as in the opening song 'Eto Rok': when Kipelov sings, it is quiet, but when the vocalist pauses, Kholstinin semi-echoes the line. When Kipelov sings the last 'America is behind', the other instruments stop playing, so the song, and by extension the album, ends quite abruptly, which is unusual compared to the other album tracks but normal for metal songs which use sudden endings to control their space (Walser, 2014, p. 149). The bass and guitar end on the last beat of 'Before him the whole world' and the guitar winds up into a screaming chord on the first syllable of the last line, before the voice finishes, its echo lingering a fraction of a second longer. The guitar solo is disorderly but organises itself briefly before descending into chaos again, regrouping just before a reprise of the chorus. This chaos reflects the jumping about of the virtual traveller from Australia to Europe and then Antarctica.

The sixth track on *Maniia Velichiia* is 'Zhizn' zadarom' ('Life for free') which also falls into the pro- or anti-Soviet theme, and also has an ambiguous title. It seems most likely that the song is about musicians and music-making in the West, since it concerns putting a price on everything, therefore capitalism, an idea associated with 'the West' in Soviet Russia (Yurchak, 2005, p. 7). The verses explain scenarios in which something is done for free and someone else profits from it. The last line, which is also repeated partway through the instrumental after the last chorus, 'he gave his life for free', makes it clear that this selling out and becoming commercialised is a negative way to live. There is a lot of repetition in the song: in the first two verses, the third and fourth lines are repeated and the first and second lines are almost identical. The chorus is two identical lines of three words followed by a wordless vocalisation, and that constant repetition of 'Everything is obscured by the price' reinforces the song's negativity: in fact, 'Vse zaslonila tsena' was the song's original title (Troï et al., 2000, p. 28).

The song predominantly alludes to authenticity, one of the most important tropes in heavy metal music. 'Zhizn' zadarom' can be interpreted as offering an anti-commercial message in a similar way to its anti-capitalist direction, thus seeking to establish the song's, and by extension the band's, authenticity. The chorus, however, suggests that nothing is truly free and so offers a note of caution in claiming authenticity must be wholly non-commercial. This may stem from the ambiguities of the late Soviet system and the way in which musicians' careers could take shape, since it was entirely possible to be successful while being non-commercial given Soviet cost of living was so low, especially if a band considered the measure of its success to be simply the ability to continue making the music it wanted. In this way, the song, and especially the last verse, is about a musician or other artist selling out to a manager or similar and losing his 'mind, beauty and talent' as he is required to compromise to fit an idealised image of the Soviet musician (see also Cushman, 1995, p.80). 'Zhizn' zadarom' is somewhat less heavy and bass-driven than the other songs on *Maniia velichiia*, sitting somewhere between hard rock and heavy metal: the guitar solo is relatively short, and while all the classic instrument markers of heavy metal are present, the song does not have as much power. The driving introduction is not prominent once the singing starts, even in the instrumental sections, and the end has a brief section of wailing guitar, increasing in pitch and reminiscent of the chorus' vocal

construction. 'Zhizn zadarom' almost fades into insignificance, much like the musician who sold out.

'Bivni chernykh skal' tells the story of a man who attempts to defy nature and the gods, firmly representing the power theme on *Maniia Velichiia*. He climbs a mountain, claims he no longer needs gods and then an avalanche carries him away. In the chorus, we hear the lyrics 'He will touch the sun', reminiscent of the story of Icarus in which a son disobeys his father by flying too close to the sun and having the wax melted on his artificial wings. The Icarus myth is used often by metal artists, with bands as disparate as Iron Maiden, Rush, Faith No More and Rammstein all employing it as a theme. While Iron Maiden subverts the theme by using it as a lesson about why teenagers should listen to their parents, 'Bivni chernykh skal' follows the expected theme of power: the Icarus myth identifies with over-ambition, hubris and taking freedom for granted. 'Bivni chernykh skal' is not about Icarus specifically and the man is climbing rather than flying, but nevertheless the comparison is evident in the trope of ascent and challenge to the godly realm.¹ The futility of this attempt to prove he no longer needs gods shows the power of nature and the gods in this song's context, both of which were seen as less powerful than the Soviet human (Yurchak, 2005, pp. 234–235). In the late Soviet period, the cracks of the totalitarian regime were starting to show, with Brezhnev, Andropov, and Chernenko falling ill and forcing a change of leader three times in 28 months: the power of the state was not all it seemed to be. Many young people lived *vnye* and were unengaged in Soviet life, emphasising that the state was not really in full control. Gods and nature retaliating on the unbelievers is a striking and excessive allegory for the reasons behind Gorbachev's reforms.²

To highlight the enormity of the man's imagined power, the natural world in 'Bivni chernykh skal' is represented by large and powerful forces including mountains, glaciers, and avalanches: the juxtaposition of the small man and the mighty mountain is evident in the original title of the song, 'Chelovek i gory' ('Man and mountains') (Troï et al., 2000, p. 28). When people try to conquer mountains they can fail with deadly consequences, avalanches are unpredictable and powerful enough to kill even the best-prepared person and glaciers are a huge, unstoppable force in nature, carving great valleys from solid rock. The Soviet Union covered a vast area which not only contained all these insurmountable hazards, but was itself too large and heterogeneous to be controlled (Gaidar, 2007, p. 13). The man, by contrast, has his shouts curtailed when the echo 'smashes on a glacier', and he himself is merely a 'grain of sand', a remnant of a glacier's passing but also a survivor of it. He may be 'negligible among the mountains' but he is a constant presence, and nature cannot destroy him utterly. This could represent

¹Aria did, in fact, go on to release a song about Icarus, 'Ikar', on their second album, *S kem ty?*, written in 1986.

²For example, Gorbachev sought to end the food crises caused by low grain yields and increasing reliance on imports. For an in-depth discussion of 'the grain problem', see Gaidar (2007, pp. 205–211).

the man himself as a survivor against the odds and show that he truly does have power even though it does not take the form he expects, or it could represent the qualities of arrogance, over-achievement and self-centredness which characterise authoritarian regimes including the USSR.

The music of 'Bivni chernykh skal' is melodic at the outset, a bright rhythm guitar introducing the song which becomes darker in mood as the guitar drops into a minor chord and Kipelov's voice comes in. Like 'Eto rok', 'Bivni chernykh skal' is mostly in a minor key, but with brighter major interludes. The chorus is very high-pitched and near screaming, at the top of Kipelov's range and it has an echo, possibly produced by backing singer (and keyboardist) Kirill Pokrovskii rather than electronically. The phrases which make up the introduction are repeated immediately after the chorus before the instrumental, at the end of the instrumental, and finally at the very end of the song, lasting 20 seconds each and accounting for more than a quarter of the whole song. The song ends on a single chord which decreases in pitch and becomes minor as the song fades, a fade which accelerates as the notes descend. There is a certain desperation in the sound of the song as a whole: the human point of view has to be represented by the band members since they are human and, therefore, they relay the subject's vehemence in his power over nature but tempered by the knowledge that he must fail, accomplished by introducing the anxious tones. The melodic start and its three repetitions highlight the man's positivity and belief in his own power, but the overall minor tonality and strained vocals emphasise the futility of his situation and suggest a sense of desperation to his actions. The chorus has the most strained sound and lasts 23 seconds, being sung three times and so taking up almost a quarter of the song; it has, though, the most positive lyrics:

He will make it to the target
Follow his own path,
He will touch the sun,
Crush all obstacles.

At this point, the relayed achievements of the man are completely at odds with the tone of voice and style of music used in the song. This is very much like Iron Maiden's 'Invaders' from the 1982 album *Number of the Beast*, which also has a chorus at odds with the lyrics as Steve Harris' guitar carries on a jaunty tune while Bruce Dickinson's voice is almost screaming in terror.

Aria and Authenticity

Aria's existence across the official and unofficial sphere was crucial to its success as a metal band, but that does not guarantee its authenticity. In the band's favour are Aria's unofficial status, the members' adherence to the metal code while working as Aria, and the fact they worked as professional musicians full time and, hence, did not need to take other jobs to fulfil the employment requirement or make money. Against the band's authenticity is the making of bland, pointless music in pursuit of their professional careers, as well as all the musicians' status as

part of the official system. Language does not matter for Aria: almost all Soviet Russian metal musicians sang in Russian, the only exception before 1986 being Shah who also formed in 1985 and sang in English with Spanish stage names, but who did not release an album until 1988 (Marochkin, 1990, pp. 369–370). From an international perspective especially, the similarities to Iron Maiden may act against Aria's authenticity status, and accusations of plagiarism of Iron Maiden do not help their case from a Western perspective.

On balance, I would argue that Aria is certainly an authentic band in Soviet Russia, but less so than a group like Legion, whose members remained outside of officialdom until the abandonment of the VIA system in 1986. I would also argue that Aria are a more authentic band in the VIA period than Kruiz or Chernyi Kofe, who became VIAs in their own right in the early 1980s but whose repertoires during that time contain an assortment of rock, metal and new wave (Troitsky, 1987, p. 97). With regard to copying, I consider Aria no more inauthentic than any other band who sound a lot like another band, especially in their context as remote from the West and its many opportunities to do something different.

Conclusion

The very specific social, economic, and cultural conditions in Soviet Russia created the perfect environment for rock music to take hold in youth culture and evolve into the separate genre of Russian rock, which in turn allowed for Russian metal to develop in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Emerging metal bands were able to produce and circulate tapes and perform unofficially without too much interference from the authorities, but trying to access greater technology to produce better music was difficult as it required dealing with the state. Metal bands especially fared better when remaining *vnye*, beyond official Soviet life, due to the state's culture of ignorance of unofficial activities.

Russian metal music in the early 1980s was very similar to Western music of the same time, using the same styles, themes and sounds as bands such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, and Iron Maiden. By far the majority of Russian metal used the Russian language instead of English, because Russian rock music had already explored the transgressive nature of English and moved on to the native language to express more complex ideas in Russian's poetic style, drawing on its grand literary heritage.

Authenticity is one of the key components of metal music, but language is not usually as important as the other markers of authenticity: non-commercialism, originality, keeping to the metal code and not over-using technology. In socialist countries, there is no commercial apparatus and, thus, the idea of not interacting with the state, existing *vnye*, replaces it. Russian metal musicians were very good at being original even though their experience of metal music was limited to what made it across the border, meaning they stuck rigidly to the metal code they understood. Those who remained *vnye* did not always have the best access to technology, so to access professional equipment they needed to become professional, which diluted their metal authenticity. One band, Aria, managed to circumvent this problem by being members of a professional VIA

but keeping their metal identity separate. The very special circumstances of Aria place them lower in the authenticity hierarchy than bands who managed to remain wholly true to their *vnye* existence, but more authentic than bands who became VIAs in their own right. In this way, *vnye* is used to determine the authenticity status of bands in Soviet Russia in the same way as commercialism in non-socialist countries.

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Chapter 12

Is *Kawaii* Metal? Exploring *Aidoru*/Metal Fusion Through the Lyrics of Babymetal

Lewis F. Kennedy

Abstract

During the second decade of the twenty-first century, the phenomenon of ‘kawaii metal’ has garnered significant attention in English-language mainstream press alongside more limited discussion in metal journalism. An ostensible fusion of metal and Japanese *aidoru* (idol) music, kawaii metal artists frequently juxtapose the traditional aesthetics of *kawaii* (cuteness) with those of metal, emphasising a combination of influences distinctly Eastern and Western. Prominent among kawaii metal artists, Babymetal have generated substantial press coverage in the Anglophone world. Despite emanating from the Japanese idol industry and singing almost exclusively in Japanese, touring the United States and Europe (producing live CDs and DVDs recorded in the United States and United Kingdom) have made Babymetal one of the most visible Japanese bands in Anglo-America. This chapter explores Babymetal’s fusion of idol and metal by analysing the lyrics for the band’s first two albums, *Babymetal* (2014) and *Metal Resistance* (2016). Following an introduction to kawaii metal through the lens of Anglo-American press, the author elucidates Babymetal’s origins as a sub-unit of the idol group Sakura Gakuin. With this background established, the author investigates the use of wordplay and themes relating to childishness and adolescence in the lyrics on Babymetal’s debut album. Examining the lyrics of the band’s second album illuminates a more thorough integration of idol and metal tropes, including more English-language lyrics, seemingly designed to align Babymetal with a more global metal audience, managing the interplay of Western and Eastern influences.

Keywords: Lyrics; metal; idol; kawaii; Japanese; Babymetal

Introduction

In early 2014, the Japanese band Babymetal uploaded a music video to YouTube for a song called *Gimme Chocolate!!* (‘ギミチョコ!!’) (BABYMETAL 2014). The video became a viral phenomenon, generating press coverage across the otherwise solid divide between general news media and metal media. Apparently unsure how to react to the band and their music, Western commentators either dismissed the group as pure gimmick or revelled in the seemingly incongruous mixture of clearly oppositional styles: metal and J-pop. However, behind the façade of novelty, Babymetal’s music can be understood as an innovative integration of elements drawn from idol music (Aoyagi, 1999; Galbraith & Karlin, 2012a; see below) and metal music. As a site of negotiation between musical cultures coded as Eastern and Western, respectively, Babymetal thus serve as a fertile case study of contemporary globalised popular music.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Babymetal’s reception in Anglo-American press, noting how perceptions of novelty conceal problematic narratives related to the band’s ethnicity and gender. After a short explanation of ‘kawaii metal’, I briefly consider Babymetal’s roots as a sub-unit of idol group Sakura Gakuin that accounts for some of the band’s imagery and practices foreign to metal music. With this contextual background in place, the chapter moves to a study of the band’s debut album, *Babymetal* (2014), analysing wordplay and lyrical themes of childishness and adolescence adopted from idol music. Babymetal’s second album, *Metal Resistance* (2016), exhibits clearer influences from global metal culture, including expanded use of English-language lyrics and topics more accepted within metal discourse. Over the course of these two releases, Babymetal develop a unique admixture of idol and metal with lyrics serving as a site of negotiation and integration.

Western Perspectives on Kawaii Metal

First uploaded to YouTube in February 2014 to coincide with the initial Japanese release of debut album, *Babymetal* (2014), *Gimme Chocolate!!* is likely Babymetal’s most well-known song in the West.¹ As of mid-2020, the music video has received over 120 million hits on YouTube (BABYMETAL, 2014), and excerpts from the clip appear in numerous ‘reaction’ videos in which seemingly unaware viewers are left dumbfounded by the apparent incongruity of the sound and images they are experiencing (e.g. FBE, 2014). The online popularity of *Gimme Chocolate!!* seems to have spurred Babymetal’s management agency, Amuse, Inc., to release the song as a digital single in 2015, and the band performed the song live on American talk show *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* in 2016 (Shaw, 2016).²

Despite some earlier commercial success in their native Japan, Western media paid little attention to Babymetal before the release of *Gimme Chocolate!!*. However,

¹All song titles in English and *rōmaji* rendered as they appear in official international Babymetal releases.

²See dy dy (2016) for a video of the performance.

in the wake of the song's viral status, the band have enjoyed extensive coverage in Anglo-American press both mainstream and metal-centric. The majority of media attention centres upon the ostensible novelty of three teenage girls singing and dancing along to heavy metal riffs, as well as commentators' surprise that, despite the apparent incompatibility, Babymetal have found an audience among metal fans and non-metal fans alike (Begrund, 2014; McQuistan, 2014). The band have graced the front covers of and won awards from British metal magazines *Metal Hammer*, *Kerrang!*, and *Rock Sound*. Co-founder of metal website, *Metal-Sucks*, Vince Neilstein (Ben Umanov) heralded Babymetal as 'the single best thing to happen to metal in the past decade', praising the band for 'stepping outside the tiny, constraining box in which heavy metal is supposed to exist', and revels in the claim that 'Babymetal make "tr00" metalheads angry' (Neilstein, 2014).³

Amongst this superficially encouraging reporting on Babymetal, one can identify a number of insidious narratives pertaining to ethnicity and gender. Continually highlighting the band's peculiarity plays into a problematic 'discourse on "weird Japan"', in which unusual-seeming aspects of culture are highlighted as somehow indicative of a generally bizarre "foreignness" that cannot be penetrated by non-Japanese' (Foster, 2015, p. 96). Nancy K. Stalker (2018) notes a potential economic benefit to this discourse, citing music videos by J-pop singer Kyary Pamyu Pamyu including 'weird and wacky features [that] inevitably appealed to foreign markets long infatuated with Japan's exotic Otherness' (p. 393). However, like much coverage of Babymetal, [w]hether the tone of this exoticization is celebratory or mocking, it tends to position "the Japanese" and their "beliefs" as special or unique' (Foster, 2015, p. 97).

What coverage female musicians do get often focuses on sideshow, gimmicky crap. For example, BABYMETAL — a band only a pedophile could love — gets more press than many outstanding women musicians (Loye, 2015).

Chastising fellow journalists, Kristy Loye highlights a similar Othering in metal media's coverage and portrayal of women musicians, who are frequently denied agency since 'conversations in relation to woman fronted bands [...] are still often about the [male] writers' (DiGioia & Helfrich, 2018, p. 367). Indeed, even Neilstein's broadly positive commentary on Babymetal falls into the trope of praising the people (i.e. men) 'behind' the music, more so than the band's vocalists: 'it's complicated music painstakingly written. [...] If you can't get into the girls and their vocals, take a look at the music itself: the guys who play in Babymetal's band are hella talented!' (2014). This is part of a wider strategy of legitimisation in which three teenaged Japanese vocalists/dancers who lack traditional

³'tr00' is an example of 'the language of metal fandom' (Clifford-Napoleone, 2015, p. 52), here referring to those metal fans who contend the music should be created and understood within a relatively narrow set of parameters, such that one can judge a given genre, artist, or song as 'tr00' or 'false', 'real' or 'fake', etc.

signifiers of ‘metal-ness’ have metal status conferred upon them by journalists (and fans) who point towards the band’s all-male songwriters and instrumentalists as exemplifying ‘real’ metal.⁴ Unlike most of her male counterparts in the Anglo-American metal press, Holly Wright (2016) praises Babymetal’s vocalists in a live concert review, noting that ‘the real star of the show is Su-metal. Her voice is awesome and she nails it when they go balls-out with the epic ballad *The One*’ (p. 104).

Despite the band’s supposed novelty, some have observed that ‘[t]heir sound is not without precedent’ (Nelson, 2014). Babymetal exhibit a strong influence drawn from visual kei (Keith & Hughes, 2016, p. 483; Nelson, 2014), a consciously hybrid genre that incorporates elements of Japanese rock, pop, and Western art music but is likely more commonly known in the West for ‘visual images that typically include lavish neo-gothic costumes and elaborately detailed forms of male cross-dressing’ (McLeod, 2013, p. 309). Nevertheless, Babymetal have variously been dubbed cute metal (Hudson, 2014), kawaii metal (Ewens, 2014), kawaiicore (Beyond The Stage, 2015), and idol metal (West, 2018). These genre monikers apply Japanese concepts of *kawaii* (cuteness) and *aidoru* (idol) to the Western-coded genre of metal to describe a growing number of artists that subvert attendant stereotypes of gender, age, and behaviour. Alongside Babymetal, one finds similarly categorised artists like Necronomidol, Ladybaby, PassCode, and Deathrabbits. Comprised mostly or exclusively of young female members (aged anywhere from early-teens to early-twenties), these groups tend to share a visual aesthetic interpreted by many in the West as *kawaii*. More specific than the common English translation of ‘cute’, *kawaii* ‘essentially means childlike; it celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behaviour and physical appearances’ (Kinsella, 1995, p. 220). Positioned somewhere between traditional notions of *kawaii* and the more recent *kimo-kawaii* (‘gross cute’; St. Michel, 2014b),⁵ these groups mix traditional elements of idol music (see below) with some form of Western guitar-based genre like rock or metal. Kawaii metal artists often fall within the scope of ‘alternative idol’, a catch-all term for the blending of idol culture (both music and commercial practices) with elements seemingly drawn from outside the mainstream of popular music. Groups like BiS (Brand-new idol Society) and, related, BiSH

⁴This strategy of legitimisation is also prevalent in frequent mentions of Babymetal receiving compliments and endorsements from well-established and respected metal musicians (Blabbermouth, 2014), not to mention Babymetal opening concerts for Metallica and performing live with Dragonforce and with Judas Priest vocalist Rob Halford (Travers, 2019).

⁵Describing something that ‘has an eerie, sweet creepiness that makes it hard to look at but harder to look away’, *kimo-kawaii* is ‘slang that mashes up *kimoi* (yucky, gross; which is a shorter, slangier version of *kimochiwarui*, itself) and *kawaii* (cute, sweet)’ (Ruble 2013). Patrick St. Michel (2014b) suggests that the aesthetic was ‘[b]orn in the 1990s and related to similar American trends, this subversion of the traditionally cutesy is part cultural backlash to Japan’s decades-long adorability binge, and part smart marketing tactic’.

(Brand-new idol SHiT) exemplify the outwardly rebellious spirit of alternative idol by subverting musical, lyrical, visual, and behavioural norms of idol culture (St. Michel, 2014c), all while being an idol group; 'what makes them so interesting [is] what they reveal about the process of idol manufacture and their shamelessness about wearing it on their sleeves' (Martin, 2013).

Sakura Gakuin and the Idol Origins of Babymetal

Idol music has a history dating back to at least the late 1960s (Aoyagi, 1999), and is often understood in relation to the complex workings of Japanese multimedia intertextuality, national economic performance, and normative gender roles in society (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012a). For present purposes, the most salient aspects of idol culture concern elements of age, gender, and agency. Idol 'usually designates mid- or early-teen singers and vocal groups, selected first for their looks' (Yano & Hosokawa, 2008, p. 356), while typical female idols 'are generally good-looking and embody characteristics such as cuteness, charm, "girl-next-door" approachability, humility, comedic talent, or sex appeal' (Keith & Hughes, 2016, p. 475). For the most part, commercially successful idol artists are created and '[m]anaged by agencies known as *jimusho* who control all creative output and collect the majority of profits' (Milioto Matsue, 2016, p. 130).⁶ Since the mid-1990s, idol groups have become particularly popular, with the Johnny & Associates (more commonly known as Johnny's) *jimusho* producing successful boy bands like SMAP, Arashi, and KAT-TUN (Stevens, 2008, pp. 54–55; St. Michel, 2018, p. 44). During the same period, all-girl idol groups have prospered with a slightly different model that includes regularly changing group members. In the mid-1980s, Onyanko Club initiated a mode of idol production 'in which a large lineup [*sic.*] of female members continually changes as members "graduate" from the group and are replaced by younger members' (St. Michel, 2018, p. 33), but this practice was popularised in the late-1990s by Morning Musume when 'producers supplemented the original five-person lineup with three additional members not long after their debut single' (Stevens, 2008, p. 59). Once Morning Musume's head producer Tsunku (Terada Mitsuo)⁷ recognised the positive audience reaction to personnel changes, 'he rotated his idols frequently, citing reasons such as "graduation" (to solo careers) or "retirement" and bringing in new, younger recruits as replacements', as well as sub-dividing the larger group 'into a variety of temporary sub-"units" which release one or two singles under different group names, before "graduation" or return to the original lineup [*sic.*]' (Stevens, 2008, p. 59). With over one hundred members, AKB48 have arguably taken the practice of

⁶While *jimusho* translates literally to 'office', 'in the music industry, this refers to an artist management agency' (Stevens, 2008, p. 159). In this context, *jimusho* are responsible for performer creation, management, and overall production. Despite their small size and limited access to capital, they exert strong control over the entertainment market, even compared with other firms in the industry' (Marx, 2012, p. 37).

⁷Japanese names appear in Japanese style with family names before given names.

large, rotating idol groups to its zenith, particularly when one accounts for smaller 'sister projects' like SKE48 and NMB48 (Kiuchi, 2017).

Babymetal were formed in 2010 as a sub-unit of the idol group Sakura Gakuin (Cherry Blossom Academy). Created by the Amuse *jimusho*, the group's 'primary concept is that of a school (specifically at junior high level) and members perform as schoolgirls, replete with uniforms embroidered with a Sakura Gakuin crest' (Keith & Hughes, 2016, p. 481). The fictional school – likely based on real performing arts schools like Actor's School Hiroshima⁸ – provides the thematic backdrop for Sakura Gakuin songs and visual aesthetics, as well as the practice of members graduating around the age of fifteen. Sakura Gakuin release one album annually at the end of the *nendo* (school year), each comprising a mix of songs by the entire group alongside songs by 'subgroups, called "clubs," which feature combinations of particular members' (Keith & Hughes, 2016, p. 482). Among clubs styled on stereotypical extracurricular activities for girls such as cooking (*Kukkingu-bu*, known as Mini-Pati) and cheerleading (*Baton-bu*, known as Twinklestars), one finds the heavy music club (*Jūon-bu*) known as Babymetal.

Created by Key Kobayashi (known as Kobametal), 'a rock and metal promoter/producer working in association with Sakura Gakuin's management company' (Keith & Hughes, 2016, pp. 482–483), the Babymetal sub-unit consisted of three members: Nakamoto Suzuka, Kikuchi Moa, and Mizuno Yui. Rechristened Sumetal, Moametal, and Yuimetal, respectively, the girls recorded and performed Babymetal songs as well as Sakura Gakuin songs until early 2014 when the band released their debut album, *Babymetal*, around the same time Nakamoto graduated Sakura Gakuin. While Kikuchi and Mizuno did not formally graduate until the following year, one can specify 2014 as the year Babymetal begun in earnest as a stand-alone musical group. Until Mizuno's departure in October 2018 (Smith, 2018), the three official members of Babymetal recorded and released two studio albums, two live albums, and seven video albums (footage of the band live in concert released on DVD, Blu-ray, and as digital downloads), not to mention several special edition releases made available only to members of the band's official fan club.

Despite allusions to the band's idol status in much Western discourse, Babymetal eschew some common elements of idol music. Visually, 'Babymetal conjure up a darker (yet still energetic), less accessible and more complex version of cuteness' through 'black attire, sometimes with splashes of red, in a style that has been compared to Gothic Lolita' (Plourde, 2018, p. 294). Unusually for idol groups, Babymetal's live performances include a live backing band. Known as the Kami Band (spirit band), the relatively stable group of musicians don costumes more akin to those found in genres like black metal, including a version of corpse paint and white kimonos – clearly separated from the official, named members of Babymetal, but nonetheless deliberately visible. Babymetal have also foregone the aforementioned idol group custom of members leaving or graduating when

⁸Several successful idol performers have attended Actor's School Hiroshima, including all three members of Perfume (St. Michel, 2018, p. 27) and Sakura Gakuin/Babymetal singer Nakamoto Suzuka.

they reach a certain age,⁹ and unlike more traditional idols who ‘not only sing but also worked as actors, models, talk show hosts, and commercial spokespeople’ (Stevens, 2008, p. 50), Babymetal are, to Western audiences at least, promoted as a ‘regular’ band. Babymetal members maintain their mystique in part by generally refusing to answer questions about their personal lives outside the band, to the chagrin of Western journalists (Ewens, 2014), whereas typical idols employ personae constructed such that fans ‘feel that they know the idol on a personal level’ (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012b, p. 8).

Although responses to Babymetal from the metal press were generally encouraging following the release of their debut album, and, especially, the music video for *Gimme Chocolate!!*, even those metal critics who took Babymetal seriously were not necessarily taking them seriously as a *metal* band. Writing for *The Guardian*, in an otherwise positive article, metal critic Dom Lawson (2014) noted that ‘[o]f course, Babymetal are not a metal phenomenon on any level’, but rather a J-pop band performing a decent approximation of metal. Yet by the time their second album was released, Lawson’s opinion of the band had changed. Reviewing *Metal Resistance* (2016) for *Metal Hammer*, Lawson characterises Babymetal, thus: ‘of course they’re a fucking metal band, and a far more convincing one than the majority of those who have attempted to blend heavy music and shiny pop in the past’ (Lawson, 2016, p. 84; original emphasis). What prompted such an about-face? The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to understanding how Babymetal have developed their music from one album to the next, focussing on how the band’s lyrics exhibit an increasing integration of idol and metal themes.

***Babymetal*, Wordplay, and Idol-ness**

Babymetal’s eponymous debut album was first released in Japan in February 2014, before being released internationally in May/June 2015. Following a model common in idol music but rare in metal, the majority of songs contained on *Babymetal* (2014) were released in some format before being grouped together for the album. During the period 2011–2013, *Doki Doki ☆ Morning*,¹⁰ *Iine!*, and *Headbangeeeeeerrrrr!!!!* were each included on Sakura Gakuin albums,¹¹ as well as being released separately as standalone singles (with attendant music videos) while Babymetal were still a sub-unit of Sakura Gakuin. In total, all but three of the songs included on *Babymetal* (2014) – *Gimme Chocolate!!*, *Song 4*, and *Rondo of Nightmare* – were released as singles before appearing on the album. Given the number of songs released elsewhere as both Babymetal singles and on Sakura Gakuin albums, it is unsurprising that Babymetal producer Kobametal refers to

⁹Mizuno left the band for unspecified reasons, but possibly to pursue a solo performing career (Smith, 2018).

¹⁰‘*Doki Doki*’ is onomatopoeia for one’s heart pounding during moments of excitement (Duane Metal, 2015c).

¹¹As with *Gimme Chocolate!!*, all song titles are here rendered as found on the international release of *Babymetal* (2015).

Babymetal (2014) as ‘almost a “best of” because they released many different singles before the album was put out, so it’s a collection of the songs written to that point’ (in Brannigan, 2016, p. 47). Not only is *Babymetal* (2014) a collection of songs written and recorded at different times, but the lengthy list of songwriters, lyricists, and arrangers who contributed to the album aligns it more with common idol practice than with metal (Stevens, 2008, p. 56; St. Michel, 2018, p. 32). That said, several of the album’s songwriters have backgrounds in metal or rock bands, including Ueda Takeshi of Mad Capsule Markets, Tatsuo of Everset, Yuyoyuppe of My Eggplant Died Yesterday, and Narasaki Nobuki of Coalta of the Deepers (who has also written for idol group Momoiro Clover Z) (Aoki, 2014).

One noteworthy element of Babymetal’s lyrics is the use of wordplay: ‘[d]rawing on the predilection for puns and wordplay in Japanese, band members will often use Japanese in ways that linguistically intertwine cuteness with classic metal aesthetics such as darkness and intensity’ (Plourde, 2018, p. 303). For Japanese audiences, Babymetal’s band name is itself a pun based on the Japanese pronunciation and rendering of ‘heavy metal’, ‘a fact that is often circulated by band members and producers’ (Plourde, 2018, p. 303). As language teacher and Babymetal fan Duane Metal explains (2015a),¹² the katakana rendering of ‘heavy metal’ (ヘビー・メタル) is very similar to that for ‘baby metal’ (ベビー・メタル), often resulting in Japanese natives pronouncing Babymetal as ‘bebymetal’. This type of wordplay features prominently in the first track of *Babymetal* (2014), and long-time live concert opener, *BABYMETAL DEATH*. Positioned first on the debut album and in live performance, the song’s function as an introduction to the band is reinforced by deliberate mispronunciation of ‘death’ as ‘*desu*’ (です), ‘a standard way of introducing yourself in Japanese’ (Duane Metal, 2015b, 2’26”–2’33”). Pronounced in this way, when Babymetal sing “Babymetal *desu*” (1’34”–1’51”) they are simultaneously employing a common trope of metal (‘death’) and also literally introducing first the band,¹³ then each member in succession.¹⁴ Another example later in the album can be found in the song *Catch Me If You Can*, which depicts the children’s game *kakurenbo* (hide and seek) or *onigokko* (tag) (Enki, 2013a). The seeker in these games are known as ‘*oni*’, a deliberate allusion to the ‘*Oni*’ (鬼; ogre/demon) characters of Japanese folklore (Foster, 2015, pp. 117–127). Babymetal play on this reference by having the words of the *oni* character in

¹²‘Duane Metal’ has released 88 YouTube videos in his series ‘Learning Japanese with BABYMETAL’, in which he translates and explains the band’s lyrics to an English-speaking audience, as well as offering cultural references that might otherwise be missed by non-Japanese.

¹³Unlike the rest of *Babymetal* (2014), the vocals on *BABYMETAL DEATH* are predominantly distorted (as opposed to clean) and are considerably lower in pitch than those produced by the band’s official vocalists.

¹⁴The only vocals clearly attributable to the official Babymetal vocalists heard on *BABYMETAL DEATH* occur as interjections set against distorted vocals repeating the word ‘death’ (2’36”–2’55”). Su-metal, Yuimetal, and Moametal introduce themselves in turn with a simple ‘Su-metal *desu*’ (and so on), further blurring the distinction between ‘death’ and ‘*desu*’.

Catch Me If You Can vocalised as death metal growls, calling out ‘Hey! Are you ready?’, before Babymetal’s vocalists respond ‘No, not yet!’ (0’25”–0’35”) (Enki, 2013a). Alongside the sonic evocation of the mythical *oni* character through distorted vocals, the liner notes to *Babymetal* (2014) include the song’s lyrics superimposed upon a typical image of an *oni*.

While wordplay is not entirely uncommon in metal – as Deena Weinstein (2000, pp. 250–251), notes in relation to Ozzy Osbourne – Lorraine Plourde (2018) suggests that Babymetal’s wordplay can be understood as intentionally emphasising the young ages of band members,¹⁵ such that the band ‘employ this sense of childishness to subvert cuteness into a complex and powerful aesthetic state’ (p. 294). A sense of childishness is clearly evident in the lyrics to *Song 4* (*Babymetal*, 2014), which exploit the Japanese superstition of avoiding the number four (Koichi, 2012). During the song’s verses, vocalists Yuimetal and Moametal sing childlike lines counting up from one to four (and down from seven to four), pronouncing the titular number as ‘yon’. During the choruses, however, the singers utilise the Sino-Japanese pronunciation of four, ‘shi’, alongside the Japanese pronunciation of death (死; ‘shi’), singing ‘4 is for happiness, and it doesn’t mean “to die”’ (1’04”–1’08”) (Enki, 2014b). Beyond allusions to juvenile naivety or scepticism regarding cultural norms, some of the ostensibly childish references in Babymetal’s music may be a result of having adolescents sing the lyrics. Songs like *Gimme Chocolate!!* and *Ijime, Dame, Zettai* (‘No More Bullying’) appear to focus on concerns of young people, but broader themes emerge from a nuanced reading of their lyrics.¹⁶ *Ijime, Dame, Zettai*, for example, is essentially a song about overcoming adversity with the help of friends, family, and the spirit of the *kitsune* (fox god) (Enki, 2013b). However, as it is sung by teenage girls and uses the Japanese word for bullying (‘*ijime*’), the song might be read simply as condemning childish schoolyard bullying rather than combatting more serious hardship.

Even more so than childishness, Anglo-American commentary on Babymetal has focussed on themes relating to adolescence. Some of the adolescent ideas on *Babymetal* are ‘typical idol-pop topics – chocolate, the struggle of waking up – but also spin into subjects such as bullying and, on “Onedari Daisakusen”, tricking your dad into giving you money’ (St. Michel, 2014a), but more sophisticated expressions emerge from under the veneer of simplicity. Writing for *Metal Hammer*, Lawson (2016, p. 84) notes that ‘Babymetal’s lyrics often focus on issues facing young people such as self-independence, body image and the pressures to remain thin’. These issues are articulated most directly in *Gimme Chocolate!!*, in which the protagonist ‘expresses frustration with body image pressure for teenage girls’; however ‘[t]he feminist potential of the song becomes overwritten by ambivalent listener responses that dwell on the supposed incommensurability of the song’s lyrical themes with the genre of heavy metal itself’ (Plourde, 2018, p. 302).

¹⁵When *Babymetal* (2014) was first released, Su-metal was 16 years old while Yuimetal and Moametal were both 14.

¹⁶While *Ijime, Dame, Zettai* translates literally to ‘Bullying, No, Absolutely’ (Enki, 2013b), ‘No More Bullying’ has become the de facto English-language title of the song (e.g. Clinton & Wallach, 2015, p. 277; Plourde 2018, pp. 302–303).

With songs about the pressure put on teenage girls to remain thin, what it's like going to your first rock gig and the concept of an 'ideal woman', they are definitely a step away from the usual subjects of heavy metal songs. (Hudson, 2014)

While themes of adolescence are unusual and sometimes unwelcome in much of the most visible forms of metal discourse, the lyrics of *Megitsune* (*Babymetal*, 2014) effectively combine these otherwise conflicting areas. The song title 'refers to the important character of the fox (*kitsune*), a messenger of the *Shintō* gods, and a common trickster in Japan, but here made female by adding the prefix "me"' (Milioto Matsue, 2016, p. 222). The mythical *kitsune* features heavily in Babymetal's work and forms the basis of their trademark hand gesture, a reworking of the devil horns commonly seen at metal concerts. The song and accompanying music video mix iconography from Japanese folklore and ritual with contemporary issues of patriarchal society. In a sense, then, Babymetal are simply continuing a tradition of metal bands utilising themes drawn from local (or sometimes foreign) mythology, in much the same way as in Swedish Viking metal (Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 106–107) or Finnish metal bands drawing on the *Kalevala* (Karjalainen & Sipilä, 2016, p. 216). But rather than evoke the masculine heroes of Nordic epics, for the members of Babymetal '[t]he shape-shifting ability of the *kitsune* (fox) is used as an allegory for transitioning into womanhood' (Keith & Hughes, 2016, p. 483).

Metal Resistance, English, and Metal-ness

Whereas *Babymetal* (2014) was a compilation of somewhat disparate songs, some written to be part of the broader Sakura Gakuin narrative, Babymetal's second album, *Metal Resistance* (2016), can be understood differently. Following the global success of *Gimme Chocolate!!* and performances to receptive crowds in the UK and North America (Travers, 2019), Babymetal 'mastermind' (Benjamin, 2015) Kobametal would have been well aware of the band's appeal outside the Japanese market. As such, and in contrast to their debut, Babymetal's second album is closer to a typical Western pop or metal record: written as an album, with a theme, and only two songs released as singles, 'a proper studio album' (Kobametal in Brannigan, 2016, p. 47). The album's opening track and first single, *Road of Resistance*, features guest appearances from Herman Li and Sam Totman, guitarists of British power metal band Dragonforce, immediately framing the album as a more serious metal record. Moreover, the inclusion of Western musicians, rather than, say, Japan-based former Megadeth guitarist Marty Friedman, suggests Babymetal may be positioning themselves as open to the global metal scene.

The international, or 'Out of Japan', edition of *Metal Resistance* (2016) is markedly different from the international version of *Babymetal* (2015). Song titles are rendered with *rōmaji* or entirely in English, and the CD comes without a lyric sheet; by contrast, *Babymetal* (2015) includes two lyric sheets, one in *rōmaji* and one in *kanjilkana*. Songs on *Metal Resistance* (2016) include more English-language lyrics, with two songs being sung entirely in English. The first,

From Dusk Till Dawn, replaces the entirely Japanese-language song *Syncopation* (‘シンコペーション’) found on the Japanese release of the album, while the final track *THE ONE – English ver.* – is an English-language version of *THE ONE* as heard on the Japanese edition. Despite the original version of *THE ONE* comprising mostly English lyrics, with Japanese only being used during pre-choruses and the second half of verses, Babymetal appear to have recognised the benefits of writing and recording an entirely English version. Utilising English serves to ‘internationalize’ (Negus, 1999, pp. 160–161) *Metal Resistance*, allowing the album’s theme – ‘all about this ring, this circle, The One, with everyone coming together, and the circle growing ever bigger’ (Kobametal in Brannigan, 2016, p. 47) – to be more easily communicable to a global audience while simultaneously positioning the band within metal culture(s) both domestic and global.¹⁷

While the use of English is by no means unusual in much twenty-first century Japanese popular music (Stevens, 2008, p. 133), it is most commonly encountered as the chorus hook of songs otherwise sung entirely in Japanese (Milioto Matsue, 2009, p. 78). Nevertheless, the use of English-language lyrics in Japanese metal (and other genres) is a significant marker of distinction for three reasons. First, despite widespread interjections of English into Japanese popular culture in the form of ‘Japlish’ (Stevens, 2008, pp. 134–135) or ‘Japanglish’ (Milioto Matsue, 2009, pp. 128–131),¹⁸ the majority of J-pop is sung in Japanese. As such, performers wishing to distinguish themselves from other J-pop artists (Stevens, 2008, p. 144) or from potentially negative connotations of J-pop, as in the Tokyo hardcore scene (Milioto Matsue, 2009, p. 130), can do so by choosing to sing in English. Second, with English as the *lingua franca* of ‘global’ popular music dominated by Anglo-American artists, some Japanese performers consider English-language lyrics ‘the key to global acceptance (or at least domestic cache)’ (Stevens, 2008, p. 133). Finally, and most significantly for present purposes, the use of English language can be a marker of authenticity for those artists participating in a music culture coded as ‘Western’. Rosemary Overell (2014, p. 42) describes how some members of the Osaka grindcore scene utilise English-language lyrics as part of a wider approach to ‘authentic “grindcore-ness”’, such that ‘singing in English [...] was done to enhance their authenticity, and intended to fulfil their ambitions to gain popularity in Western countries’. Seeking to avoid the constraints of being labelled a ‘Japanese girl band’, Lovebites employ English lyrics to the same ends: ‘[w]e’re almost the only one of the Japanese girl metal bands singing everything in English. There is a particular Japanese metal sound, but when I’m writing I try to go more European’ (Lovebites guitarist Miyako in West, 2018, pp. 51–52). Both these examples recognise the hegemonic position of the English language

¹⁷ While wordplay features prominently in their Japanese lyrics, Babymetal employ the device less frequently in English lyrics (hence, my focus here on Japanese wordplay).

¹⁸ ‘English can be found everywhere in Japan, although often in the form of Japanglish, the mixture of English words often in nonsensical grammatical formations, or the use of English words in completely inappropriate contexts’ (Milioto Matsue, 2009, p. 129).

within ostensibly global genres, for while Japanese-language lyrics situate an artist within a single country, English-language lyrics may allow the same artist to occupy space within much broader European or Western contexts.

For Babymetal, the increased use of English language from one album to the next can be understood as a combination of these three elements. Babymetal seek to distinguish themselves from other Japanese artists and, in particular, from Japanese idol and kawaii metal performers by expanding the amount of their music sung in English. The inclusion of two all-English songs (one seemingly a re-working of the Japanese original) on the international edition of *Metal Resistance* (2016) suggests a recognition of the band's positive global reception, especially in English-speaking countries. However, Miyako's comments notwithstanding, English language remains an important signifier of authenticity for Japanese metal bands and fans:

The predilection for 'classical/traditional' (or 'old wave') heavy metal among Japanese fans is often explained by a domestic sensibility of *yōshi-kibi*, which means 'stylistic beauty' or 'style aesthetic.' [...] One element of this 'style aesthetic' is singing in English. (Kawano & Hosokawa, 2011, p. 253)

As Kawano Kei and Hosokawa Shuhei attest, even without an explicit coding of metal as 'Western', some Japanese metal fans deem English lyrics authentic owing to their prominent use in 'traditional' heavy metal artefacts. By releasing two versions of *Metal Resistance*, one to an international audience that employs more English, Babymetal appear to be negotiating a possible disadvantage of language choice: '[s]inging in Japanese will potentially appeal to the wider [Japanese] public yet at the same time alienate the core audience of metal enthusiasts' (Kawano & Hosokawa, 2011, p. 254).

In isolation, Babymetal's increased use of English might not be straightforwardly attributable to the band positioning themselves as more metal or, at least, more amenable to a metal audience. However, while lyrical themes related to childishness and adolescence dominate *Babymetal* (2014), such topics appear less frequently on *Metal Resistance* (2016). With references to chewing gum and bubble gum (Enki, 2015a), *Awadama Fever* recalls the kawaii food-based imagery of *Gimme Chocolate!*,¹⁹ while *YAVA!* and *Sis. Anger* are most readily interpreted as adolescent owing to the age of the performers, much like *Ijime*, *Dame*, *Zettai*. Aside from those few examples, lyrics on *Metal Resistance* (2016) can be read as more traditionally 'metal' than those on *Babymetal* (2014). Outlining the album's narrative theme, opener *Road of Resistance* is a call to arms culminating in a climactic final chorus beginning (in English) 'Resistance! Resistance! Stand up and shout! Justice forever!' (4'20"–4'30"). Closing the album, *Tales of The Destinies* and *THE ONE – English ver.* – form a conceptual diptych starting with portrayals

¹⁹ 'Awadama' translates roughly to 'bubble-ball' (Enki, 2015a), but is also the name of a Japanese candy (Duane Metal, 2016b).

of bad luck and hopelessness before the prospect of salvation emerges at the end of *Tales of The Destinies* through invocations of ‘THE ONE’: ‘It is our destiny, THE ONE will be with you’ (Enki, 2016d; 4’32”–4’42”). In the album’s final track, ‘THE ONE’ is summoned through the power and strength of the group – both Babymetal and their fans – in part during the ritual of a metal concert: ‘We stand in a circle pit, side by side, hand in hand’ (3’39”–3’46”). Aside from the curiously tame depiction of a circle pit, this reference to the transformative power of the metal concert aligns Babymetal with those fans for whom the concert is ‘the epitome of the heavy metal culture’ (Weinstein, 2000, p. 213).²⁰ Lyrics to *Amore* are perhaps less overtly metal, but images of love ‘breaking through gloomy rain clouds’ (Enki, 2016a; 0’13”–0’18”) are tempered a few tracks later during *No Rain, No Rainbow*, a ‘syrupy power ballad’ (Dalton, 2016) about love lost culminating with the lyrics ‘An endless rain fills my heart forever’ (Enki, 2014a; 3’51”–4’02”). Long associated with forms of metal closely aligned to wider popular music – variously termed lite, glam, or pop metal (Pillsbury, 2006, p. 54; Weinstein, 2000, pp. 45–48) – Weinstein’s (2000, p. 47) characterisation of power ballads as ‘crossovers, standing inside and outside the [metal] genre simultaneously’ is an apt description of *No Rain, No Rainbow*’s synthesis of traditional metal song themes articulated by atypical voices.

While lyrical themes on *Metal Resistance* are not necessarily ‘metal’ topics in a typical sense, they nonetheless mark a departure from the adolescence and childishness found on *Babymetal*. From one album to the next, Babymetal appear to be moving away from elements that constitute ‘abject genres’ (Smialek, 2015, pp. 65–114). In a broad sense, ‘extreme metal fans typically view abject genre traits as misappropriations of metal music proper’ (Smialek, 2015, p. 66), but Eric Smialek (2015, p. 65) outlines a more specific conception of ‘a threefold “black-feminine-adolescent” series of asymptotes, where extreme metal fans position their boundaries’. In short, extreme metal fans (that is, ‘proper’ metal fans) deem abject those genres and genre traits that are interpreted as supposedly adhering to mainstream trends and/or the invocation of blackness, femininity, and/or adolescence. Since extreme metal fan ‘discourses reveal a tendency to associate markers of adolescence with inauthenticity’ (Smialek, 2015, p. 66), the prominence of adolescent themes on *Babymetal* (2014) would likely mark the album as inauthentic. By contrast, the comparative lack of explicitly adolescent lyrics on *Metal Resistance* (2016) might be understood as a recognition of and adjustment toward a (potential) fanbase yearning for more stereotypically metal themes.

Alongside the more typically metal fare of songs like *Road of Resistance*, *Metal Resistance* (2016) includes tracks that exhibit Babymetal’s continued *integration*

²⁰This narrative is developed further in the English-language graphic novel *Apocrypha: The Legend of Babymetal* (2018), in which three elemental spirits, ‘the Metal Resistance’ defeat evil by joining together to form ‘The One’. *Apocrypha*’s penultimate page depicts a concert stage from the perspective of an audience-member towards the back of an enormous crowd, with the book’s final line – ‘We are The One’ – matching the main hook of *THE ONE – English ver.* – (*Metal Resistance*, 2016).

of idol and metal. The lyrics to *GJ!* marry imagery of metal concerts with that of daily Japanese life. The song opens with Yuimetal and Moametal singing, ‘The circle mosh of the green commuter train turns into [a] Wall of Death with the bell and the death growl’ (Enki, 2016b, 0’26”–0’30”), comparing travelling on the busy commuter trains of Tokyo’s *Yamanote-sen* to the experience of attending a metal concert. In the second verse, a throng of eager shoppers are likened to lively audience members – ‘Soon after the shop opens, it’s like a mosh’sh pit’ (Enki, 2016b, 1’23”–1’25”) – with lyrics making reference to a specific type of moshing promoted by Babymetal and described by Su-metal as “something like a safe, enjoyable game of *Oshikura Manju*’ (BABYMETALfan.com, 2014; 11’22”–11’28”).²¹ On *Meta Taro*, Babymetal invoke the superhero character of *Ultraman* (Duane Metal, 2016c) as a symbol of the power of metal in their ‘symphonic folk metal anthem’ (Lawson, 2016, p. 84). Indeed, drawing on his ‘Metal power’ from his ‘Metal heart’, *Meta Taro* is ‘the Metal hero. If Metal music sounds, we are friends’ (Enki, 2016c, 3’13”–3’23”). In referring explicitly to a male hero, *Meta Taro* follows conventions of gendered mythologies in folk metal (Spracklen, 2015), aligning the song’s central theme with a well-established metal genre while nevertheless incorporating idol overtones: ‘together boys and girls; everybody, let’s sing together!’ (Enki, 2016c, 3’28”–3’35”).

Perhaps the more obvious example of Babymetal’s integration of idol and metal can be identified in *Metal Resistance*’s second single, *KARATE*. Named after what is likely the most famous Japanese martial art, *KARATE* carries immediate overtones of ‘Japaneseness’ to both foreign and domestic audiences. One woman interviewed as part of a YouTube video on Japanese people’s reactions to Babymetal suggests that ‘The song “KARATE” is very Japanese’. Asked why she thinks Babymetal are so popular outside Japan, the unnamed woman proposes that the use of Japanese stereotype may have been deliberate on the part of the band, ‘Don’t you think “KARATE” was targeting foreign people? I think they made it feel Japanese on purpose’ (That Japanese Man Yuta, 2017, 2’57”–3’03”). More than merely a gimmicky title, karate forms the backdrop of the song’s lyrical content: during verses, Yuimetal and Moametal sing variations of ‘*Seiya*’ and ‘*Soiya*’, ‘two of many yells or shouts of karate martial arts’ (Duane Metal, 2016a, 1’40”–1’48”), usually vocalised when striking an opponent. Similarly, each line of the pre-chorus is introduced by the two vocalists singing ‘*Ossu*’, ‘another yell [...] but *ossu* is more like a greeting when you face your opponent before fighting’ (Duane Metal, 2016a, 2’21”–2’31”). Within this combative setting, Su-metal sings about fighting through adversity: ‘let’s fight on even if we get sad and unable to stand up’ (Enki, 2015b, 1’10”–1’17”), ‘Even if our spirits are broken, let’s confront it!’ (1’52”–2’03”). In this sense, ‘KARATE’s lyrics go hand in hand with so many of the words written by “proper” metal bands. [...] What’s more metal than singing about fighting over the top of killer riffs?’ (Morton, 2016).

²¹*Oshikura Manju* is a ‘Japanese children’s game. Basically the players just push each other. Usually it is played in winter to get warm’ (Enki, 2016b).

Summary and Conclusion

At first glance, Babymetal can seem a confusing mixture of ostensibly contrasting aesthetics and genre signifiers, at turns heavy and cute, adult males and young girls. The music video for *Gimme Chocolate!!* does little to dispel the perplexing combination of styles – is this pop music with a metal band or metal music with pop singers? From a Western perspective, it would seem, an additional layer of intrigue arises from the foreignness of the music. Once identified as Japanese, Babymetal's peculiarity can be explained away through the Orientalising narrative of 'weird Japan' and a surface-level knowledge of *kawaii* and *aidoru*. As a viral novelty act, Babymetal spurred much discussion when Western audiences first encountered them online, but outside a core fanbase few took the band seriously as metal (or, in fact, as idol).

To put it crudely, from their beginnings as a sub-unit of the Sakura Gakuin idol group, Babymetal have transformed into a bona fide metal band; but this oversimplification neglects the subversive nature of Babymetal. In reality, Babymetal were never an idol group in the traditional sense of intertextual media entities, and given their age, gender, and unashamed constructedness, the band were never likely to be accepted by a sizable portion of metal fans. Instead, Babymetal combine practices and aesthetics from both idol and metal musical traditions, subverting both in the process. As Plourde contends, 'the band draw on a complex set of musical genres, performance styles, and heavy metal tropes and imagery that confound both idol pop and heavy metal genre conventions' (2018, p. 294).

On their first album, a diverse collection of songs chronicling their history to that point, Babymetal employ wordplay and lyrical themes of childishness and adolescence drawn primarily from idol music. In *BABYMETAL DEATH*, the band play with similarities in pronunciation between '*desu*', a common word in Japanese, and 'death', a common word in metal. In other songs, Babymetal invoke metal tropes of mythological creatures adapted to a typical idol setting, situating the *yōkai* of Japanese folklore as part of girlhood (in *Megitsune*) and the playground (in *Catch Me If You Can*). Over the course of *Metal Resistance* (2016), especially when compared to the band's debut album, Babymetal position themselves as more open to an international metal audience. The expanded use of English lyrics aligns Babymetal with the global metal scene, but also gestures towards traditional Japanese conceptions of metal music. Bar two or three songs, the album's overarching theme of collective resistance marks a departure from typical idol content. Lyrics to songs like *GJ!* and *Meta Taro* amalgamate topics from idol and metal, the former associating Japanese urban life with metal concerts, the latter combining folk metal tropes with those of Japanese popular culture in the form of a metal superhero. Finally, *KARATE* demonstrates Babymetal's unique integration of disparate themes: at once stereotypically Japanese in its use of martial arts yells and, at the same time, stereotypically metal in its focus on fighting and perseverance.

Rather than read these changes from one album to the next as a cynical marketing strategy or attempt to diminish Babymetal's Japanese identity and audience, we can observe a band further developing their generic synthesis. Interpreted this way, both *Babymetal* and *Metal Resistance* are phases in Babymetal's ongoing negotiation of East and West, idol and metal.

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Part V

Ancient Languages and Mythology

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Chapter 13

Nata vimpi curmi da: Dead Languages and Primordial Nationalisms in Folk Metal Music

Simon Trafford

Abstract

Folk metal is an immensely varied genre but an interest in the past in general, and the remote barbarian past, in particular, is a universal and defining characteristic. Performers evoke history in a number of ways, including musical sound, visual imagery, and lyrical subject matter, but the most emphatic tactic adopted (albeit by a minority of bands) is by the use of lyrics in dead languages (defined as those with no speakers for whom they are a mother tongue). Europe has many of these, of which much the most prestigious is Latin; folk metal bands, however, tend to use one or other of the vernacular languages, invariably that spoken during the earliest and formative period of their own national group. This practice of singing in dead languages originated in 1994 with the Norwegian band Enslaved, in a period in which extreme metal bands were self-consciously rejecting English – pop music’s dominant tongue – in an attempt to distance themselves from what they saw as inauthentic neo-liberal Anglo-American cultural hegemony. From its beginnings, it had strongly patriotic and nationalistic overtones but it is argued that the ancient texts from which lyrics are taken also acquire a quasi-religious character for listeners, not least because of the occulted and numinous air imparted by the opaqueness of the language. The acts that have most often composed lyrics in dead languages have been Scandinavian – singing in Old Norse – but the most popular act that currently engages in it is Eluveitie, from Switzerland, who, whilst mostly performing in modern English, include at least one song on every album in reconstructed ‘Gaulish’. This linguistic strategy is at once a means of locating Eluveitie within the ‘code’ of folk metal, a method of

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acquiring the sub-cultural capital associated with ‘authenticity’, and an opportunity to align themselves with internationally-familiar and popular ‘Celtic’ identity and sensibilities.

Keywords: Dead languages; Gaulish; folk metal; Eluveitie; Old Norse; nationalism

Introduction

Folk metal is a spectacularly diverse (and diversely spectacular) genre. Musically it is immensely varied: there is certainly not a single and distinctive folk metal ‘sound’ that unites all those bands who might be described by the term, nor is there a unity in philosophical, political and spiritual outlook, in typical appearance, or in the seriousness with which bands and audiences treat their material (Weinstein, 2013, pp. 58–59; also Spracklen, 2015). Indeed, there is scarcely a consensus on the name by which the genre should be known: ‘folk metal’ is popular (and will be used here), but ‘pagan metal’ is also often encountered (and some would argue that the two names actually describe distinct, but closely-related categories) (cf. Weinstein, 2013, p. 59, pp. 64–65). Nor is the exact nature of folk metal’s relationship with other closely related – indeed overlapping – genres such as Viking metal or mittelaltermusik¹ at all clear: there are those who would lump them all together as a meta-genre, while others might insist upon the abiding and perceptible differences between them (Trafford, 2020).

What all folk metal bands do have in common, though, is an interest in the past, and particularly in trying to evoke an exotic past that contrasts with, and can be used to comment upon, the present. Sometimes this taste for the historical amounts to little more than escapism – the opportunity to be transported by a song to a more magical and thrilling time – or the expression of a nostalgic longing for the supposed virtues, charms, or excitements of a now-lost golden age. But folk metal is often instrumentalised in a more profound way, operating effectively as both an exhortation of the alleged vices of the present and a manifesto for the restoration of the claimed virtues of the past: political, cultural, spiritual, or racial.² Whatever the eventual intent, folk metal bands seem to adopt four main approaches to evoking the past. All folk metal performers deploy at least one of these tactics and most combine several. They are as follows:

¹Mittelaltermusik is a blend of folk, rock/metal and early music popular in Germany and central Europe and most frequently associated with medieval markets (Mittelaltermärkte). Prominent acts include Corvus Corax, In Extremo and Subway to Sally, among many others (Winick, 2006, 2007, 2008; Yri, 2019).

²Cf. Spracklen (2015), which puts forward a convincing case that whiteness and traditional gender norms are the central ‘message’ of folk metal, a view certainly not dismantled by the subsequent popularity of heavily Orientalist east Asian folk metal bands such as Tengger Cavalry or The Hu.

1. *Song themes and lyrics*: More or less every folk metal band uses the words of their songs to summon up images of past cultures, most often those of the European Middle Ages. Songs can narrate complete and developed stories, such as the depictions of medieval Scandinavians travelling the river route through Russia to Constantinople that make up Turisas's concept album 'The Varangian Way' (see Vigier, in this volume, Chapter 6). Others merely make passing allusions to historical people, ideas, or activities (often weapons, raids or diagnostic material culture such as longships): these are sufficient to locate the action in a familiar – and significance-bearing – historical milieu for the listener, whilst not requiring further fleshing out or explanation (Traf-ford, 2020). Very frequently the focus is upon thrilling stories of battle and violence, but the mythological heroes, gods and goddesses of pre-Christian Europe are also an abundantly popular subject for such bands as Cruachan (who have reflected extensively upon Irish mythology), Amorphis and Moon-sorrow (Finnish bands who draw upon the Kalevala) or Heidevolk (from the Netherlands and concentrating upon Germanic mythology) (Ashby & Scho-field, 2015; Kallioniemi & Kärki, 2009). Indeed, it is practically unknown to encounter a folk metal band that does not make considerable play with pagan mythology (Weinstein, 2013). Very nearly as ubiquitous, though, are lyrics that evoke the natural world – especially in its more pristine, pre-industrial, form.
2. *Musical sound*: Many bands try to make their music sound in some sense 'old'; there are various ways in which this can be done. One way, of course, is to use melodies that are genuinely ancient or traditional; this is a tactic employed by historicising bands from outside the folk metal scene such as The Mediae-val Baebes or Dead Can Dance, but is also sometimes encountered amongst Mittelalter artists such as Faun or folk metal acts such as Týr or Eluveitie. Far more common among folk metal bands proper, though, is the practice of composing their own original music but incorporating 'folk' or ancient instruments or compositional devices that sound suitably antiquated: this is almost a defining characteristic of the genre and examples are too many to number. Authenticity to an original, it should be noted, is rarely as important as producing something that sounds right.
3. *Appearance and visual imagery*: Clothes, hairstyles, tattoos, jewellery, weapons, and other paraphernalia worn or used by performers are amongst the most common and easiest ways of signalling the past; indeed, it seems undeniable that all the dressing up is, for both performers and audiences, one of the principal attractions of the scene. Alongside personal appearance, though, many other sites of visual display can be used to indicate a band's historicising inclinations: in album art, in publicity images, in stage sets, and backdrops and not least in the venues chosen for performance, which are sometimes historically meaningful in their own right, as evidenced by Wardruna's performances at the Oslo Vikingskibsmuseet 'Viking Ship Museum' or the holding of the Midgardsblot metal festival among the early medieval royal burial mounds at Borre in Norway.
4. *Language*: Arguably the most emphatic device of all deployed by folk metal performers to evoke the past is linguistic: specifically, a number of artists use

old-fashioned or completely dead languages for some or all of their songs. It is, for sure, a tactic which makes much greater demands both of performers and audiences than any other means of signalling the past, and it is by no means every folk metal band that chooses to use it. Yet it is a particularly characteristic and well-known feature of the genre, and it is to this habit that this chapter will be devoted.

Dead Language Usage

Having said that folk metal sometimes uses languages that are ‘dead’, it is essential to start by defining exactly what is meant by that. A ‘dead’ language is one that has no living users for whom it is a mother tongue, that is, one learnt as a child as one’s first language. Being dead need not mean that such languages are in all cases obscure, poorly understood or devoid of contemporary cultural significance. Indeed, Latin – perhaps the most prominent of European dead languages – retains considerable cultural currency by virtue of its traditional prestige as the language of the church, science, medicine and the law. It is still routinely taught at school in many countries and millions of people around the world can read and write it. Even those who cannot are normally aware of its appearance, morphology, and cultural significance as a consequence of its appearance in public inscriptions and mottoes, and through frequent allusions in popular culture (Leonhardt, 2013; Waquet, 2001). Latin, however, is an exception. The other dead languages of Europe – the vernacular tongues of the common people – do not have Latin’s prestige or scholarly associations and as a result have far less of a presence in present-day cultural discourse. They are seldom taught in schools, rarely appear in inscriptions or other widely visible contexts and are, for the most part, the rather rarefied preserve of a tiny number of specialist academics in universities. Of course, in many cases these languages are actually the defunct older counterparts of modern European languages that are very much alive and widely spoken in the present day, but linguistic change over the centuries renders the antique version incomprehensible to the untutored modern speaker.

Sometimes relationships between dead languages and their modern manifestations can be more complex. Old Norse is a case in point. This was the language of the Vikings and is especially favoured by folk metal bands as a result. Old Norse is ancestral to all the modern Scandinavian tongues, but the continental Scandinavian languages – Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian – have undergone change sufficient that most speakers cannot easily understand Old Norse. The present-day languages of Iceland and (to a lesser extent) the Faroe Islands, however, have not altered so much and speakers of the modern languages can normally manage Old Norse without too much difficulty (Haugen, 1976). Old Norse is in the extraordinary position, therefore, of being at once a living and a dead language according to how it is considered, a fact which has been exploited, as will be seen below, by the Faroese band Týr.

Singing in dead languages, it should be emphasised, is by no means a habit exclusively of folk metal performers. Pop and rock performers of all types and genres have, for instance, made use of Latin: indeed, it is so common that there is

even a Wikipedia page ‘List of songs with Latin lyrics’ (Wikipedia n.d., see also Cecchini et al. in this volume, Chapter 15). This should occasion no surprise: with all of its associations – as the language of Rome, of scholarship up to the eighteenth century and of Catholicism to the twentieth century– Latin is both immensely prestigious and semantically incredibly rich. Pop artists as various as ABBA, Bauhaus, Enya, and Little Mix have on occasion exploited its ability to conjure ideas of Otherness, antiquity, spirituality, or occulted learning (whilst also revelling in the classiness that lyrics in Latin inevitably impart) (see e.g. Fast, 2000; Yri, 2008). For most of these artists, Latin is only a rare indulgence, used once or twice amid a catalogue of songs otherwise in English to conjure a special effect, but for a select group of performers Latin songs make up a significant part of their repertoire. The likes of Dead Can Dance or the Mediaeval Baebes have quarried the (classical) Early Music canon extensively for authentic medieval or early modern compositions to adapt and present to popular music audiences (Yri, 2008). In Germany, there has been a particular flourishing of adoption of this sort by bands associated with the *Mittelalter Musik* scene such as Corvus Corax and In Extremo: these performers often make a particular virtue of extravagant displays of polyglot bravura, with songs not just in Latin but a host of dead European languages (Winick, 2006, 2007, 2008; Yri 2019). Corvus Corax, to take but one example, regularly sing in Latin, Old and Middle French and a variety of extinct and living German dialects with occasional songs with still farther-flung languages; one recent album (‘Sverker’) flourishes songs in Old Norse, Danish, Old and Middle Irish, and modern German and English (Yri, 2019).

Dead language use in the folk metal scene proper is of a rather different sort. Latin is seldom deployed; on the contrary, when folk metal bands use dead languages as a rule they use one, vernacular, language, namely that associated with their own nation of origin in its earliest and formative period. It is particularly notable that the dead languages of choice for folk metal bands are almost never the relatively recent later medieval forms but almost invariably the languages of the remote past, frequently the first millennium CE or earlier, traditionally seen as Europe’s ethnogenetic period, in which the nations of the continent first emerged. The point is not, as it is with the *Mittelalter* bands’ employment of dead languages, to emphasise the breadth and diversity of their influences, but rather to place the performers in a very firm relationship with the earliest and most fundamental period in the emergence of their own ethnic group. This emphasis on barbarian vernaculars marks folk metal out from all other users of dead languages in pop music: indeed, it has become one of the distinctive ways by which folk metal can be recognised as such, a norm by which bands can mark their membership of that particular scene. That is not, though, to say that it is by any means ubiquitous within the genre: some folk metal bands never sing in an ancient language, and even those that do rarely use it for the majority of their material. On the whole, they will tend to use either English or their own native language in its present-day form for most of their songs, reserving the ancient or medieval tongues for occasions when particularly conspicuous effects are called for. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to say that dead language use is widely recognised as a typical and constitutive element of the folk metal formula. One measure, perhaps, of the way

in which archaising linguistic play is seen as normal is the word *kvlt*, used within extreme metal circles as a term of mocking approbation for anything perceived to possess the attributes (highly desirable within the culture) of being eclectic, obscure, and underground. Something seen to possess these qualities in abundance might be said to be *tr00 kvlt and nekro*. The v-shape to the u is surely an allusion – albeit an incorrect one – to pre-modern orthographic norms, and indicative, especially in this knowing context, of the way in which historically based linguistic difference is understood to be intrinsic to the genre (Trafford, 2020).

Having asserted that singing in dead languages is a fundamental – though not indispensable – component of folk metal, it is natural to ask why this might be. The disadvantages of the habit are many and obvious. The practice makes substantial demands of the performer: they must either find appropriate texts, poems, or songs from ancient literature to commandeer or – much harder – compose them themselves. It hardly asks less of the listener than the performer, for it breaks one of the fundamental rules of conventional pop, which dictates that lyrics should be catchy or tell a story to attract an audience to the song and, hopefully, encourage them to purchase it. In the face of such disincentives, the compensating advantages of using dead languages must clearly be substantial, and it is with this subject that the rest of this chapter will deal. First, the origins of the practice will be explored: to make sense of the practice, it is essential to understand the extremely specific sub-cultural context in which it arose. The focus will then shift to explaining how a number of bands used dead languages to reinforce their political, patriotic, and spiritual messages over the course of the 1990s and early twenty-first century. Most of these bands were Scandinavian and so Old Norse (or variants thereof) was generally the target of their linguistic eclecticism. Coming to the present, though, by far the biggest band to use dead languages is not an Old Norse-using Viking metal band, but Eluveitie, a Swiss act who sing in a reconstructed ‘Gaulish’ language: their example sheds a new and very different light on the practice and they will be examined in depth.

***Rúnar munt þú finna*³: Viking Metal and Old Norse**

It is easy to pinpoint the moment at which the idea of singing songs in antique tongues became embedded as a part of the discourse of folk metal: the release in 1994 of the Norwegian band Enslaved’s first full album *Vikingligr Veldi* ‘Glorious Viking Square’ (Enslaved, 1994a). One of the album’s five songs is an instrumental, but the rest all have lyrics that are linguistically exotic in one way or another. One track, *Heimdallr*, takes its lyrics verbatim from Snorri Sturluson’s Old Norse description of the god Heimdall in Chapter 27 of *Gylfaginning*, the second part of the *Prose Edda* of c.1220 (Snorri, 2008). The others have lyrics composed by the band and are rich with Norse gods, brooding skies, black forests, prowling wolves, and so on. As performed on the album, these are in modern Icelandic, which the band have acknowledged in interviews as an attempt at archaism (Decibel, 2019).

³‘Runes shalt thou find’: Hávamál, stanza 142.

Icelandic is, for sure, much closer to Old Norse than was the band members' own west Norwegian dialects, and it seems likely that it was much easier for the band – teenagers at that time – to find someone who could translate into contemporary Icelandic for them than to employ a scholar to render their words into Old Norse (Pilo, 2018, p. 50; *World Metal Domination*, 2016).

Vikingligr Veldi is one of the foundational statements of Viking Metal: it helped to establish a blueprint for the genre as a whole, and also for folk metal as that emerged in the 1990s and later. The presence of ancient languages in such a prominent and influential location ensured that they became a part of the cultural idiom of the genre; any band that used them placed themselves in a tradition recognisably handed down from Enslaved. To understand why Enslaved had used Old Norse in the first place, though, the very specific sub-cultural context must be borne strongly in mind. As is well-known, the early 1990s saw the construction of the template for the new extreme metal scene in various sites around the world, but most importantly in Scandinavia (Kahn-Harris, 2007). A central part of the ideology of this new scene was a rejection of – indeed, a loathing for – many of the established norms of commercial pop and rock, including, but by no means limited to, the pervasive use of the English language. Modern local languages were increasingly deployed by extreme metal bands in their songs as a way of stating distance from and opposition to what was seen as one of the keys to becoming commercially successful: adherence to a flattening neo-liberal Anglo-American hegemony over global culture (Kahn-Harris, 2000, pp. 20ff.; Weinstein, 2013, pp. 65–68). This is the paramount context in which Enslaved's linguistic eclecticism should be understood: using Old Norse (and the Icelandic which stood in for it) rather than modern Norwegian was, in a way, simply an example of heavy metal culture's habit of taking things to extremes, as Enslaved went one step further than all the rest in rejecting easy commerciality. But by so doing the band also acquired considerable amounts of what Keith Kahn-Harris calls 'transgressive subcultural capital', that is respect within the scene for the ability to think radically, to reject those ways of doing things that are widely seen as normal and altogether to stay true to oneself and one's artistic muse (Kahn-Harris, 2007, pp. 121–139). Precisely because singing in Old Norse was a wildly impractical gesture that made no sense within the terms of traditional metal, it became a valuable indication of Enslaved's authenticity and commitment both to the Vikings and to the principles of extreme metal. That said, it should be noted that the extremely harsh shrieked and grunted style of singing employed by Enslaved at the time meant that it was in any case more-or-less impossible simply by listening to understand what they were singing: their audience was not significantly less likely to be able to comprehend the meaning of the words rendered in Old Norse than if the lyrics had been in a modern language (cf. Weinstein, 2013, p. 67). Enslaved's ancient languages were to be consumed as much by looking at the lyrics printed on the sleeve as by listening to them.

To use Old Norse and Icelandic was, for sure, a gesture of resistance to global neo-liberalism and the dominance of English, but it was also a fundamentally nationalistic statement. With *Vikingligr Veldi*, Enslaved were not just expressing enthusiasm for their heroes, the Vikings, but claiming kinship with them by virtue

of their own Norwegian nationality; deploying Old Norse was, among other things, a way of underlining that claim. Enslaved positioned themselves as using the language of what they and their fans saw as both the formative and the most glorious period of Scandinavian history (von Helden, 2017). Compared with the modern languages of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, which have been heavily influenced by other European tongues (Haugen, 1976), Old Norse (and to a lesser degree, Icelandic) seemed pure and primal, distilling the essence of the heroic North. By using it, the band dissociated themselves from the Scandinavian-ness of the present day, compromised and diluted as it was through contact with Christianity and other external influences, and instead asserted an atavistic identity aligned with the unsullied, raw, and primordial Nordic past: they were, in a phrase, none more Scandinavian.

One further point must be made about *Vikingligr Veldi*, concerning the use in the song *Heimdallr* of the authentic medieval text from Snorri's *Prose Edda*. This set another important precedent for folk metal: it is probably reasonable to say that most bands who have followed in Enslaved's footsteps by using ancient languages have tended to adopt this approach – appropriating their material from extant ancient texts – rather than emulating the other way in which dead languages were deployed on *Vikingligr Veldi*: original composition and translation. On a practical level, to write extended and meaningful texts in an ancient language requires considerable linguistic skill and is normally (though not always) beyond the easy reach of most band members. But there are also less prosaic reasons to prefer ancient texts to newly composed ones: they can seem to carry their own authenticity, representing direct and unmediated contact with the desired 'real' past. Moreover, as in the case of Enslaved's *Heimdallr* (Enslaved, 1994b), the texts in question often have an overtly spiritual quality: the *Prose Edda* from which it is taken (Snorri, 2008), though written by a Christian in an unambiguously Christian culture, is one of the principal sources for the familiar stories of the Norse pantheon and religion and – for that substantial section of the listening audience that avers some manner of faith in Norse paganism – constitutes a sacred text (Mørk, 2011).

Following on from Enslaved's lead, a number of other bands have used Old Norse lyrics. Among the most conspicuous of these was the Norwegian band Burzum, the one-man project of Kristian 'Varg' Vikernes, infamous for his involvement in the church-burnings associated with the early second wave of black metal and especially for his murder of Øystein 'Euronymous' Aarseth in 1993 (Baddeley, 1999, pp. 191–96; Hagen, 2011). Whilst in jail for his crimes he released a dark ambient album *Dauði Baldrs* 'Baldr's Death' (Burzum, 1997) that, though purely instrumental, set out its narrative – the story of the death of the god Baldr – in extended sleeve notes taken wholesale from *Gylfaginning* and provided in Old Norse. Vikernes/Burzum's other albums were generally in (modern) German, English, or Norwegian, but a later album, *Umskiptar* 'Metamorphoses' (Burzum, 2012), issued some while after Vikernes's release from prison, took all its words directly from *Völuspá*, the first section of the *Poetic Edda*, preserved in the Codex Regius of c.1270 (Dronke, 1997). This deployment of ancient language should be seen in the context of Vikernes's determinedly racist political and

spiritual beliefs. For his message of militantly anti-Christian Norse neo-paganism and virulent white supremacism, Old Norse texts in the original were the perfect medium: by articulating these traces of an allegedly autochthonous Scandinavian culture dating to a period supposedly free of external influences, Vikernes sought to link himself and his fans directly with that past, whilst at the same time emphasising its exclusive and occulted character by the Otherness and difficulty of its language (cf. Hoad, 2013). Vikernes's employment, alongside Old Norse, of modern German (which still retains associations with the Second World War and Nazism) may point to another element of his linguistic strategy to underline his political ideology.

A rather more eclectic case of linguistic archaising is that of the band Týr, formed in 1998 in Copenhagen, although notably making great play of the Faroese origins of several of its members (Spracklen, 2015). Musically, they play a relatively straightforward and traditional heavy metal, but they are characterised by an obsession with early medieval Scandinavian culture that places them solidly in the Viking Metal scene (Ashby & Schofield, 2015; Hoad, 2013; Spracklen, 2015). What is most interesting about them, though, is the way in which they activate their Faroese identity as a selling point, with language actively exploited in support. Most of their songs are, to be sure, in English, but every album includes at least one song based upon one or other of the *kvæði*, traditional Faroese ballads collected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Christensen, 2019). The words of the *kvæði* are not generally in Old Norse as such, but rather in Faroese, a Scandinavian language which, as we have seen, retains far more features in common with Old Norse than do the Scandinavian languages of continental Europe (Haugen, 1976). Furthermore, it is often claimed that the folk practice of *kvæði* performance in the Faroe Islands is a living and continuous tradition reaching back at least to the Middle Ages, if not to the Viking Age itself. On this basis, Týr are able to use their *kvæði*-based songs as a distinctive selling-point, a guarantee of their authenticity that marks them out from their peers. They operate, in effect, a dual linguistic strategy: the majority of their songs are in English (with clear vocals), maximising their reach and international appeal, but their use of traditional material sung in a language which is inaccessible to practically everyone who is not Faroese underlines an Otherness which is highly localised and unusual and which, by virtue of the apparent special connection of both the *kvæði* and the Faroese language to Viking Age culture, seems also to promise a closer and more authentic relationship with the desired past (Trafford, 2020, cf. Hoad, 2013).

Taking one last example, in the relatively recent past (from 2009 onwards) particularly striking use of Old Norse language has been made by Wardruna, a band that in musical sound has scant relation to metal, but that nevertheless sits comfortably on concert and festival bills alongside more conventional folk metal acts. Partly, this is as a result of its pedigree: two of its principal original members were previously in the influential black metal band Gorgoroth. But it is also the consequence of the band's avowed emphasis on Norwegian identity and ancient culture, a commitment that is given vastly more heft by the fact that their music has been employed extensively in the very successful

History Channel tv series *Vikings*.⁴ Wardruna use both Old Norse and modern Norwegian dialects, even mixing the two in the same song on one occasion: *Helvegen* ‘The way to Hel’ (Wardruna, 2013), a song that muses upon the inevitability of death is mostly in Norwegian but turns at the end to two famous stanzas known from *Gestaþáttur*, the ‘Guest’s chapter’ from *Hávamál* (preserved in the thirteenth-century Codex Regius), but which are also related to *Hákonarmál*, a skaldic poem of the tenth century:

*Deyr fê deyja frændur,
deyr sjálfur ið sama;
en orðstír
deyr aldregi
hveim er sér góðan getur.*

*Deyr fê,
deyja frændur,
deyr sjálfur ið sama.
Ég veit einn,
að aldrei deyr;
dómur um dauðan hvern.*

Cattle die, kindred die,
Every man is mortal:
But the good name never dies
Of one who has done well.

Cattle die, kindred die,
Every man is mortal:
But I know one thing that never dies,
The glory of the great dead.

The point of the switch in languages whilst continuing to reflect upon the same subject matter is that death is as unavoidable and its unwelcome inevitability is as much to be wrestled with in the present as it was in the Viking Age. The transition from modern to ancient language is marked by a change in the music: from a medium-paced polyphony with multiple voices and instrumental accompaniment to a single male voice chanting much more slowly and simply against a background of falling rain. Even to a non-speaker of Scandinavian languages, the change is very evident: the section with words in Old Norse has an austere, otherworldly quality that demarcates it as a numinous Other. Yet, at the same time, its subject matter is almost exactly the same as that of the modern-language sections of the song. With the lyrics widely available online

⁴Vikings (History Channel). First broadcast on March 3, 2013, the series concluded in 2020 after six seasons. Hardwick and Lister (2019) examine the medievalism of the series.

both in the original and in English translation, the central point of the song is that there is a profound Otherness to ancient Norse society, but that it is nevertheless important to recognise that it was confronted with fundamental human issues that remain relevant in the present, and that the ways in which it attempted to engage with them can inform the way the modern age deals with them. As Einar Selvik, Wardruna's principal driving force, said in introducing *Helvegen* at a festival in Oregon:

I'm gonna play a song about death, about dying, about honouring those who have been there before, about crossing over and about letting go. One of the reasons why I do Wardruna is because ... before ... we had songs for everything: we had songs for sewing, we had songs for reaping, we had songs when people were dying, when people were born. People were sat at your bed singing you over to the other side for days ... and ... when I wrote this song the thought behind it was 'who's gonna sing me?'. It's not about re-enactment. The old songs are gone. We need to make new ones, that's the whole point with Wardruna. (Selvik, 2015)

Eluveitie

While it is certainly the case that more folk metal bands use Old Norse than any other ancient or medieval language, the most prominent present-day proponents of singing in dead languages are nevertheless not from Scandinavia and take an entirely different direction. This is the Swiss band Eluveitie. Founded in Zurich in 2002; they have produced eight studio albums so far, as well as various EPs and live albums. With well over 800,000 'likes' on Facebook, they are far and away the most popular band that regularly sings in an ancient language; by comparison, Wardruna, despite all their *Vikings*-inspired popularity, can only muster just over 200,000 Facebook 'likes'. Although nominally a band, Eluveitie actually are very largely the creation and project of one man: Chrigel Glanzmann, a Swiss German speaker from Basel, who writes and arranges their material and who is the one consistent factor among a changing cast of musicians (Spracklen, 2015). Musically, they follow a hybrid formula typical of folk metal, using heavy guitars and drums melded with the musical staples of 'Celtic' folk music since its 1960s efflorescence: tin whistles, bodhráns (the traditional Irish goatskin drum), fiddles, and bagpipes, together with the odd hurdy-gurdy. Vocals are a mixture of clear female voices and Glanzmann's death metal-style grunts and shrieks. Many of their melodies are borrowed from traditional Irish, Scottish, and Breton tunes either directly or at the second hand via the likes of Alan Stivell and other performers from the Celtic folk 'revival' of the 1960s and 1970s; Eluveitie's biggest hit, *Inis Mona* 'The Island of Mona' (from *Slania*, 2008), for instance, takes its tune from Stivell's 1972 single *Tri Martolod* (from *À l'Olympia*, 1972), itself a re-interpretation of an eighteenth-century Breton folk song. They position themselves carefully as Swiss patriots (whilst going out of their way also to identify with groups opposed to racism within the metal scene). Their songs deal mostly

with Celtic mythology, the natural beauties of Switzerland, the virtues of her people and, in particular, the struggles of the ancient Helvetii against Rome, which are the subject of a complete concept album, *Helvetios* (Eluveitie, 2012), as well as numerous of their other songs. As for the language of their material, the majority of their output is in English, but they also make a great play of their songs in what they like to call ‘Gaulish’, although, as will emerge, this description is not one that should be accepted uncritically. Every one of their albums has at least one song in the language, and indeed every song on their 2009 album *Evocation I: The Arcane Dominion* was in ‘Gaulish’.

Eluveitie’s linguistic strategy is striking and a defining feature of their identity; in the context of the current discussion, it has a number of interesting points that demand further consideration. First, the point needs to be made that academic knowledge of the historical Gaulish language is fragmentary in the extreme. The little that is known of it comes from a very limited corpus (around 900 items) of mostly very short inscriptions of quite specific types – funerary tributes, curses, graffiti, coin legends, and so on – which are completely inadequate to convey anything more than a general sense of the language to modern philological scholarship (Eska & Ellis Evans, 1993; Stifter, 2008). The samples of the language that they preserve can in no way be regarded as characteristic of the language as it was generally spoken, but are, on the contrary, formulaic, stereotyped, and either official or ritualised to a significant degree. What is largely absent are longer texts which might give a better representation of the language as used for more normal and less stylised purposes, or which record vocabulary of the more commonplace and everyday sort that is necessary for the composition of songs. Furthermore, there are none of the big detailed ‘sacred’ texts about the gods, ethics or morality that, as we have seen, lend themselves particularly well to the making of folk metal songs. Gaulish does not in any meaningful sense survive even as a ‘dead’ language, but can only be reconstructed by guesswork and analogy with those Celtic languages that do survive in a less fragmentary form, such as Irish, Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, and Breton. This is hard work, to be undertaken only by an expert, and its results are speculative and conjectural at best. In Eluveitie’s case, they did indeed use a number of lyrics written by Dr David Stifter, then of the University of Vienna and now Professor of Old Irish at Maynooth.⁵

The second point to make is that Eluveitie’s relationship with Switzerland and Swiss history is not as straightforward as it may at first appear, particularly when refracted through this linguistic lens. Modern Switzerland is, of course,

⁵In an informative series of posts dated December 11, 2009 and formerly (but apparently no longer) available on the forums on Eluveitie’s website, Stifter explained the background to some of the songs used by Glanzmann and Eluveitie, expressly stating that ‘The vocabulary and the grammar found on [surviving Gaulish] texts is not sufficient to creatively write songs. So what I had to do is to make educated guesses what certain words and constructions would most probably have looked like in that period’. His lyrics were composed to some degree light-heartedly and as an intellectual exercise in what might be done.

linguistically complex, with four tongues spoken – French, German, Italian, and Romansh – but none of these are related to Gaulish, a language which probably did not survive even in its strongest redoubts in France beyond the tenth century AD and which was certainly completely dead in Switzerland long before that (Stifter, 2008). Unlike many European nations, for whom linguistic unity has been an important pillar in the sense of a cohering identity, Swiss nationalism has not placed any great premium upon language and certainly not upon an ethnogenetic moment in the first millennium in which the ‘Swiss’ emerged as a discernible unit defined by a single language. For Eluveitie to couch their stories about early Switzerland in ‘Gaulish’ is interesting, for, if anything, it actually lessens the sense of national or ethnic continuity to the present.

There is a further point to make about Eluveitie’s expression of Swiss nationalism through evocation of barbarian struggle against the Romans, for the dominant historiographical origin myth of the Swiss does not in fact lie in primeval barbarians such as the Helvetii, but actually with the legendary figure William Tell and rebellion against the Hapsburgs in the fourteenth century and later (Church & Head, 2013), a set of stories which are notably entirely absent from Eluveitie’s oeuvre. The band thus pull off the curious feat of being avowed Swiss patriots who never mention the central figure in the traditional story of the origins of Switzerland. Instead, Eluveitie’s mythos is centred around the Helvetii, whose contribution to Switzerland, at least within traditional national historiography, is far more attenuated: any concept of Switzerland or a Swiss people dates to the fourteenth century CE at the absolute earliest, some 1,400 years after encounters between the Helvetii and Caesar (Church & Head, 2013). Why do Eluveitie eschew the conventional Swiss patriotic myth for one that is to a large extent of their own devising? The answer lies in the fact that – despite the great play of authenticity, not to mention undoubted scholarship, that has gone into researching and constructing the ‘Gaulish’ songs Eluveitie sing – their primary reference is not to Switzerland’s past or, in fact, to the past at all, but to other examples of supposed historicising within the folk metal genre (in this sense they are a notable example of what Andrew Elliott has called a ‘banal medievalism’ (Elliott, 2017)). It is because they are obeying one of the tropes of folk metal – established by Viking metal – that the nation is born in a struggle of heroic pagan barbarians defending their old gods against menacing incomers (cf. Trafford, 2013). In the case of Viking metal, Christians are the incoming authority figures who must be struggled against, but this formula would be hard to apply in Switzerland: the process of Christian conversion was far earlier there and the inhabitants were never especially noted for any particular militancy towards Christian monasteries of the sort for which the Vikings are popularly renowned. Instead, therefore, Eluveitie and Chrigel Glanzmann have Celts/Gauls fighting against Romans: Romans here stand in for Christians but also all the other authority figures – parents, teachers, employers, politicians, and all the other guardians of contemporary dull civil society – who might stop Eluveitie fans from having the sort of uproarious enjoyable barbarous times that they crave (cf. Trafford, 2013, pp. 306–307). It also provides a narrative of romantic struggle of pagan barbarians against an overwhelming enemy of a sort that is already comfortably familiar to consumers of folk metal from many

other bands who have told similar stories, rather than the historical fight between the Swiss cantons and the Hapsburgs, which does not enjoy the same sort of ready popular recognition among international audiences or non-historians. Still more unhelpfully for its use in a folk metal context, the war between the Swiss and the Hapsburgs was a struggle of Christians against Christians. For all the heroic nationalist virtues of William Tell, his Christianity renders him a less than ideal candidate for valorisation in a folk metal context.

A final point to make is that identification across time with the *Helvetii* affords Eluveitie a comfortable berth in that most malleable and well known of ancient European identities, Celticism (on which see [Ortenberg, 2006](#), pp. 119–142). This has a number of pleasing attributes for the band: first, the Celts have a firmly established connection in popular culture with new-age and alternative spirituality. Simply evoking the Celts instantly provides access to this ready-made reservoir of quasi-religious associations. Second, they provide a degree of international reach. It is extremely well established in the popular imagination that practically all of western Europe was at one time or another occupied by ‘Celts’ – of course, historians, archaeologists, and philologists have all raised very strident questions about the validity or meaningfulness of ‘Celtic’ as a cultural or ethnic indicator – but that has done practically nothing to shift the idea of Celticism as a significant component of the identity of peoples of the British Isles, France, Iberia, and a huge area of central Europe ([Dietler, 1994](#); [James, 1999](#)). The audience which can potentially look back to the Celts as their ancestors is enormous (and, of course, not narrowly Swiss). A third way in which wrapping themselves in a Celtic identity serves the purposes of the band is due to its associations with romantic struggle and resistance. More or less every one of the areas in which Celtic identity has been most emphasised – Brittany in France, and Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Cornwall in the British Isles – can be portrayed with varying degrees of justice as sites of conflict in which an oppressed national or regional group is or has been engaged in a long-term struggle to retain its identity and independence against a larger and oppressive metropolitan outsider ([James, 1999](#)). It is surely as an attempt to invoke this oppressed minority status that the English-language voiceover that bookends Eluveitie’s epic concept album *Helvetios* (Eluveitie, 2012) should be understood. The album tells the story of Julius Caesar’s Gallic Wars, but begins and ends with a spoken word section in a rural Scottish accent performed by the Scottish actor Sandy Morton lamenting an ultimately unsuccessful war but celebrating a spirit and culture undaunted by defeat:

When I reminisce about all those years of tribulation, I mostly
remember

Our songs. We died, and our blood seeped away on the battlefields;
but our

Songs survived, together with those of us that returned. And as
they too

Will die one day, our songs will live on, and will be sung by our children,

And by our children's children. This is how we will be remembered.
This is

Who we were. (Eluveitie, *Epilogue* on the album *Helvetios*, 2012)

Whilst not itself in an ancient language, this passage demonstrates another way in which Eluveitie manipulate their linguistic choices to produce effects that resonate within popular culture: The Scottish accent as an expression of a supposedly subaltern identity struggling against a dominant neighbour has seen repetition across film and TV, perhaps above all in the film *Braveheart* (1995), and provides a pre-fabricated and far more accessible means for Eluveitie to convey what they want Caesar's Gallic Wars to have meant for the conquered Helvetii/Gauls.

Conclusions

This chapter has considered the use of dead languages by folk metal performers, arguing that it is the most emphatic among the various means by which folk metal expresses its historicising impulses. While folk metal bands are by no means the only popular music performers to deploy ancient and defunct languages – taking advantage of their ability to conjure an exotic and desirable Otherness – various features of the way that they are used within folk metal are distinctive and peculiar to that scene, and, thus, are suggestive of the functions that the device performs within it.

Dead language use in folk metal needs to be understood above all as a product of the highly specific subcultural context in which it first arose: in the formative period of extreme metal in Norway in the early 1990s. Using Old Norse and Icelandic in their lyrics allowed Enslaved to mark themselves out as even more extreme (linguistically, at least) than their peers and to carve out a niche for themselves in a highly competitive market: while many bands signalled their rejection of the conventions and ideals of mainstream society and popular music by abandoning English for modern local languages, Enslaved went one step further and eschewed the present day altogether. By deploying the language of the Vikings, the band seemed to provide direct and unmediated access to the mental horizons of a group whose well-defined role in popular culture as romantic anti-establishment mavericks had long endeared them to heavy rock fans (who liked to see themselves in almost exactly the same mould) (Trafford & Pluskowski, 2007). At the same time, the practice also made a potent nationalist statement, for Enslaved were implicitly aligning themselves not with the compromised present but with a period that is both the most celebrated in Scandinavia's history and that was crucial to the very formation of Scandinavian identities. Furthermore, by presenting 'sacred' texts of Norse paganism in their original forms, an important spiritual appeal was added to the mix. Arguably, the very fact that these texts were in a language that few fans could easily understand may actually have been something of an advantage in this respect, for it

imparted difficulty, mystery and an appropriate sense of the numinous, all precisely the sorts of qualities desired by audiences seeking to escape the mundaneness of present-day life.

The prestige of Enslaved as early champions of Viking metal, and of *Viking-ligr Veldi* as one of its ur-texts, have been sufficient to ensure that the use of dead languages – though certainly not universal – became a staple of Viking metal and later of folk metal. A string of bands throughout the last 30 years have used dead languages both to signal their membership of the genre but also for a number of other purposes: in support of extreme nationalism and racism in the case of Burzum, but for more sympathetic artistic and commercial reasons by the likes of Týr or Wardruna. Nor do the acts considered here by any means exhaust the stock of bands that engage in the practice: languages such as ancient Greek (Kawir and Naer Mataron) or even Old Church Slavonic (Batushka) have also been pressed into service (Apergis, 2019; Dark Art Conspiracy, 2019). Consistently, though, the principal reference of the practice has not been the past at all, but has lain in the present, and with the observance of contemporary political and subcultural needs, as is perhaps most evidently the case with Eluveitie, its most popular current proponents, who have been so eager to employ a dead language in the way that a good folk metal band should that they have not allowed the prevailing absence of usable remains of the language in question to stand in their way. It remains, therefore, a ‘banal medievalism’, a device that seeks to legitimise modern practices and beliefs by constant endorsement and re-statement of other examples of modern cultural representations of a past that is itself lost and absent (Elliott, 2017).

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Chapter 14

***Verba Bestiae*: How Latin Conquered Heavy Metal**

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Abstract

The presence of Latin in heavy metal music ranges from full texts, intros, song and album titles to band names, pseudonyms, and literary quotations. This chapter sheds light on heavy metal's fascination with the history and 'arcane' sound of Latin, and investigates its patterns of use in lyrics with the help of Natural Language Processing tools and digitally-available linguistic resources. First, the authors collected a corpus of lyrics containing differing amounts of Latin and enhanced it with descriptive metadata. Next, the authors calculated the richness of the vocabulary and the distribution of content words. The authors processed the corpus with a morphological analyser and performed both a manual and a computational search for intertextuality, including allusions, paraphrase and verbatim quotations of literary sources. The authors show that, despite it being a dead language, Latin is very frequently used in metal. Its historical status appears to fascinate bands and lends itself well to those religious, epic and mysterious themes so characteristic of the heavy metal world. The widespread use of Latin in metal lyrics, however, sees many bands simply reusing Latin texts – mostly from the Bible – or even misspelling literary quotations.

Keywords: Heavy metal; song lyrics; Latin; corpus; text reuse; Natural Language Processing

Introduction

Esoteric and dark themes had been captivating bands and fans of heavy metal music long before the genre came to be known as such (Cresti, 2011; Umurhan,

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2012, pp. 130–133). Indeed, one of the most distinctive and influential aspects of the debut album of Black Sabbath (1970), pioneers in heavy metal music (Cerati, 2019; Cope, 2016; Larson, 2004, pp. 183–187; Popoff, 2004, p. 6), was its cover – the sinister depiction of a woman dressed in black in front of a watermill. Over the years, numerous subgenres of metal music have embodied this fascination for the mysterious and the obscure (Farley, 2016), and for the imaginary and fantastical aspects of life as opposed to the bright and socio-political message upheld by the Hippie Movement coming to an end by the time *Black Sabbath* was released. During the 1980s, this attraction was mostly epitomised by the naïve Satanic image of a number of bands (for instance, Venom) and their lyrical themes, which in the minds of some of their critics were truly *verba bestiae*, that is, ‘words of the Beast’. Initially designed to provoke, this attitude became a much more serious matter in the early 1990s following the infamous wave of crimes connected to the Norwegian black metal scene (Moynihan & Söderlind, 2003), during which a Satanic stance was translated into support for pagan cults and culture, strictly linked to an anti-Christian message. Thereafter, traditional and pagan values continued to distinguish certain subgenres of metal, such as folk metal.

Besides this type of approach, numerous bands and songs also deal with epic fantasy imagery about heroes and warriors, mostly in the power metal subgenre and its derivatives, and have been doing so from the very beginnings of heavy metal; more precisely, from the 1970s, with Ritchie Blackmore’s Rainbow representing the root of this popular tendency, which relates to the latent sense of grandeur of metal (Popoff, 2004, p. 36).

Thanks to its history and long-standing use in religious rites (mostly Catholic) and in the classical world, Latin has been enlisted by metal as a device to strengthen the mysterious and epic aura of its music (Campbell, 2016; Fletcher, 2015). According to Fletcher, Latin’s allure resides in its association with escapism and power. Latin, in fact, ‘[...] seems to offer a certain otherworldliness’ (Fletcher, 2015, pp. 8–9) connected with religious issues and mystic themes dealing with the Catholic Church or Satanism. As for power, ‘the use of Latin [...] gives the music a depth and weight it would not otherwise have’. In Metal, Latin thus becomes ‘part of a larger obsession with other times and places [...]’ (Fletcher, 2015, p. 1). Indeed, many bands ‘employ Latin [...] with a view to exploring some additional aspect of antiquity and not necessarily as an end unto itself’ (Umurhan, 2019).

The use of Latin in metal is very diversified (see section Different Uses of Latin?). This chapter focusses on its presence in lyrics and addresses the following research questions:

- (a) Of the many metal subgenres that turn to Latin (including but not limited to symphonic, gothic, black, death, power), which are those that use Latin lyrics the most?
- (b) Owing to the absence of native speakers, linguistic knowledge of Latin is traditionally passive and geared towards translation from and into modern languages. Writing lyrics in this historical language can be challenging, as verse requires a good grasp of rhythm and sound. Can we identify a direct correlation between Latin proficiency and the provenance of metal bands?

- (c) Many bands do not write original Latin lyrics but reuse existing texts. How much of the Latin in our corpus is original and how much is it a re-elaboration of literary texts? Which are the most quoted Latin sources in metal?
- (d) We investigate the most used Latin words in metal lyrics to better understand the preferred themes of the bands who employ it. Does their vocabulary differ from that occurring in English metal lyrics? If so, how?

Studies on the use of Latin in heavy metal are few and far between. On the web, the blog *Heavy Latin* is perhaps the most analytical resource (Heavy Latin, n.d.), as other pages offer only sporadic lists of metal songs written in Latin, for example, *List of songs with Latin lyrics* (2019) or *Metal songs in Latin?* (2015). With regard to academic scholarship, extant research in classical reception studies is largely socio-philological (Fletcher, 2014, 2015, 2019; Magro-Martínez, 2019; Umurhan, 2012, 2014, 2019) or only partially overlaps with our linguistically oriented inquiry, as is the case of the survey by Lindner and Wieland (2018) about Classics-inspired band names: while not strictly dealing with Latin names, the authors give a first insight into this phenomenon and the fascination with Classics-related symbols. Finally, and, to the best of our knowledge, a series of posts published in the *Degenerate State* blog (by Iain, 2016) is the only computational exploration of the topic. Some works applying computational techniques to a more generic analysis and classification of song lyrics are, for example, Mahedero, Martínez, Cano, Koppenberger, and Gouyon (2005) and Fell and Sporleder (2014).

The Corpus

The corpus is aptly named *Verba Bestiae* ‘words of the Beast’, a nod to Iron Maiden’s historic *The Number of the Beast*.

It consists of selected lyrics that are partially or entirely written and/or sung in Latin, and whose Latin parts consist of meaningful pieces of text (usually a sentence or at least a cohesive phrase), and not just isolated words or names; we otherwise refrain from further constraints. We restrict our selection to one song per band to have as much variety as possible. Currently, *Verba Bestiae* consists of 102 songs by as many bands.¹ Our main source for metal lyrics and data is the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* (hereafter EM), also known as the *Metal Archives* (Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives, n.d.), but we gather lyrics also by means of personal communications, CD booklets and transcriptions.

Textual data and metadata are encoded in XML. Besides the complete text of each song with highlighted Latin parts, the metadata provide discographic information (band name, album title, etc.), subgenre (reduced to a single keyword from the ‘genre’ entry in EM; see section Subgenres), biographical and linguistic information (see section Provenance and Languages), philological information (see section Text Use and Reuse), and source of the lyrics.

¹As of 30th April, 2019.

Different Uses of Latin?

During our research, we have noticed a common pattern of eye-catching, yet superficial use of Latin which does not correspond to an effective presence of the language in the lyrics (and whose study falls beyond the scope of this work); in this sense, we have to acknowledge the pervasiveness of Latin in metal, particularly in relation to European and American bands. A few examples: the album *Non Serviam* 'I will not serve' by Rotting Christ (Greece, black),² the song *Pluvius Aestivus* 'Rainy summer(time)' by Pain of Salvation (Sweden, progressive), the band name Sonata Arctica 'arctic sonata' (Finland, power), and the band member Nocturno Culto 'nocturnal cult' of Darkthrone (Norway, black). It is clear that a certain amount of linguistic skill is required before weaving Latin into fully fledged song lyrics, so that here we are observing two correlated but different phenomena: Latin as used only in a band's name pertains more to the external image they wish to convey about themselves (epic, arcane, solemn), whereas Latin as used in lyrics is more functional to their actual artistic expression (see section Data Analysis).

An illuminating example of the difference between these approaches is the Swedish industrial death metal band The Project Hate MCMXCIX (TPH), who used their blog to invite fans to help find 'cool Latin phrases' for their new album ([The Project Hate MCMXCIX, 2010](#)). The blog post, entitled *Know Latin?*, said:

Do any of you Haters actually speak or know Latin? [...] We did a shirt once that had Mecum Omnes Plangite³ on the front – that's definitely a suitable phrase for us. Dark Funeral, f.e, always comes up with nice sentences (or supposed to be sentences anyways) and that is the kind of style I am looking for here. [...]

The coveted *suitable phrase* appeared in the subtitle of their 2011 album *Bleeding the New Apocalypse: Cum victricis in manibus armis* 'with the Victress' weapons in hand'. Interestingly, this phrase shows an ungrammatical form (*victricis* 'of the victress'), which suggests an original production. But apart from the title of the first song *Iesus Nazarenus, Servus Mei* 'Jesus of Nazareth, servant of mine' (again ungrammatical), not a single Latin word appears in the lengthy lyrics of the album! Here, the band's mere desire to introduce Latin text appears to outweigh any other consideration about its correctness or content. This is further proven by the mention of Dark Funeral, a historic band famous for a similar approach, and by the fact that the quoted phrase *mecum omnes plangite* never appears in any of TPH's lyrics.

Data Analysis

This section presents and discusses the results of our data analysis with a view to answering the previously mentioned research questions.

²Here and in the following, we accompany every mention of a band with its country of origin and subgenre (see section Subgenres) to give the reader context.

³'Everyone weep with me', from the poem *O Fortuna* 'O Fortune' in *Carmina Burana*.

Quantifying the Distribution of Latin in the Songs

Verba Bestiae consists of a total of 14,187 tokens (i.e. word occurrences), of which 6,242 (44%) make up the Latin parts of the songs, 2,932 thereof being unique forms. The mean ratio of Latin tokens to all tokens in any given song is 0.623, while the median is 0.786. These coefficients tell us that despite the motley nature of the texts and the differing degrees of Latin use, more often than not the commitment to include a historical language like Latin moves beyond a mere short quotation to become an important part of the artistic message. In fact, 44 of the 102 bands in our corpus chose to sing at least one song entirely in Latin (20 of them bringing forth original lyrics), and of the remaining 58 songs there are 13 with over half of their text in Latin. In total, 42 groups have produced an original Latin text.

At one extreme, a band can have its entire lyrical production in Latin, as testified by three examples in our corpus: Astral (Czech Republic, black), Atis (Russia, gothic) and Nazgûl (Italy, black), with two, three and one full-length albums, respectively (Astral later also published an EP with Czech lyrics, alongside Latin ones).

On the other side of the spectrum, short Latin quotations can serve just as peripheral ornaments. Examples are *All Must Come To Pass in Transience* by Shylmagoghnar (Netherlands, progressive) and *The Last Sled in The Life and Times of Scrooge* by Tuomas Huolopainen (Finland, symphonic). The former displays just the line *Sum principium fines omnes* ‘I am the beginning of every end’ (ungrammatical); the latter repeats the motto *Fortuna favet fortibus*⁴ ‘fortune favours the brave’ twice. With four and six tokens, respectively, these are the shortest Latin phrases in our corpus.

Provenance and Languages

One might hypothesise that linguistic proximity and cultural heritage influence the different distribution of Latin in the metal scene with respect to the country of origin. Table 1 seems to confirm this conjecture: most of the bands in our corpus are Italian, twice as many as the German groups, which come second. Much as absolute numbers help us understand the bigger picture, it is more significant to compare the ratio between the number of bands in *Verba Bestiae* and the total number of bands recorded in the EM (displayed as a *per mille*, ‰, value). As our sample is already statistically very small, we decided not to compute it for countries that are represented only once. Nonetheless, this ratio reveals that, while the United States rank fourth with seven bands in VB and first in EM, the fraction of the large American metal scene engaging with Latin is proportionately the smallest in our corpus. Similarly, while France ranks only fifth in the VB corpus, its VB–EM ratio slightly surpasses that of Germany. Out of the major metal scenes, the British scene is visibly missing. Conversely, the historically strong Fenno-Scandinavian scene, represented by sixteen bands in total, confirms its influence and variety (only Denmark is absent, probably due to it being the smaller scene

⁴This motto is periodically used in the US Army and is a re-elaboration of *Audentis Fortuna iuvat* ‘Fortune favours the bold’ by Virgil (Aeneid, x, 284).

Table 1. Number of Metal Bands Per Country Represented by at Least Two Bands in the *Verba Bestiae* (VB) Corpus as Compared to EM, Ordered by Ratio.

Country	Bands in VB	Bands in EM ⁶	Ratio ‰
Italy	27	6,474	4.171
Austria	4	1,196	3.344
Sweden	9	4,590	1.961
Colombia	3	1,589	1.888
Norway	3	1,696	1.769
Netherlands	3	2,382	1.259
France	6	5,086	1.180
Poland	4	3,463	1.155
Germany	12	10,847	1.106
Finland	4	3,853	1.038
Mexico	2	2,810	0.712
Brazil	3	6,018	0.499
Russia	2	4,018	0.498
Canada	2	4,107	0.487
USA	7	27,033	0.259

of the lot). Our corpus mainly represents Europe and the Americas, with only one band from the Middle East (Orphaned Land, Israel, progressive) but none from Asia, Africa or Oceania (notably Australia).

The observed distribution seems to confirm that the legacy of Latin is at its strongest in the epicentre of its diffusion in Rome and Italy, the cradle of the Roman Empire, which at its peak in the second century stretched from Anatolia to as far as the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and from North Africa to modern-day England. This secular political power underpinned both Romance languages, daughters of the Latin language (which have diverged from their common ancestor to the point of greatly impairing, if not preventing, its understanding on the part of their speakers), and the religious and cultural sphere of influence of Catholicism, which to this day holds its seat in Rome (the Holy See) and whose presence is strongest in countries like Italy or Poland.⁵ This historical sketch might explain the general distribution in *Verba Bestiae*: in regions where neither Christianity nor a Romance or other European language predominate, and where

⁵See the surveys 'Religion' by European Values Study (retrieved from <https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/about-evs/research-topics/religion/>) and 'Being Christian in Western Europe' by the Pew Research Center (retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/05/29/being-christian-in-western-europe/>).

⁶As of 25th April, 2019.

Table 2. In Metal Lyrics, Latin is Mostly Found Alongside English, Followed by Italian and French.

Accompanying language	Appearances in VB
English	40
Italian	9
French	4
Swedish, Ancient Greek	3
German, Sanskrit	2
Enochian, Nahuatl, Spanish, Irish, Hebrew, Finnish	1

different cultural models are dominant, like in Eastern Asia (where, e.g. Buddhism is firmly rooted), Latin would appear to be less present.

Besides their linguistic proximity, Classical Studies play an important role in the common imagery of Italian society because of their well established presence in education; works like the Aeneid are often studied both in translation and in the original language (Fletcher, 2019) and an estimated 41% of high-school students were involved in the study of Latin in 2005 (Ricerca TreeLLLe, 2008, p. 35). Another European country with a great tradition of Classical Studies is Germany, as confirmed in Table 1; the same is valid for Austria and the Netherlands, which indeed rank high in *Verba Bestiae*, and where Latin is an obligatory course in the *Gymnasium* (high school), as well as a requirement for higher education (Ricerca TreeLLLe, 2008, p. 32).

This entire analysis demonstrates that common cultural heritage and the importance of Latin as a medium of cultural and religious transmission or its presence as a token of prestige exerting a strong ‘exotic’ fascination (e.g. mottos in the US army, or sports teams⁷), can be much more relevant than genetic linguistic affinity or territorial continuity.

Table 2 lists the languages that appear in the 58 lyrics in our corpus that are not entirely written in Latin.

The predominance of English (ca. 69%) comes as no surprise, but its value possibly falls below expectations. The presence of ancient languages, together with the fictitious occult language Enochian (purportedly an angelic language recorded by the sixteenth century English alchemist John Dee in his journals; for details, see Asprem, 2012), is also worthy of note. Here, we have clear influences of historical (Ancient Greek), religious (Ancient Greek: New Testament; Hebrew: Old Testament and Hebrew Bible; Sanskrit: Vedas) or esoteric (Enochian) origin. Our hypothesis is that the exposure to, and interest in, one of these classical languages (e.g. in school) prompts equal interest in the other classical languages too. In general, we believe that the use of a non-mainstream language in metal, like Latin, is often both connected to, and nurtured by, multilingualism,

⁷E.g. United States Marine Corps: *Semper fidelis* ‘ever faithful’; Everton Football Club (UK): *Nil satis nisi optimum* ‘nothing but the best is good enough’.

and, hence, by an inclination to explore linguistic expression more widely. We see this, for instance, in Haggard's (Germany, Symphonic) concept album *Eppur si muove* (Italian for 'and yet it moves') about Galileo Galilei, sung in German, Italian, Latin, and English. A further possible explanation as to why there are so few English mother tongue bands in *Verba Bestiae* (in comparison with their total number) could be that they have little interest in using a (currently) less dominant language, like Latin.

Subgenres

The distribution of Latin among metal subgenres appears to be strongly skewed towards black metal. With 47 entries out of 102, black metal outweighs power at 13, death and doom at 8, heavy at 6, gothic at 5, folk and symphonic at 4, progressive and neoclassical at 3, and, finally, grind at 1 entry. As with countries of origin, these figures are compared to the total number of bands of one given subgenre found in the EM (overlaps are possible); results are shown in Table 3, ordered by *per mille* (‰) ratios. There, we see that black's presence is still very substantial even if gothic and neoclassical seem to experience an even greater fascination for Latin; together, they form a triad of 'dark' subgenres that seem to share some common elements in their artistic exploration, such as obscurity, melancholy, spirituality, mysticism and solemnity, which they find can be well expressed in Latin (but doom is visibly lagging behind).⁸

Meanwhile, power emerges as the second force, accompanied to a lesser extent by the similarly oriented folk and symphonic metal. Here, the allure of a glorious past, be it of an empire or of the arts and sciences, seems to resonate with the characteristic

Table 3. Number of Metal Bands Per Subgenre in the *Verba Bestiae* (VB) Corpus as Compared to EM, Ordered by Ratio.

Subgenre	Bands in VB	Bands in EM ⁸	‰ Ratio
Neoclassical	3	1,539	1.95
Power	13	7,700	1.69
Gothic	5	3,600	1.39
Black	47	34,353	1.37
Folk	4	3,042	1.31
Symphonic	4	3,214	1.24
Doom	8	13,157	0.61
Heavy	6	18,699	0.32
Progressive	3	10,308	0.29
Grind	1	5,227	0.19
Death	8	43,717	0.18

⁸As of 27th April, 2019.

lyrical themes of such bands (Sharpe-Young, 2003): for example, among others, Iced Earth (USA, power) sing about ‘fantasy, literature, mythology’, while Haggard (Germany, symphonic) about ‘history, astronomy, astrology’ (source: EM).

Besides black and power, the other subgenres seem less concerned with Latin possibly because these styles generally share a less romantic and more down-to-earth approach to their lyrical themes (Mudrian, 2004, and Ekeroth, 2008, give a good insight into the origin and spirit of death metal, while Cerati, 2019, has a more general approach to heavy metal), from which Latin is too distantly removed in space and time.

Text Use and Reuse

Sources of the reused texts

As already mentioned, 42 out of the 102 bands in our corpus have produced original Latin lyrics. The remaining 60 draw their texts from various sources. Table 4 lists the number of text reuses we manually identified.

Table 4. Number of Manually Identified Reuses in the *Verba Bestiae* Corpus.

BIBLE	19	Miserere	1	QUOTES (ATTRIBUTED)	4
Psalms	6	Pater noster	1	Caesar	1
Apocalypse	4	Salve Regina	1	Ignatius of Loyola	1
Gospels (Matthew, Luke)	2	Ut queant laxis	1	Lucifer	1
Genesis	2	Veni creator spiritus	1	Solon	1
Ecclesiastes	1	ANCIENT LITERATURE	15	ESOTERIC TEXTS	3
Isaiah	1	Aeneis	4	Clavicula Salomonis	1
Jeremiah	1	Carmina (Horace)	4	Libri Luciferius	1
Job	1	Ab urbe condita	1	Tabula Smaragdina	1
Romans	1	Ad Lucilium	1	EXORCISMS	2
PRAYERS/HYMNS	17	Carmina (Catullus)	1	In Satanam et angelos apostaticos	1
Dies Irae	3	De rerum natura	1	Others	1
Libera me	2	Fasti	1	OTHER RELIGIOUS TEXTS	1
Anima Christi	1	Metamorphoses	1	Malleus Maleficarum	1

Table 4. (Continued)

Ave verum corpus	1	Thebais	1	MODERN LITERATURE	1
Credo	1	MOTTOS	9	Epigrammata (Owen)	1
Confiteor	1	MEDIEVAL LITERATURE	5	MEDICAL	1
Hosanna	1	Carmina Burana	3	Arm muscle	1
In paradisum	1	Festa Asinaria	1	PAGAN	1
Memento mei	1	Canzona di Bacco	1	Ad lovem	1

We make a distinction between religious and non-religious texts, and we, therefore, list the *Malleus Maleficarum* ‘Hammer of Witches’ (a fifteenth century treatise against witchcraft written by the Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, alias Henricus Institor) under ‘other religious texts’ and not under ‘medieval literature’. We classify as ‘ancient’ Latin literature dating from its beginnings up to the fall of the Roman Empire (fifth century), as ‘medieval’ that dating from the fifth century to the end of the 15th, and as ‘modern’ everything published after the fifteenth century. Hymns are works that might be originally inspired by the Psalms, but owe their popularity and circulation to their musical version, often played during liturgies. ‘Mottos’ and ‘quotes’ are short phrases, whose origins are traceable to a specific work or author but which have gained a notoriety of their own, which are often cited without reference to their sources and which are subject to variation (as previously discussed with regard to Tuomas Holopainen’s pseudo-quotation of Virgil). ‘Medical’ refers to medical terminology: its only occurrence in our corpus is in the grind subgenre, which is especially fascinated with the gorier aspects of the human body. This example is provided by the Swedish band DPOS!!! (which stands for ‘disgusting piece of shit’) and consists of the name of an arm muscle: *vagina tendinum musculorum abductoris longi et extensoris brevis pollicis*. It is doubtful the band members were aware that *vagina* simply means ‘sheath’.

All these types are distributed among subgenres as in [Table 5](#).

Among the identifiable authors, the most quoted belong almost entirely to classical literature: Virgil (*Aeneis* ‘Aeneid’; for an analysis of different approaches of metal bands to the Aeneid, see [Fletcher, 2019](#)) and Horace (*Carmina* ‘poems’) with four each, Ovid twice with *Fasti* ‘calendar’ and *Metamorphoses*, and Catullus (*Carmina*), Livy (*Ab urbe condita* ‘from the founding of the City’), Lucretius (*De rerum natura* ‘on the nature of things’), Seneca (*Epistolae morales ad Lucilium* ‘moral letters to Lucilius’), Statius (*Thebais* ‘Thebaid’) once. As they all rank among the most renowned literates of Latin-ity, their presence in *Verba Bestiae* comes as no surprise, nor does their even distribution among bands from many countries. It is probably not by chance

Table 5. Distribution of Latin Text and Reuse Across Metal Subgenres.

BLACK	57	Original	5	Bible	2
Original	18	Bible	2	Medieval literature	1
Bible	10	Ancient literature	1	Mottos	1
Prayers/Hymns	9	Prayers/Hymns	1	Prayers/Hymns	1
Ancient literature	7	DEATH	8	FOLK	4
Mottos	7	Original	4	Bible	1
Quotes	3	Ancient literature	2	Medieval literature	1
Esoteric	2	Mottos	1	Original	1
Exorcisms	1	Prayers/Hymns	1	Pagan	1
Medieval literature	1	HEAVY	7	NEOCLASSICAL	3
Modern literature	1	Original	4	Ancient literature	1
Religious	1	Prayers/Hymns	2	Original	1
POWER	13	Bible	1	Prayers/Hymns	1
Original	7	GOTHIC	6	PROGRESSIVE	3
Mottos, quotes	2+1	Medieval literature	2	Ancient literature	1
Ancient literature	1	Prayers/Hymns	2	Bible	1
Exorcisms	1	Bible	1	Original	1
Bible	1	Original	1	GRIND	1
DOOM	9	SYMPHONIC	5	Medical	1

that the lesser-known Statius is cited by an Italian band (Bahal, black), with an evocative passage of his epic poem about monsters, nocturnal creatures and bad omens (*monstra, striges, dirae*).⁹ Apart from Livy (cited again by an Italian band: Ade ‘Hades’, death), there is an absence of renowned prose authors like Cicero, Caesar, Pliny, or Vitruvius, whose nonfictional, less philosophical writings probably have less appeal for artists.

⁹Album *Striges* (classical ‘screech-owls’, later ‘witches’), song *Valperga*: ‘*Monstra volant, dirae stridunt / In nube volucres, nocturnaeque gemunt / Striges et feralia bubo / Damna canens*’ ‘Monsters are flying, direful birds shriek in the clouds, screech owls of night and the horned one wail, chanting death and disaster.’ (Thebais, III, 510–512; translation from Statius, 2004); ‘*Sic Striges per silvam ductae / Ignis purgat*’ ‘And so the witches, brought into the wood, the fire purges’ is original by the band (with the erroneous *ductae* instead of *ductas*).

The only medieval reference in our corpus is a Latin translation by Italian band Inner Shrine (gothic) of four lines from Lorenzo de Medici's famous poem *Canzona di Bacco* ('Bacchus' song'; fifteenth century) from medieval Italian.¹⁰

Modern Latin literature is less well known, and usually more for its scientific treatises than its poetry. Only the Swiss band Schammasch (black) draws from the latter, citing from the *Epigrammata*¹¹ 'epigrams' of the prolific fifteenth/sixteenth century Welsh epigrammatist John Owen (Ioannis Audoenus).

It is no coincidence that we detected so many poetical sources, prayers, and especially musical compositions (e.g. *Dies irae* 'day of wrath' or *Ut queant laxis* 'so that [they] can with loose [voices] [...]') or biblical psalms set to music (e.g. *Miserere* 'pity [me]'). In general, rhythmical and musical works seem to resonate more with the artistic sensibility of band members. Even the *Carmina Burana* 'Poems of Benediktbeuern' owe their popularity to the orchestration by Orff (Stein, 1977, p. 129), which transforms these bittersweet, fickle medieval poems into something dark and ominous (possibly the driver behind their success).

Materials of a Christian nature, or which have acquired a Christian connotation over time, account for over half (41) of the reuses and range over all epochs (see e.g. the 'Exorcismus in Satanam', 1890–1891). This shows that, today, the primary international and popular medium of exposure to Latin are the Christian churches, particularly the Catholic Church. The mixed and critical reactions (Miccoli, 2011) to the Second Vatican Council, which, held in Latin in 1962, was the first true attempt at liturgical and dogmatic reforms to meet the needs of a modern society after the Council of Trent in 1545–1563 (Melloni, 2012–2013), reveal how strong the self-identification of the Catholic Church with the use of Latin can be. In fact, the Vatican City is the only state in the world to recognise Latin as an official language (Paulus pp. vi, 1967), and Latin is occasionally still used for special Masses. As a consequence, many Latin phrases have become fixed common expressions (e.g. *agnus Dei* 'lamb of God' or *sanctum sanctorum* 'the holy of holies') and constitute a large part of the vocabulary in our corpus (see section Lexicon Analysis).

As an important and intimate part of society, religion has naturally acted as a polarising element (Fabbro, 2018, pp. 112–119) and provoked diverse, even hostile, reactions (well represented in modern times by Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2006). That is why quotations from the Bible are actually used with different intents: either derogatorily (see section Automatic Text Reuse Detection or the 'Reinterpretation'

¹⁰Its most famous line '*Quant'è bella giovinezza, / che si fugge tuttavia! / chi vuol esser lieto, sia: / di doman non c'è certezza*' 'Youth is sweet and well / but doth speed away! / Let who will be gay, / to-morrow, none can tell' (translation in de' Lucchi, 1922, pp. 100–109) becomes '*Quam pulchra iuventa / qui tamen fugit! / Qui vult laetus esse, sit / De postero die non veritas*'. However, the text reported in EM does not seem to be sung in its entirety.

¹¹'*Ad mortem sic vita fluit, velut ad mare flumen*' 'To death, so flows life, like a river to the sea' (Epigrammata, Book 1, 32). The following '*Ad inferos descensus, / ad lucem, / ad indefinitum*' 'Descent into the nether world, into light, into the indefinite' seems to be original.

by Devilish Impressions, Poland, Black or Deathspell Omega, France, Black) or supportively, as is the case of Slechtvalk (Netherlands), a declared Christian black ('unblack') metal act, with *In Paradisum* 'into Paradise'. Often, however, bands do not seem to take any particular stance, or simply express a generically mystical communion (usually with gnostic nuances), like Schammasch.

An interesting consequence of these phenomena is the simultaneous presence of three Colombian bands in *Verba Bestiae*, all of them vibrantly dealing with religious themes from a critical and mystical, gnostic point of view, and one of them writing their own Latin lyrics incorporating Sanskrit words such as *vajrah* 'lightning, diamond' (a doctrinal symbol of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism especially), which is also their name. These bands are not isolated (see e.g. the black metal band *Ignis Haereticum*¹² 'the heretic fire (?)'): Colombia is known to be a country where Catholicism is so ubiquitous and strong as to be oppressive for many (Hortua, 2013), so that we see the reaction to it in these bands, in a way, similar to the first wave of Norwegian black metal (Moynihan & Söderlind, 2003). For them, heavy metal music, and perhaps Latin in particular, might serve to both attack (Catholic) Christianity more directly and set themselves apart from the common people (Hortua, 2013).

We have already mentioned a few original Latin lyrics, but overall they are of multifarious nature and here we can only comment on some main typologies. First, we have coherent texts about the most disparate topics, with varying degrees of grammaticality (but numerous bands, including Dutch power metallers Epica, resort to expert help, e.g. professors of Latin): solid fantasy narration (Nazgûl, Italy, black), rambling cosmic digressions (Carcharoth A.V., Germany, black), intimate poetry (Secretpath, Italy, black), cryptic occultism (Astral, Czech Republic, black), etc. Second, a number of bands seem to be merely reciting loose sets of words (Krypteria, Germany, power; Iced Earth, USA, power) for the sake of Latin's exotic sound. Third, and lastly, a number of bands devote themselves to the standard translation exercise: in addition to Inner Shrine's track, VB also features *Persona mortuae cutis* by Aarni (Finland, doom), the Latin cover of *Dead Skin Mask* by Slayer, and *Reversio ad secessum* by Draconian (Sweden, doom), the semi-Latinised version of *Return to solitude*, by the same band.

Automatic Text Reuse Detection

To this day, the study of intertextuality (Allen & Drakakis, 2011) is an established practice of Classical Philology. Owing to the growing volume of digitised classical works, scholars operating at the intersection of Classics and Natural Language Processing have developed Information Retrieval tools for the automatic detection of *text reuse*, also for what concerns Latin texts.

A manual examination of our corpus of metal lyrics affirms a substantial reuse of the Latin Bible. Our existing experience with the tool Tracer (Büchler, 2013) makes it our tool of choice to test automatic retrieval techniques, and we prepare

¹²<http://heavylatin.blogspot.com/search/label/ignis%20haereticum>.

our texts according to its requirements (Franzini, Franzini, Bulert, Büchler, & Moritz, 2018; Franzini, Passarotti, Moritz, & Büchler, 2018), tagging them for part of speech (PoS) and lemmatising them with TreeTagger (Schmid, 1994). This process produces ambiguities as some forms can have more than one PoS and/or lemma (a base form); if this is the case, Tracer has been programmed to base its analyses on TreeTagger's first proposed option. For example, for TreeTagger's output 'inferni N:gen infernum|infernus' Tracer is set to choose *infernum* 'Hell' over *infernus* 'infernal'. This strategy currently represents the only solution. Next, a list of synonymous relations between words is extracted from the Latin WordNet (Minozzi, 2017) and added to the Tracer file system to support the detection of paraphrase.

The detection yields 932 possible cases of text reuse, 40 of which meaningful. Alongside the numerous *verbatim* text reuses identified, Tracer also finds one case of near literal reuse with substitution (1).

- (1a) Vulgata, Psalm 51 (*Miserere*)¹³

*Cor mundum crea in me, **Deus**, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.*

- (1b) Funeral Mist, *In manus tuas*

*Cor mundum crea in me, **Satanas**, et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.*

Tracer finds a near literal reuse with addition (2).

- (2a) Vulgata, Gospel of Matthew 27:51-52

Et ecce velum templi scissum est in duas partes a summo usque deorsum : et terra mota est, et petrae scissae sunt, et monumenta aperta sunt : et multa corpora sanctorum, qui dormierant, surrexerunt.

- (2b) The Black, *Occumbere mortem*

*Et Monumenta aperta sunt et multa corpora Sanctorum Qui dormierant **monstrum** Surrexerunt.*¹⁴

As previously mentioned, variations to literary quotations are likely intended as provocations.

Finally, Tracer also identifies a variant reading of the Latin Bible (3). Results such as these can tell us more about the bands' Latin sources.

- (3a) Vulgata, Romans 7:19

Non enim quod volo bonum, hoc ago : sed quod odi malum, illud facio.

- (3b) Aggelos, Labii reatum

*Non enim quod volo bonum, hoc **facio** : sed quod **nolo** malum **hoc ago**.*

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to make use of computational methods to detect text reuse of Latin text in five decades' worth of metal lyrics production.

¹³The Latin Bible and its translations into other languages can be accessed via the dedicated Holy See webpage at http://www.vatican.va/latin/latin_bible.html.

¹⁴*monstrum* can be translated as 'wonder'.

Lexical Analysis

Most frequent Latin lemmas

Fig. 1 shows the most frequent Latin lemmas occurring in our corpus, after having removed stopwords (namely, very common words with little actual lexical meaning; see the lists by Berra¹⁵) and having run the morphological analyser and lemmatiser for Latin LEMLAT (Passarotti, Budassi, Litta, & Ruffolo, 2017; Passarotti, Ruffolo, Cecchini, Litta, & Budassi, 2018) on the remaining 2,596 unique forms. Given the rich morphology of Latin, a lemma might correspond to many different forms, for example, *deus* ‘god’ appears in various cases and numbers as *deo*, *deus*, *deos*, *deum*, *dei*, *deorum*.

Nearly 9% of the total, 231 forms, are not recognised by LEMLAT. Most of the time this originates from non-standard variants, like *audatia* for *audacia* ‘boldness’, *intollerabiliorem* for *intolerabiliorem* ‘more intolerable’ (probably of Italian influence), or ungrammatical forms: *voluminem* for *volumen* ‘volume’, *gentae* for *gentes* ‘people’. Many words are proper names of unknown entities (*Yog-Sothoth*, Lovecraftian Old One, or *Gustavus*, seventeenth c. king of Sweden) or entered Latin very late (*cabala* ‘Kabbalah’, from Hebrew), and are as such absent from our lexical base (ranging from Classical Latin to early Middle Ages), foreign words (*vajrah*, from Sanskrit) or neologisms (*vulcanicus* ‘volcanic’ instead of the attested *vulcanius* id., or *endorcizo*: the latter is notable being the opposite of *exorcizo* ‘drive away [evil spirits]’).

Fig. 2, on the other hand, shows how words are distributed across different songs, i.e. how much ‘cross presence’ they have in our corpus, counting only the number of songs they appear in. So we see that *deus* ‘god’ (in all its forms) is

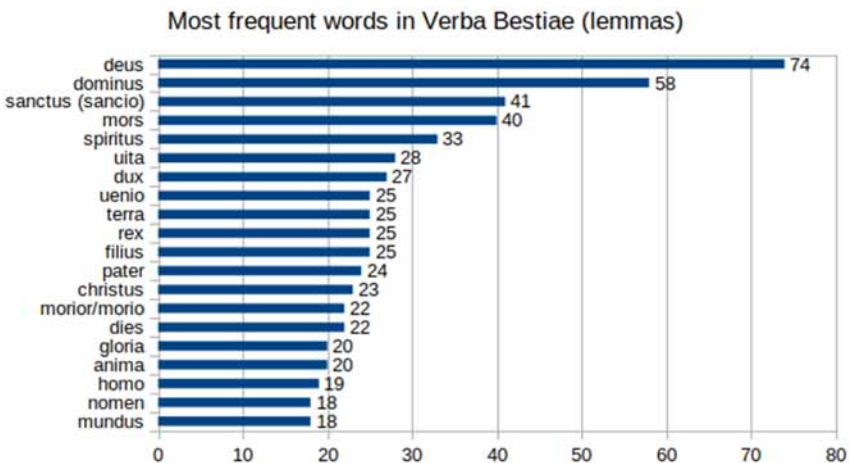


Fig. 1. The 20 Most Frequent Words in the *Verba Bestiae* Corpus.

¹⁵Retrieved from <https://github.com/aurelberra/stopwords>. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.1473877. Accessed in April 2019.



Fig. 2. The 20 Most Present Words in the *Verba Bestiae* Corpus.

both the most used and the most present word overall (appearing in 42 different songs), but that, across different lyrics, *mors* ‘death’ holds a greater fascination for most bands than *dominus* ‘lord’, which comes third in Fig. 2 but second in Fig. 1, being confined to few songs – 12 repetitions alone in *Valley of Shadows* by Rhapsody of Fire (Italy, power).

We observe that most words deal with spiritual and/or religious aspects. Members of the Christian trinity (*pater* ‘father’; *filius* ‘son’; *spiritus* ‘spirit’; *sanctus* ‘holy; saint’, the perfect participle of *sancio* ‘to ratify’) are fully represented in the lyrics and all appear in the 20 most frequent words. The terms *deus* ‘God’ and *dominus* ‘Lord’ are also there, although *christus* ‘Christ’ is not so popular, probably because its Christian connotations are too strongly defined (but this feature is of course dear to Christian metal bands, who tend to incorporate ecclesiastical Latin in their lyrics). This confirms our analysis of text reuse, in that religious texts are the privileged sources.

We also note that *anima* ‘soul’ and *animus* ‘(rational) soul’ (the latter not appearing in our figures), put together, would come near the top of both rankings with 32 appearances and 19 presences. This term is interesting because, more than others, it embodies the not necessarily (Christian) religious spiritual and mystical tension of many forms of black and power metal (Cerati, 2019; Cresti, 2011; Moynihan & Söderlind, 2003), and is one of those terms which has seen a continuous and complex transformation in its conceptual field, from antiquity up to the present day. At the same time, it appears that despite the traditional ‘Satanic’ picture of some metal subgenres, the *princeps* ‘prince’ of darkness is much less represented than his heavenly adversary: we could only find 15 songs in which either *satanas* ‘Satan’ or *diabolus* ‘devil’ are directly cited. The term *princeps* in itself is ambiguous: while it appears alongside *dux* ‘leader’ and *rex* ‘king’ in long demonic invocations (the so-called *ars goetia*) as shown in Fig. 1, it can also stand for nobler ideals. The same goes for other generic

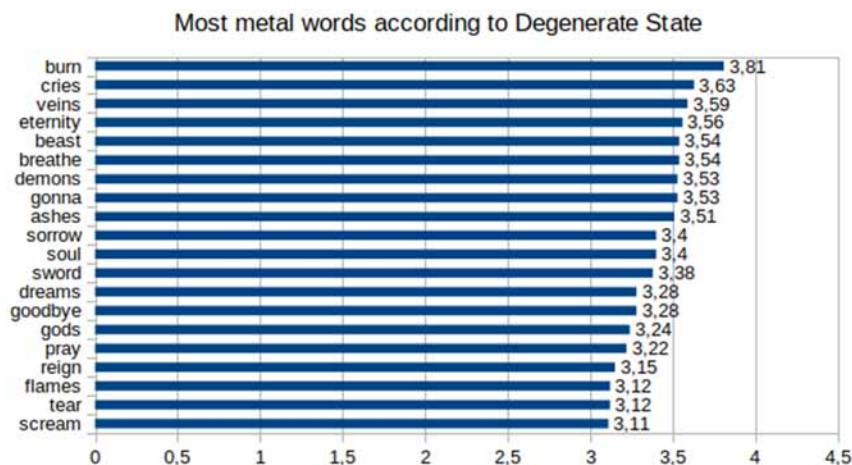


Fig. 4. Most Metal Words in English Lyrics According to the *Degenerate State* blog (Iain, 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

By grounding our claims on a textual corpus specially selected for this research work, we have investigated the use of Latin in metal lyrics from various perspectives, including the origin of bands who use Latin in their songs and the ‘most Latin’ words in metal.

We have shown that the use of Latin is very frequent in metal, as its historical status appears to lend itself well to those religious, epic, and mysterious themes so characteristic of the heavy metal world. The widespread use of Latin in metal lyrics, however, sees many bands simply reusing Latin texts, mostly from the Bible.

The full *Verba Bestiae* corpus is not publicly available due to copyright restrictions.¹⁶ However, most of the songs it contains can be listened to via a YouTube playlist created by the authors.¹⁷ Moving forward, we plan to extend *Verba Bestiae* with the long-term objective of covering all (or most of) the uses of Latin in metal lyrics. This will provide us and the community with a substantial reference corpus to be used in support of future research questions about the use of Latin in metal. In addition, we will include *Verba Bestiae* in the *LiLa: Linking Latin* database of linguistic resources for Latin¹⁸ in the form of a collection of references to the sources of the lyrics.

¹⁶The public-domain Latin data used in this research is available from the project’s GitHub repository at: <https://github.com/CIRCSE/VerbaBestiae>. Personal communication with EM (July 2018) confirmed that the site does not own the lyrics collected in the database.

¹⁷‘Latin metal’ at https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLfRLSJGFNfEULZSIBi6LVI_FJJpLiXaVP.

¹⁸<https://lila-erc.eu/>.

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Chapter 15

Local Folk Tales, Legends, and Slavic Mythology in Slovenian Heavy Metal Lyrics: A Quantitative Analysis

Anamarija Šporčič and Gašper Pesek

Abstract

The main aim of the chapter is to examine the prevalence of Slavic and, more specifically, Slovenian mythological elements in Slovenian heavy metal music. No such analysis had previously been attempted, so a database had to be established anew. Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives (MA) was chosen as the most comprehensive available source on metal music, supplemented by information gleaned from other sources. All 290 bands listed as Slovenian on MA were inspected for evidence of Slavic and Slovenian mythological content. Each band's name, genre, lyrical themes as listed in their profile, song titles, and lyrics were taken into account. The compiled corpus was then analysed in terms of information availability, prevailing languages used by the bands, and, subsequently, their relation to Slovenian mythological heritage. The search for Slavic and Slovenian mythological content began with keyword-based computer-assisted analysis followed by manual annotation. Elements directly concerning the Slavic mythos, Slovenian legends, and folk tales, were featured in a 'Slavic content database', their suitability ascertained through inclusion in prominent publications on the topic, e.g. [Mikhailov \(2002\)](#), [Ovsec \(1991\)](#), and [Šmitek \(2004, 2006\)](#). The acquired results were then divided into seven categories in order of prevalence, namely, deities, mythical creatures, history, nature, literary references, mythical places and phenomena, and idiosyncratic folklore. Our intention was to also present the contents of each category in a short overview aimed at acquainting the reader with individual phenomena, yet only the most prominent two categories could be presented here due to spatial constraints. The remaining categories will be dealt with in more detail in a follow-up paper. The findings featured will

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also enable the commencement of the second part of the research, a qualitative analysis of the afore-mentioned ‘Slavic content database’.

Keywords: Slovenian folklore; Slavic mythology; heavy metal lyrics; linguistic corpus analysis; Slovenian music; Slovenian language

Introduction

One of the smallest and perhaps less recognisable members of the European Union, Slovenia is bordered by Austria, Italy, Croatia, and Hungary and, therefore, uniquely positioned at the crossroads of the Germanic, Romance, Slavic, and Ugric cultural and linguistic landscapes. Slovenia’s diminutive size and geographical position (Gams & Vrišer, 1998), the nation’s history of constant foreign influence (Nečak, 1997; Prunk, 2008), a distinct lack of reliable sources on pagan beliefs in the area (Ovsec, 1991; Šmitek, 2006), widespread exploitation, appropriation, or invention of mythology for nationalist and other political purposes (see e.g. Amalietti, 2011; Šavli, 2008; Vodopivec, 2010), pronounced linguistic and cultural regionalisation of the country (Smole, 1998), as well as the relatively small number of heavy metal bands in Slovenia (‘Browse Bands’, n.d.),¹ are all potentially significant contributors to the fact that our research into Slovenian heritage and heavy metal was never likely to yield results as substantial as those acquired by colleagues studying other European mythological traditions in this genre (see e.g. Koradžija, 2011; McParland, 2018).

Nevertheless, as metal music is slowly being recognised as a relevant indicator of cultural diversity, we feel that smaller nations in particular could benefit from research linking the musical genre to their national particularities, and this chapter aims to be a stepping stone to further research on the topic in the country of Slovenia. Some limited and primarily sociological research had previously been conducted on the status of local heavy metal (e.g. Frkovič, 2007; Kolmanič, 2012; Mencin, 1991; Muršič, 2011; Špehar, 2008), yet the field of modern Slovenian music production in general continues to receive negligible attention from scholars. The intersection of Slovenian heavy metal, Slavic mythology, and local folklore is, therefore, academically largely uncharted territory.

Weinstein (2000, pp. 5–7) describes the heavy metal genre as made up of three essential aspects: the sonic, the visual, and the verbal dimension. In analysing Slovenian heavy metal music and searching for examples of Slovenian heritage therein, our research focussed solely on the verbal dimension, including band names, album and song titles, and, most importantly, song lyrics.

No prior analyses of Slovenian metal with regard to lyrical content have, to our knowledge, been performed thus far, consequently making it necessary to compile what we believe to be the most complete corpus of Slovenian heavy metal

¹As of April 24, 2019.

lyrics in existence at present. Our chapter offers insight into our research methodology, quantitative analysis of the lyrical corpus compiled, results obtained, and a limited interpretation thereof. The project is set to continue with further, qualitative analysis of the findings presented in this chapter.

Methodology, Hypotheses, Results, and Interpretation

The reasons listed in the Introduction importantly affected the quantitative aspect of our research and, consequently, our establishing of an appropriate methodology with which to best analyse Slovenian heavy metal lyrics.

Methods

Slavic and Slovenian Motif Identification. For the purposes of computer-assisted analysis, a list of keywords was created, compiled through cross-checking a number of reputable academic publications on Slavo-Slovenian mythology and folklore (Kelemina, 1930; Mikhailov, 2002; Ovsec, 1991; Šmitek, 2004, 2006). Over 200 keywords were identified as a result, although only those that returned a positive concordance within the database (see next section) will be mentioned in the chapter due to spatial constraints.

The second stage followed in the form of manual annotation of all the content within the heavy metal database compiled. This time-consuming approach provided us with more obscure or region-bound results that we were unable to predict in advance and therefore search for digitally. It also ensured that no keyword from the first stage was accidentally missed in the process of computer-assisted analysis due to potential alterations to the terms. Slovenian is a morphologically rich and highly inflected language boasting a variety of nominal, verbal, and adjectival suffixes. In addition, due to the plethora of dialects appearing across Slovenia (Smole, 1998), alternative spellings and different names for what are likely the same mythological phenomena were expected, as were descriptions and references without specific keywords one could track down through computer analysis. Individual relevant phenomena may also exist under different names in other countries and be referred to as such in the lyrics. For example, the Slavic goddess called Morana in Slovenia is also known as Mora, Mara, Morena, etc. (Šmitek, 2004, p. 231). While not part of the first stage of our research, any alternative names and spellings appearing in the lyrics were observed and included in the database during the manual annotation process.

As some elements (fairies, giants, sprites, elves, wolves, and the like) also appear in mythologies of other cultures, the lyrics had to subsequently be examined more closely in order to determine whether they were indeed used in a Slavic or Slovenian context. Fortunately, the size of the sample (lyrics, band names, song titles, and release titles by 290 bands) allowed for a combination of a digital and an analogue approach, leading to the creation of a 'Slavic content database'. The content of this database was later further divided into seven subsections based on the type of mythological information it contained (see 'Motif categorisation').

Determining the Lyrics Database. Identifying and collecting Slovenian heavy metal lyrics proved to be a methodological challenge in its own right, as there are currently no official, peer-reviewed sources dedicated to keeping a systematic record of Slovenian heavy metal bands, let alone their lyrics. Creating and managing such a database that would satisfy all contemporary academic standards would require rigorous scholarly effort and represents an endeavour beyond the scope of time and resources available to us at present.

Although no official metal lyrics databases are presently available, an unofficial online resource does exist in the form of *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives* ('Encyclopaedia Metallum', n.d.). *The Metal Archives* (henceforth abbreviated as MA) keep a thorough record of metal bands across the globe, aspiring 'to grow the largest and most complete database regarding heavy metal bands as possible' ('Encyclopaedia Metallum HELP', 2018). To achieve this, MA allows registered users to contribute, whereby all new bands are reviewed by a moderator before they are published on the website ('Encyclopaedia Metallum HELP', 2018). Members with the rank of *Veteran* or higher are able to modify most of the existing data, whereas users with lower ranks may only contribute new pieces of information ('Encyclopaedia Metallum HELP', 2018). A band's page is designed to contain an abundance of information, including their name and its alternate spelling(s), genre, lyrical themes, country of origin, the year it was formed in, and information about its releases such as album titles, song titles, and – most importantly for our purpose – song lyrics ('Encyclopaedia Metallum HELP', 2018).

Having considered the only apparent alternative – that is precariously collecting Slovenian band lyrics and data from various social media pages scattered across the Web – it was decided that MA was the best database available for the purposes of the present study.

Systematic Data Annotation

A systematic annotation process had to then be developed for reviewing the substantial dataset. Using the page 'Browse Bands – By Country – Slovenia' (n.d.) as an alphabetised list of Slovenian metal bands, each band's page would be manually examined and annotated in terms of four variables:

1. *MA lyrics availability* (whether the lyrics for the band's songs were available on MA).
2. *Slovenian lyrics* (whether the band has produced any lyrics in Slovenian).
3. *English lyrics* (whether the band has produced any lyrics in English).
4. *Slavic content* (whether the band's name, lyrics, song titles, release titles, genre, or reported lyrical theme(s) featured references to relevant content).

Whenever explicitly Slavic (or specifically Slovenian) mythological and/or folk content was identified, the relevant piece of data was extracted to a separate 'Slavic content database' for subsequent categorisation and analysis.

In the cases of bands which featured or hinted at the possibility of Slavic content – either in their names, song titles, release titles, genre, or reported lyrical theme(s) – in spite of having none (or few) of their lyrics available on MA, additional effort was made to locate their lyrics elsewhere. Namely, we examined the band's 'Related Links' page as published on their MA profile at the time, following the available links to pages such as Bandcamp, Facebook, SoundCloud, and YouTube. If any relevant new information was available via these external pages, the findings were included in the overall *Slavic content* annotations.

Annotation Periods

The bands' profiles were examined and annotated within three separate time-frames, following the protocol described in the previous sections.

The first round of annotations was carried out for the Slovenian metal bands as listed on MA on May 14, 2018 ('Browse Bands – By Country – Slovenia,' n.d.). The page contained a list of 281 bands at the time. Two subsequent annotation processes took place, on September 15, 2018 and April 24, 2019, respectively. On the first date, MA listed a total of 285 bands and on the second, 290 were recorded. Only the new bands (Bloodshed, Ghost of Veronica, Skullcrusher, and Terminal Disease on the first date and Agan, Challenger, Degress, Glista, and Mrk on the second date) were examined and annotated during each of the two supplementary examinations.

Any new Slavic content identified during the two subsequent annotation periods was also extracted into the 'Slavic content database', awaiting final categorisation and analysis. The overall results, reported in the 'Results and analysis' section, feature the complete data from all three annotation periods.

Hypotheses

In addition to gathering both predictable and unpredictable data for further analysis, our research also attempted to confirm or reject the following four hypotheses:

1. The vast majority of Slovenian heavy metal bands write and record in English, rather than Slovenian.
2. Most Slovenian heavy metal bands do not feature elements of Slavic mythology or Slovenian folklore within the verbal dimension of their work.
3. The bands that do feature Slavic / Slovenian mythological content are more likely to also write lyrics in their mother tongue.
4. The most frequently occurring elements from the Slavic or Slovenian mythological realm are Slavic pagan deities.

Results and Analyses

MA Lyrics Availability for Slovenian Metal Bands

Due to Slovenia boasting a relatively small number of bands, we were able to carefully examine all 290 artists listed as Slovenian on MA. As can be seen in

Fig. 1, the vast majority of Slovenian metal bands (49.66% or 144 bands) did not have their lyrics available on MA, nor were we able to find them on any external websites provided by the 'Related Links' sections of the bands' profiles.

The second largest group of bands (26.55% or 77 bands) had at least some of their lyrics available on MA, whereas the third group of bands (20.34% or 59 bands) had all of their lyrics published in their MA profile.

Finally, of the bands without any lyrics on MA, there were a few cases where some (2.41% or 7 bands) or all (1.03% or 3 bands) of their lyrics could be found either on Bandcamp or on YouTube. All lyrics were included in the final database, as was all other relevant information (i.e. lyrical content, lyrical themes, song and release titles, as well as genre) from MA pertaining to individual bands, even if their lyrics could not be located. All information was entered manually and accompanied by personal observations (pertaining to the Slavic and/or mythological nature of the bands' content) that could already be made at that stage.

The Language(s) of Slovenian Metal Lyrics

The first finding of note was that Slovenian bands predominantly write their lyrics in English (Figs. 2 and 4). It can be speculated that some reasons for this may be their desire to succeed outside the small country of Slovenia, imitation of foreign English-writing musical and lyrical influences, or the ubiquitous feeling that the Slovenian language is not as well-suited to the genre as English. Deena Weinstein (2016) refers to English as 'metal's *lingua franca*' (p. 30), which coincides with the findings of linguist David Crystal. In his seminal work, Crystal (2012)

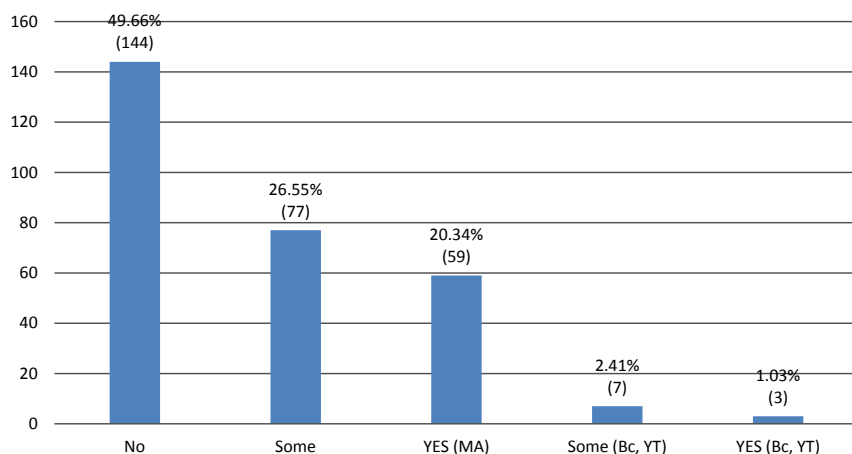


Fig. 1. Number of Slovenian Metal Bands in Terms of Availability of Lyrics. BC, Bandcamp; MA, The Metal Archives; YT, YouTube.

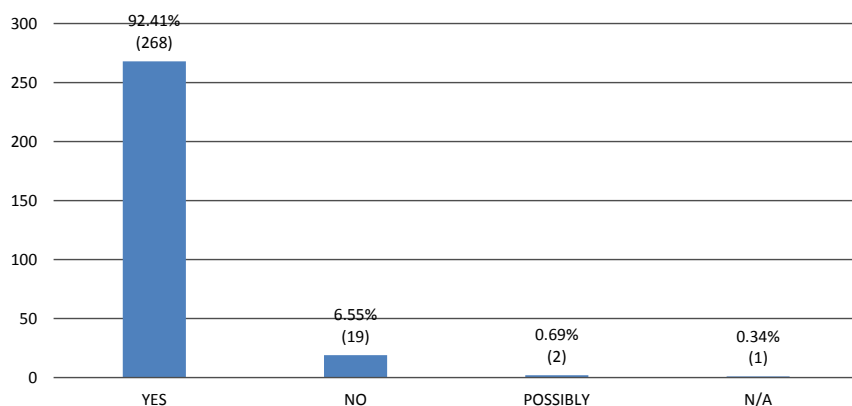


Fig. 2. Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with English Lyrics.

describes the rise of English as a global language and also focusses on its popularity in music, deeming it a necessity for any artist wishing to ‘break through into the international arena’ (p. 103).

Our analysis has shown that less than one-third of Slovenian metal bands regularly or occasionally employ their mother tongue in their lyrics (Figs. 3 and 4). As shown in Figs. 2–4, a staggering majority of Slovenian bands (92.41% or 268 bands) have written at least some of their lyrics in English. On the other hand,

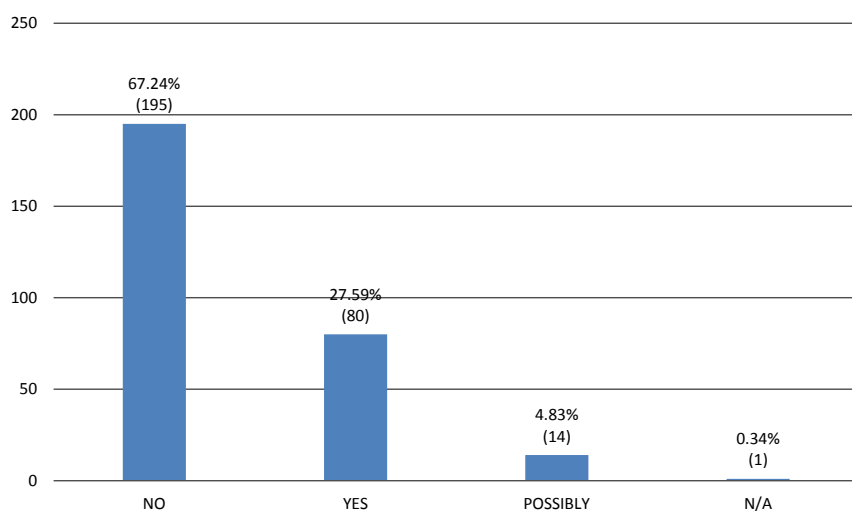


Fig. 3. Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Lyrics in Slovenian.

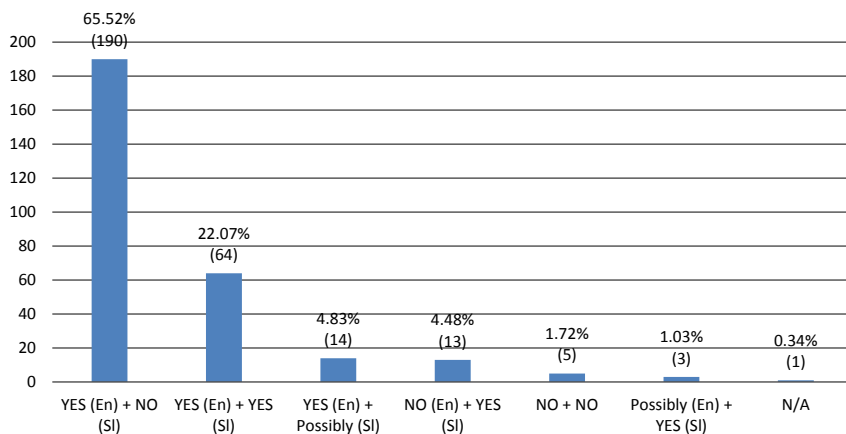


Fig. 4. Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Lyrics Both in English and Slovenian. En, English; Sl, Slovenian.

only 80 bands (27.59%) have at least some Slovenian lyrics. Most bands write exclusively in English (70.34% or 204 bands), of which 14 bands (4.83%) have some content suggesting that certain songs might also have Slovenian lyrics (we were unable to verify this as the lyrics themselves were not available). Some bands (22.07% or 64 bands) have written songs in both English and Slovenian.

Interestingly, we came across two bands whose lyrics were written exclusively in English, and yet some of their songs bore Slovenian titles (e.g. the song *Razkol* 'Divide' by Grob, 2018, track 6; *Spomin* 'Memory' by SentiMetal, 2006, track 4). On the other hand, the band Temačnost has only released songs with English lyrics, with the exception of a single word – *temačnost* 'darkness' – in their eponymous song Temačnost (2008b, track 7).

Only a handful of bands (5.52% or 16 bands) write exclusively in Slovenian, of which 3 bands (1.03%) have some content suggesting that certain songs might also have English lyrics (we were unable to verify this as the lyrics themselves were not available).

Bands in Terms of 'Slavic Content'

'Slavic content' entails any references to Slavic or Slovenian mythology, legends, or folklore that could be verified by their appearance in one of the principal comprehensive works on the subject by prominent Slovenian ethnologists (Kelemina, 1930; Ovsec, 1991; Šmitek, 2004; or Šmitek, 2006). Of the 290 bands examined, we were unable to identify a single motif eligible for inclusion in our Slavic content database² for 73.79% (or 214) of the bands (see Fig. 5). For 43

²According to the criteria described in the 'Systematic data annotation' section.

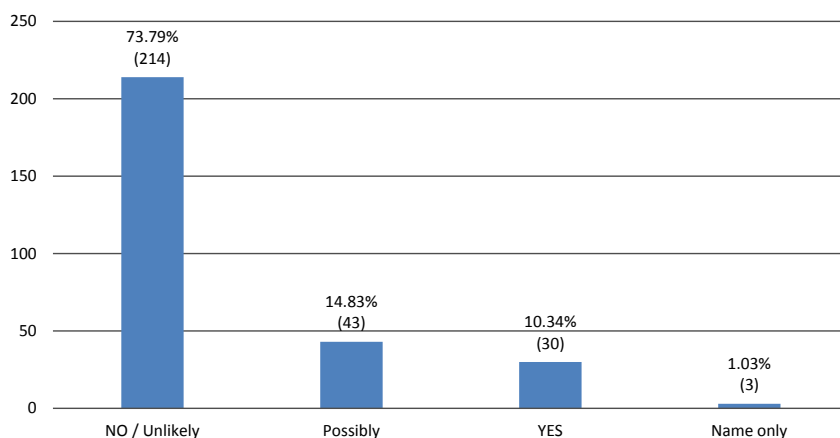


Fig. 5. Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Slavic Content.

bands (14.83%), certain potentially Slavic motifs were identified, yet the context was either unavailable or too inconclusive to allow for a definite inclusion into the Slavic content database.

Ultimately, a total of 33 bands (11.38%) were added to the Slavic content database, three of which (1.03%) were included solely due to the fact that their names themselves – and not any of the other content they had produced – constituted explicit references to Slavic motifs or imagery. The three bands in question were Črnobog, Lintver, and Perun (the motifs featured in their names shall be discussed in the context of their assigned categories in the following section).

Of the 33 bands exhibiting unambiguously Slavic or Slovenian mythological and/or folk content in their releases, it is interesting to note that 78.78% (or 26 bands) chose to write at least some of their lyrics in Slovenian, and three of those bands (9.09%) have exclusively produced Slovenian-language lyrics (see Fig. 6). In comparison with the entire sample of Slovenian heavy metal bands, the decision to write lyrics in Slovenian was made by only 27.59% of the total 290 (Fig. 3), which suggests that bands whose content features Slavic or Slovenian mythological and/or folk motifs are more inclined to choose their native language as the language of their lyrics.

‘Slavic Content Database’ – Motif Categorisation

Having identified an array of Slavic motifs through both computer-assisted and manual searches, the ‘Slavic content database’ was then qualitatively compared and analysed, yielding seven larger categories:

1. Slavic deities
2. Mythical creatures

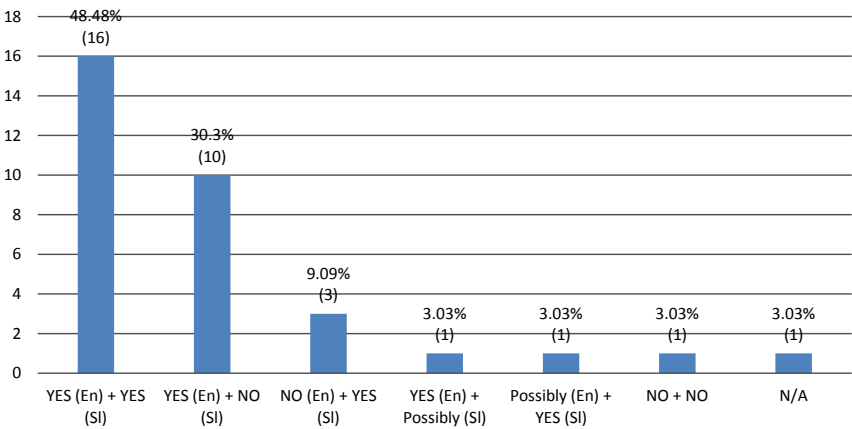


Fig. 6. Number of Slovenian Metal Bands with Slavic Content Based on the Language of Their Lyrics. En, English; SI, Slovenian.

3. Slavic / Slovenian mythology-related history
4. Nature
5. Mythology-related literary references
6. Mythical places or phenomena
7. Idiosyncratic folklore

Fig. 7 visualises the percentage and the number of Slavic elements within the larger motif categories. Repeating elements were only counted if they appeared in a different level of the same piece of content (e.g. as a song title and the band's name).

As far as genre distribution is concerned, we were surprised to find that just over half (51.52%) of all bands exhibiting Slavic content were identified as black metal on MA, contrary to our expectations to predominantly find such bands within the folk metal genre (which constituted a mere 12.12%).

Due to spatial constraints, we are only able to present the two largest categories in this chapter (Slavic deities and Mythical creatures, representing 41.3% and 15.22% of all Slavic elements analysed, respectively), while the remaining categories will be discussed in a subsequent publication. Even though Slavic/Slovenian mythology-related history appeared as frequently as mythological creatures, we decided to prioritise the latter as the former is politically sensitive (due to inclusion of nationalist or far-right sentiment in the lyrics and consequent potential for historical distortion) and requires a more substantial presentation before we can even begin to discuss it. We shall therefore, at this point, only briefly mention our quantitative results, which report the following incidence for the remaining categories (see Fig. 7): Slavic/Slovenian mythology-related history (15.22%),

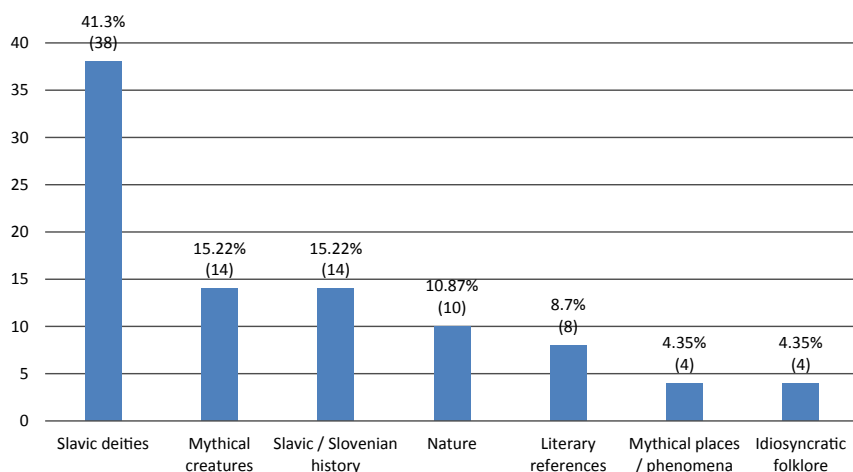


Fig. 7. Number of Slavic Elements within Larger Motif Categories in Slovenian Metal Lyrics.

nature (10.87%), mythology-related literary references (8.7%), mythical places or phenomena (4.35%), and idiosyncratic folklore (4.35%). The last category features elements that could not be included under any of the other nine categories.

Slavic Deities. As anticipated, Slavic pagan deities represent the largest category, with over a third of all instances of Slavic content belonging to this group (see Fig. 7). The most frequently occurring deity was Morana, identified 10 times, followed by Triglav and Slava with 5 mentions, Perun with 4, Črnobog with 3, and then Zarja and Mati Syra Zemja (Mokoš) with 2. Goddess Živa and gods Belibog, Svarun, Svetovid, and Veles made single appearances, as did Vodin and Vodan, respectively.

Morana is the ancient Slavic goddess of death and dreams, who dies at the end of winter to make room for the rebirth of spring, represented by the Slavic goddess Lada (also goddess of fertility, love, beauty, youth, harmony, and joy) or Vesna. She appears twice as (part of) a band name, as Morana and Kormorana, respectively (the latter most likely a portmanteau joining the black aquatic bird *kormoran* ‘cormorant’ with the name Morana). She also features in one album title, namely *Under the Free Sun – Legion of Morana* (2011a) by Stars Will Burn Your Flesh. Brezno’s song ‘Žanjica’ [The Reaper³] (2014b, track 7) speaks of warfare between Christians and pagans, who beg Morana to ‘come and grant them

³In Slovenian, the noun is feminine and refers to a woman. Death (*smrt*) in Slovenian is also perceived as feminine due to the word’s grammatical gender, but is not equated with the Germanic idea of ‘the Reaper’ – it is known as *starka s koso* ‘the old hag with the scythe’ instead.

death', while in the band Morana's song 'Zarja' (2012a, track 3), the goddess is mentioned as the opposite of Zarja, the goddess of light and dawn. Much like in Skorbut's song 'Slovans' (2004, track 2), she is presented as a sadistic deity. The bands Valuk (2014) and Requiem (1997) also have songs entitled 'Morana' (track 1 and track 7, respectively), for which lyrics could not be obtained. The band Kaoz (2003) have a song that undoubtedly speaks of the goddess of death and includes bloody imagery, but have titled it 'Morena' (track 8). While Šmitek (2004, p. 231) does mention Morena as a possible alternative spelling, we believe its use to be very limited and speculate the song title may be an error on the band's part, made due to the fact that *morena* is an existent Slovenian word denoting a mountain moraine or a type of fish.

Triglav literally means 'three-headed', representing a Slavic deity with three heads (Mikhailov, 2002, p. 32). His frequent appearance in Slovenian heavy metal lyrics can be explained by the fact that Slovenia's highest mountain (with three peaks) is also called Triglav and is a recognisable symbol of Slovenia, albeit the names of the mountain and the deity are most likely etymologically unconnected (Snoj, 2009, p. 439). The two representations of the name (the god and the mountain) occasionally intertwine in Slovenian culture, which is also evident in heavy metal lyrics, for example in Magus Noctum's (2003) song 'Mountains of Triglav' (track 6). There is one heavy metal band in Slovenia called Triglav, the description on their MA profile indicating the name should be understood as that of the deity. Morana's (2012b) song 'Raven's Shadow' (track 6) mentions Triglav as he is often portrayed, 'a three-headed man' with 'Blindfolds over his eyes golden and tight'. Morana's lyrics also accuse him of leaving 'without a fight' and arriving 'too late for me', most likely referring to the end of paganism and the prevalence of Christianity in Slovenia today. The band Noč (2017) (meaning 'Night'), in their otherwise non-pagan and somewhat incomprehensible rant entitled 'Wroth and Grain' [*sic*] (track 1), beseech Triglav with the words 'you are wroth / this is pain / save me triglav / blut [*sic*] is grain'.

Perun, god of war and thunder and the supreme god of the Slavic pantheon, also appears as a band name and in song titles or lyrics by three different bands. The band Brezno (2014a) feature this deity in their song 'Krst' [Baptism] (track 9), which uses the words of France Prešeren's (1952) poem 'Krst pri Savici' [The Baptism on the Savica] as its lyrics. The band Morana mention Perun alongside Veles in their song 'Raven's Shadow' (2012b, track 6), while Snøgg (2014) refer to the god in the title of their song 'Perunovo' (track 7).

Surprisingly, Živa, the goddess of life and fertility and 'a central figure in the Slavic pantheon' (Marinčič, 2009), only features in Brezno's (2014a) rendition of the national poet Prešeren's 'Krst pri Savici' (entitled simply 'Krst' (track 9)). Zarja ('Dawn'), on the other hand, is the name of two Slavic goddesses, either servants or daughters of the Sun god Dažbog, who represent the Morning Star and the Evening Star. Two folk metal bands make reference to Zarja. Zaria use an alternative spelling for the name of their (folk metal) band, while Morana (2012a) have a song entitled 'Zarja' (track 3) and speak of her as 'Sun's mother'.

Veles is the Slavic god of earth, water, and the underworld, while Svarog (frequently Svarun in Slovenian) is a less well-researched Slavic deity, possibly

akin to the Greek god of blacksmiths and fire Hephaestus or the Roman Saturn. Veles is briefly mentioned in Morana's (2012b) 'Raven's Shadow' (track 6), while Svarun appears as a title of the band Stars Will Burn Your Flesh's song 'Svarun' (2011b, track 1). Lyrics or a recording could not be obtained and it is possible that the song is in the band's made-up 'Slavic' language, Slavenor.⁴

Mokoš, the Slavic Great Mother or Mother Earth, protectress of women and home, is known under many different names, including Vela and the Russian Mati Syra Zemlia 'Moist Mother Earth' (Kropej Telban, 2008), referenced in Exsilium's 'Heathen Blood' (2012, track 3) as Mati Zemlja. It is interesting to note that the Slovenian band Temačnost (in their 'Outro' (2008a, track 8)) choose to use a mixture of Slovenian and Russian, chanting *Zemlia ti me vidiš, Zemlia ti me slišiš...* 'Earth you can see me, Earth you can hear me...'. The Slovenian word for Earth is *Zemlja*, while *Zemlia* is Russian.

Svetovid (also known as *Sventovit*) is a Slavic deity whose name's old Slavic origins could potentially be traced back to the word *svet* 'holy' – it is likely a holy deity, possibly even the ruler of the pantheon (Mikhailov, 2002, p. 32). Svetovid features in the lyrics to 'Mine Cloak' (track 3) by the one-man band Noč (2018).

Several alleged or unsubstantiated Slavic deities were also identified. They will be presented and discussed in a follow-up article due to spatial constraints.

Mythical Creatures. Slavic or Slovenian mythical creatures make fewer appearances in Slovenian heavy metal lyrics than the Slavic deities (Fig. 7).

Zeleni Jurij ('Green George'), Tork(lj)a, and Kurent are the three distinctly Southern Slavic (or even solely Slovenian) mythical creatures to be found in Slovenian heavy metal, although each only once. Zeleni Jurij and Kurent are both also costumes that people wear to celebrate the arrival of spring. On April 23 or 24, Jurjevo (George's Day) is celebrated in the region of Bela Krajina, situated in the southeast of Slovenia. Today, the holiday is dedicated to St George (*Sveti Jurij*), but the celebration itself probably dates back to pre-Christian times and involves dressing a boy up in green branches of birch trees and parading him around the village, accompanied by folk music and dancing (Šmitek, 2004, pp. 111–130). Zeleni Jurij appears in a song title by the band Praslovan ('Ancient Slav') as 'Zeleni Jure' (2000, track 3), with no lyrics available.

Lyrics were also not available for Triglav's (1998) song 'Kurent' (track 5). *Kurent* or *korant* denotes a popular and widespread traditional Slovenian costume based on a pagan mythological being, possibly a deity (Mikhailov, 2002, pp. 74–78). The *kurent* has the ability to repel malevolent demons and awaken dormant natural forces (Šmitek, 2004, p. 59), but is popularly mostly known as a being that chases away winter with its incessant ringing of cow bells tied around the waist of the sheep-skin covered body.

⁴According to the band's MA profile, Slavenor is an artificial language created by the band by mixing sounds present in different Slavic languages, as well as English and Norwegian ('Stars Will Burn Your Flesh', n.d.). The language is void of semantics and is used purely for its phonaesthetic appeal – to convey meaning, the band title their songs in English (and not in Slavenor).

The band [Torka \(2006\)](#) also have a song called 'Torka' (track 2), which features this unusual mythological being (see e.g. [Šmitek, 2006](#), pp. 106–107). Also known as Torklja, the creature preys upon poor unsuspecting wool spinners. Spinning was traditionally especially forbidden on Tuesday (*torek* in Slovenian, hence, Torka) night before the beginning of Ember Days in December. 'Torka is a cruel punisher. She either eats the unobeying [*sic*] spinner, licks the flesh from her bones, or just destroys all the yarn and the equipment' ([Kuret, 1989](#), p. 514).

The Catholic witch trials, which also took place on Slovenian soil during the Inquisition, are the focus of [Morgue's \(2004\)](#) song 'V spomin čarovnicam' [In memory of witches] (track 2), while [Requiem's \(1995\)](#) song 'Čarovnice' [Witches] (track 2) does not have any specific references to Slavic content.

The band Foglet use Slovenian mythical creatures as song titles, but the vocals only consist of screams. Their songs include 'Parkelj' (2018b, track 1), 'Čarovnica Baba Yaga' (2018a, track 2), and 'Zmaj' (2018c, track 3). *Parkelj* is a term for a Slovenian version of the Central-European (particularly Germanic) Krampus, a devil-like creature that accompanies St. Nicholas and his angels as they deliver presents to Slovenian children on the night of December 5. The *parklji* scare 'bad' children with shouting, stomping, and rattling of chains ([Ovsec, 2000](#)).

The Russian spelling of 'Baba Yaga' ([Johns, 2004](#)) is unusual for a Slovenian band, since Slovenians usually refer to this creature as *Jaga baba*. In Slovenian folklore, she is not really a witch (*čarovnica*), as indicated by the song's title, but a forest spirit of sorts ([Blažič, 2010](#)).

Zmaj 'dragon' may be a generic reference, although Slovenian folklore is familiar with many different dragons, the most famous one probably being the dragon in the coat of arms of Ljubljana, which is said to have been killed by Jason (of the Argonauts fame). Five more references to dragons were discovered, all in English, but none bore any indication that they referred to anything but generic dragons. An interesting local dragon reference was, however, discovered with the band name Lintver, which is also the name of a dragon featuring in a legend from the village of Solčava ([Hrobat Virloget, 2004](#); [Šmitek, 2006](#), pp. 146–147).

Another unexpected reference was discovered in the lyrics of [Lupus \(1999\)](#) and the song 'Pod sencami vejevja' [Under the shadows of branches] (track 2), which mentions Lesi. He is not a creature familiar from Slovenian mythology, but a minor deity, spirit, or fairy-like being recognised by Western Slavic nations, particularly Russians. He is said to be keeping an eye on the forest and its creatures ([Bane, 2012](#), p. 85). The same song includes another reference that is completely foreign to Slovenians, namely the *dwarg*s. The term *dwarf* is a proto-Germanic word for a mythical creature known to English-speakers as 'dwarf'. Interestingly, both the Germanic *dwarf* and the Slavic *leshy* or *leszy* were subjected to Slovenian grammar rules in the lyrics, *dwarf* by having the Slovenian plural -i added to it and *leshy* through the Slovenian spelling.

Slavic mythology is exceptionally rich in all manner of fairies (fates, nymphs, water sprites, forest and cave fairies, evil and benevolent fairies, etc.), yet they appear surprisingly little in Slovenian heavy metal music. References that do occur mostly concern generic fairies of no specific cultural origin, as in [Avven's](#)

(2011) song 'Vvile'⁵ (track 4), a love song about a lyrical subject missing their loved one and saying *Vile naj vedo, da se vrnil bom tja* ('let fairies know that I shall return').

Last but not least, a Slovenian understanding of death as feminine⁶ was also observed in English-language lyrics. Grammatically speaking, *smrt* 'death' is feminine and therefore personified as a 'she' (*starka s koso* 'hag with the scythe') in Slovenian, as opposed to death as a 'he' (The Grim Reaper) in English. The band *Entreat* (2005), in their song 'The Wraith of Who We Wish to Be' (track 10), made the mistake of transferring the Slovenian understanding of death into their English lyrics, resulting in 'I'm still waiting for death to call / Terrified! has she [*sic*] forgotten me?'. Judging by the rest of the text, the feminine pronoun here does refer to death and not to a person.

The band *Funeral March* (1992), on the other hand, called one of their songs 'Married with [*sic*] Matilda' (track 5), using a specifically Slovenian personification of death not found in any other language, unfortunately without lyrics available for further analysis. To be 'taken by Matilda' or 'sniffed by Matilda' are both Slovenian idiomatic expressions meaning 'to die' and 'to have a near-death experience', respectively (Weiss, 2013). The origin of this widely used name for Death is unclear, with some scholars speculating that it may have originated as late as the 1940s, with Tito's partisans giving the machine gun the nickname Matilda, as being targeted by one equalled certain death (Smolej, 1971, p. 68). The phrase is now so commonly used it can be spelled without capitalising the proper name.

Conclusion

The present chapter's primary aim has been to offer insight into the previously virtually unresearched incidence of Slavic and, more specifically, Slovenian mythological elements in Slovenian heavy metal music. At this stage in our project, statistical analyses were performed to acquire results which can later be used to support more detailed analyses of individual examples. The chapter focusses on this initial stage, first describing the methodology employed and the hypotheses formulated for the purposes of the research, followed by the statistical analysis of the lyrical corpus compiled, results obtained, and a short presentation of the most prominent categories. Conclusions drawn from the results acquired are presented in this closing section of the chapter, although the project itself is, as previously stated, set to continue with further analyses.

The present analysis was performed on a body of texts compiled primarily through entries on *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives* (MA), which was chosen as the most comprehensive source currently available on Slovenian heavy

⁵The Slovenian word for fairy being *vila*; Avven perhaps doubled the V in a nod to their band name.

⁶This understanding of death is, however, by no means exclusively Slovenian. In fact, the feminine has historically been associated with death in numerous cultures (see, e.g. DiGioia, 2017, p. 13).

metal music. Artists that had no lyrics posted on MA were subject to further online inquiry. We were consequently able to expand the original Metal Archives' database with some additional content, thereby creating what we believe to be the most complete corpus of Slovenian heavy metal lyrics in existence at the time of writing. All 290 Slovenian bands featured on MA were subject to analysis with each band's name, genre, lyrical themes as listed in their profile, song titles, and lyrics carefully examined for corroboration of Slavic mythological and Slovenian folklore content. The latter was categorised as such based on its appearance in relevant publications on the topic (see e.g. Kelemina, 1930; Mikhailov, 2002; Ovsec, 1991; Šmitek, 2004, 2016).

The compiled corpus was first analysed in terms of information availability, the analysis revealing that almost exactly half of all Slovenian bands appearing on MA had no lyrics available on said website or online in general (see Fig. 1). This is a statistically relevant shortcoming of our research that we are unable to address at present, but hope to be able to rectify in the future with further expansion of our Slovenian heavy metal database, primarily with the help of information obtained offline and through personal contact with the bands. Unfortunately, such an approach was not viable at the time of writing and analysing the existent online information was the only feasible alternative.

The statistical analysis further revealed the following hypotheses to have been correct:

1. The vast majority of Slovenian heavy metal bands write and record in English, rather than Slovenian (see Figs. 2–4).
2. Most Slovenian heavy metal bands do not feature elements of Slavic mythology or Slovenian folklore within the verbal dimension of their work (see Fig. 5).
3. The bands that do feature Slavic/Slovenian mythological content are more likely to also write lyrics in their mother tongue (see Fig. 6).

The initial mythology-focussed search included a list of keywords, such as the names of Slovenian or Slavic deities or references to notable myths and legends, and was later complemented by manual search that had to be carried out due to potential regional differences in spelling and naming, as well as to exclude the possibility of overlooking specific local references that do not necessarily feature in most available overviews of Slavic and Slovenian mythological content. The overall number of deities, mythological creatures, heroes, myths, and legends that could potentially feature in the Slovenian heavy metal realm was, of course, impossible to predict. While some may be regionally specific and not mentioned by most ethnological sources (e.g. *Lintver(n)*), others could be recent inventions and appropriations (e.g. *Vodin*) and still find their way into heavy metal music through (mostly nationalist and far-right) ideologies. Elements directly concerning the Slavic mythos, Slovenian legends and folk tales, were exported to a 'Slavic content database' for further analysis.

The acquired results were then placed into one of the seven categories, which were established based on the nature of each element located within the 'Slavic

content database'. The categories are, in order of prevalence: Slavic deities, mythical creatures, Slavic / Slovenian mythology-related history, nature, mythology-related literary references, mythical places and phenomena, and idiosyncratic folklore. The analysis showed the most frequently occurring elements from the Slavic or Slovenian mythological realm to be Slavic pagan deities. With over a third of all instances of Slavic or Slovenian mythological content belonging to this group, hypothesis number 4 was also confirmed (see Fig. 7).

To acquaint the reader with individual phenomena, as well as in the preparation for the continuation of our research, contents of the two most prominent categories were also briefly examined in this chapter. Overall, our research revealed that Slovenian heavy metal features mythological elements appearing in notable and verifiable publications, ones originating in local folklore that do not or only rarely appear in any of the sources examined, as well as content that appears to have been adapted and appropriated for the purposes of glorification of the Slovenian nation. This division will be examined in greater detail in the upcoming qualitative analysis.

Heavy metal music in Slovenia in general has been, with a few exceptions (e.g. Frkovič, 2007; Kolmanič, 2012; Mencin, 199)), very poorly researched thus far. It did not surprise us to find that no prior academic analyses of Slovenian heavy metal with regard to lyrical content have been carried out at all, yet given the limitations in terms of time and space, this chapter could only focus on the prevalence of Slavic and Slovenian mythological elements in and, to an extent, their incorporation into the lyrics of Slovenian metal bands. The findings and databases featured shall, however, certainly play an important role in enabling further research.

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Index

Note: Page numbers followed by “n” indicate notes.

- A dream that cannot be* (song), 52
- A Farewell to Arms* (song), 106
- A mabl fun mashke* (songs), 22
- A mol iz geven a mayse*(song), 19
- A Portage to the Unknown* (song), 84
- Abadonna* (band), 33
- Abnormality, 114
- Aces High or War Ensemble* (song), 106
- Afrenta de Corpes* (song), 66n3, 74
- AlefBase* (album), 17–21
- Alkbottle, 177–180
- Alternative für Deutschland* (*AfD*), 165
- American Jewish culture, 12
- Ancient languages, 12
- Anglo-Germanic-Nordic, 63, 71
- Anima*, 256
- Animus*, 256
- Annotation periods, 267
- Anti-Fascist extreme metal bands, 73
- Anti-Semitism, 14
- Anti-war song
 - Desafío*, 98–99
 - lexis, 105–109
 - plot, 100
 - poetic analysis, 99
 - poetics, 100–105
- Apocalypse Live* (album), 38–39, 41
- Apokalipsis* (album), 32–33, 35
- Appearance, 225
- Arashi (band), 205
- Aria
 - and authenticity, 196–197
 - case study, 192–196
- Ars goetia*, 256
- Ashkenazic culture, 13
- ‘Au Lecteur’ (song), 29
- Austria, 3–4, 172–173, 177–178
- Austrian dialects, 172
 - agents of paradox, 177–180
 - Austrian nation, 172–173
 - of German, 172, 174
 - metal studies and sound history, 173–177
- Austrian metal community, 173
- Authenticity, 4, 188–189
 - Aria and, 196–197
 - Aria case study, 192–196
 - of language, 189–190
 - in metal music, 33–35
 - in Socialist context, 190–191
 - and *vnye*, 191–192
- Automatic text reuse detection, 253–254
- ‘Automobilisation’, 175
- Avanspettacolo, 154n2
- Az a foygl un a goylem tantsn* (album), 18–20, 22–23
- ‘Baba Yaga’ (band), 276
- Babymetal, 202–203
 - Sakura Gakuin and idol origins of, 205–207
 - Wordplay, Idol-ness and 207–210
- Babymetal* (album), 206
- Bahal, 251
- Bands in terms of ‘Slavic Content’, 270–271
- ‘Bands’ repertoires, 18
- Barbaria-Romania*, 63
- Barbie, MILF Princess of the Twilight* (song), 160
- Barón Rojo* (band), 98

- Basque radical rock, 98
Bastuvisan (song), 88
Battle Hymns (song), 160
Battle Metal (album), 86
 Baudelaire, 30–31
 Chernyi Obelisk, 29–30
 literature and authenticity in metal
 music in Soviet Union,
 33–35
 metal music, 28–29
 politics, *Perestroika* and, 31–33
 Spleen, 35–38
 Une Gravure Fantastique, 38–42
 Baudelaire Song Project database,
 28–29
 Baudelairean revolution, 34
Bay mir bistu sheyn (songs), 20
 Bellicose vocabulary, 105–106
 Bereavement, 2
 ‘Bivni chernykh skal’, 195–196
*Black for Death: An Icelandic
 Odyssey, Pt. 2* (album), 57
 Black metal music, 3, 134
 Black Sabbath (band), 191, 242
Black Shabbis (album), 14, 22
*Bleeding the New Apocalypse: Cum
 victiciis in manibus armis*
 (album), 244
Blodhemn (album), 56
Blood of the Kings (album), 157
 Bokmål, 53
 Bosnia–Herzegovina, 102, 107–109
 Bosnian–Croatian–Montenegrin–
 Serbian (BCMS), 164
 Browse Bands, 264

Canzona di Bacco (poem), 252
Casa Vianello (song), 157
 Celtic languages, 234–235
 Chernyi Obelisk (band), 29–31, 33,
 38, 42
 Christianisation of Nordic area, 88
 Chthonic (band), 127
Cicciput (band), 155
Cid (band), 65–66

 ‘Code’, 189
 Commercialism, 3
 Coping, 145–146
 Corpus, 243
 analysis, 264–265
 Corvus Corax, 227
 Crescent Lament, 117, 125
 Cultural
 identity, 50–51
 intimacy, 2, 135, 138, 140–143
 policy, 186
 Cultural appropriation mechanisms in
 heavy metal, 68–71
Cursed Be Iron (album), 87

 Danish, 52, 134
 Danish black metal, 136
 fieldwork in, 143
Dauði Baldrs (album), 230
Dawn of Victory (album), 157
 Dead language usage in Folk metal,
 226–228
 ‘Death denying’ society, 145
 Death sequestration, 138–140
 Deep Purple (band), 191
 Denmark, 134, 136, 138–140, 230
 Depressive and suicidal black metal
 (DSBM), 138–139
 Depressive black metal (DBM), 138
Der rebe elimelekh (songs), 19
Der Schwarzer Obelisk (novel), 32
Desafío (band), 2, 98–99, 102
 Dibbukim, 17–18, 21
 Dibbukim (bands), 15
Disposable Heroes (song), 106
 Diversification of metal music, 4
 Dö ‘To die’ (band), 84
Dödsrikets Kallelse (album), 84
 Dragonharp (band), 69, 72

 ‘Eastern bloc’, 172
 Eastern European Jewish culture, 14
El Cid (song), 72, 74
 cultural appropriation mechanisms
 in heavy metal, 68–71

- heavy metal, 62
- recapitulation, 73–74
- song list, 74
- from Spanish American perspective, 66–68
- Spanish bands, 63–64
- from Spanish perspective, 64–66
- unintentional Islamophobia, 72–73
- El Cid Campeador*, 67, 74
- El Cid the Champion* (song), 68, 72, 74
- Eld* (album), 56
- Electric Messiah* (album), 106
- Electric Messiah* (song), 106
- Elegy for the Blossoms* (album), 124
- Elio e le Storie Tese (EelST), 155
- Elitism, 158–159
- Eluveitie, 233–237
- Embarrassment, 140–143
- Emotions, 52, 135
- Encyclopaedia Metallum (EM), 67, 81, 173, 243
- Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives*, 266
- Energiya* (album), 34
- English, 83, 189, 210–214, 268
 - lyrics, 266
- Enslaved (band), 50, 54, 56–57
- Enter Sandman* (album), 20
- Epigrammata*, 252
- Eshhjo odin koncert dlja skripki* (album), 38
- ‘Eternity’, 257
- Evocation I: The Arcane Dominion* (album), 234
- Extreme Metal in Taiwan*, 114
- Fagioli* (song), 155
- Fallopio, 156
- Fältskärens berättelser* (novel), 89
- ‘Fantastic neomedievalism’, 162
- Fantasy, 159–162
- Feminine, 273n3
- Finland, 1–2, 80, 83, 86–88
- Finland-Swedish minority, 80–81
- Finnish language, 85–87
- Finntroll (band), 82, 84
- Five Hundred and One* (song), 84
- Flamenco, 98
- Foglet (band), 276
- Folk metal music, 224
 - dead language usage, 226–228
 - Eluveitie, 233–237
 - language, 225–226
 - Viking metal and Old Norse, 228–233
- Folklore, 3, 17–18, 22, 142, 145, 210, 215, 264, 279
- Fortuna favet fortibus*, 245
- Gaffa* (magazine), 146
- ‘Gaulish’ language, 228
- Gaylord (band), 73
- German, 16, 28, 32, 39, 70, 164, 173, 189
- Germany, 63, 71, 164–165, 173, 227, 245, 247
- Gevalt*, 16
- Gevolt, 15–17
- Gimme Chocolate!!* (song), 202, 207, 209–210
- Giorgio Mastrota*, 162
- Glasnost* (openness), 29, 31, 34, 36, 40
- Global, 3, 165–166
- ‘Global scene’ concept, 63
- Glocalisation, 4, 64, 165–166
- Golden Melody Awards, 127n10
- Grand Funk Railroad (band), 191
- Hakkapeliitat* (song), 88
- ‘Heathenism’ (see Polytheism)
- Heavy metal, 1, 62
 - cultural appropriation mechanisms in, 68–71
 - medievalism, 62
- Heimdallr*, 230
- Helvetios* (album), 234, 236
- Hispanicity, 68
- Høgnorsk, 53
- Homo Austriacus*, 173
- Humour, 157–158

- 'Hymns and crippled anthems' (song), 104
- Hypermasculinisation, 62
- I Dieci Metallamenti* (song), 163
- I Guerrieri del Metallo* (song), 163
- Identity, 2, 50, 80
- Idol culture, 3, 204–205
- Idol music, 205
- Idol-ness, 207–210
- Jesus Nazarenus, Servus Mei* (song), 244
- Ignis Haereticum* (band), 253
- Ijime, Dame, Zettai*, 209
- In the Court of Jarisleif* (song), 84
- Insular Nordic, 52–53
- Intertextuality, 88–89, 253
- 'Intimacy', 138, 143–145
- Into Gay Pride Ride* (album), 157
- Intolerabiliorem, 255
- Introducing the Power* (song), 156
- Ir* (album), 3, 136–138
- Iron Maiden (band), 106
- Islamophobia, unintentional, 72–73
- Italian comedic genre, 3
- Italian comedic music genre, 3
- Italian heavy metal (*see also* Taiwanese metal)
- elitism, 158–159
 - humour, 153–154
 - juggling global and local, 165–166
 - localisation and language, 162–165
 - medievalism, fantasy, and warfare, 159–162
 - parody through lyrics, 157–158
 - parody through music, 156–157
 - Rock demenziale*, 154–156
- Italy, 63, 154–156, 162–165, 246, 264
- Japan, 1, 120, 123, 165, 207
- Japanese, 3, 28, 117, 124, 202–205, 208–212, 214
- Jewish, 2, 10, 12
- bands, 22
 - culture or traditions, 14
- Jimusho*, 205–206
- Just Not Meant to Be* (song), 117–118
- music video, 124–126
 - song structure, 121
 - sound blocks, 122–124
 - troubled past in, 119
 - two-stringed instrument, 120
- Kalevala*, 86–87
- Kami Band, 206
- KARATE, 214
- KAT-TUN (band), 205
- Kawaii* metal (*see also* Yiddish metal)
- Babymetal*, Wordplay, & Idol-ness, 207–210
 - Metal Resistance*, English, & Metal-ness, 210–214
 - Sakura Gakuin and idol origins of Babymetal, 205–207
 - Western perspectives on, 202–205
- Khaloymes* (songs), 22
- Khokhotshet* (songs), 22–23
- Kimo-kawaii*, 204
- King* (song), 161
- Kinotto* (album), 155
- Klezmatiks, 13
- Klezmer, 11–13, 16, 18, 22–23
- Köyliönjärven jäällä* (song), 88
- Kruiz, 187
- 'Kurent' (song), 275
- Kvlt*, 228
- 'L'Invitation au voyage' (poem), 29
- 'La Mort des amants' (poem), 29
- La sangre se me subió a la cabeza*, 102
- La spada del Cid* (song), 69–70
- La Terra dei Cachi* (song), 155
- Landsmaal*, 53
- Language, 12, 162–165, 174, 225–226, 245–248
- authenticity of, 189–190
 - of Slovenian metal lyrics, 268–270
- Larga Vida al Rock and Roll* (album), 98
- Late Show with Stephen Colbert, The* (American talk show), 202

- Latin in heavy metal, 242–243
 automatic text reuse detection, 253–254
 corpus, 243
 data analysis, 244
 esoteric and dark themes, 241–242
 lexical analysis, 255–258
 provenance and languages, 245–248
 quantifying distribution of Latin in songs, 245
 sources of reused texts, 249–253
 subgenres, 248–249
 text use and reuse, 249
 uses, 244
Le Spleen de Paris (The Spleen of Paris), 30
 Led Zeppelin (band), 191
Legendario (song), 65, 74
 Legitimation, 204n4
Les Fleurs du Mal (song), 29, 34–35, 41
Les Illuminations (album), 35
 Lexical analysis, 255–258
Leyenda y realidad (song), 66n3, 74
 Linguistic eclecticism, 229
Litanies de Satan'm (song), 29
 Liturgical lexis, 106
 Local, 3, 140, 165–166
 Localisation, 162–165, 172
 Locating metal, 172
 Love songs, 20
 Lullabies and children's songs, 19–20
 Lyrics, 275
 of Babymetal, 208
 database, 266
 MA lyrics availability, 266
Madon Lauulu (song), 85–86
Magnitizdat, 187
Mai Dire Gol (soccer-themed comedy show), 155
Malleus Maleficarum, 250
Maniia velichiia (album), 192–195
 Manowar (band), 158
Marchando una del Cid (song), 74
Mardraum (album), 49n1
 Martial Law, 114n2
Master and Margarita, The (novel), 33
 Material culture, 12
 McDonaldisation of metal, 4
 Medievalising themes, 62
 Medievalism, 159–162
Medina Azahara (band), 98
 Metadata, 243
 Metal, 27, 51
 culture, 50–51
 studies in German, 173–177
Metal Archives (MA), 266
 lyrics availability for Slovenian metal bands, 267–268
Metal demenziale, 166
Metal Invaders (song), 160
 Metal music, 80, 264
 in Soviet Russia, 188
 in Soviet Union, 33–35
Metal Resistance (album), 202, 210–214
Metal-La-La-La! (song), 159
 'Metal-ness', 204, 210–214
Metallo o Morte (album), 163
Mezquita (band), 98
 Minority identity, 2
Mio Cid Campeador (song), 66, 74
Mio Cid mercenario (song), 66, 74
 Mittelalter artists, 225
 Mittelaltermusik, 224
Modern Times, 175
 Modernity, 139
 Mokoš, 275
Morena, 274
Morte alla Techno (song), 163
 Motif categorisation, 271
 'Mountains of Triglav' (song), 274
Muerte en Mostar (song), 2, 98–101, 105–107
 Multilingual metal, 1–4
 Music in Soviet Russia, 186–188
 Musical sound, 225
 Mythical creatures, 275
 Mythology, 3, 272

- Nanowar of Steel (band), 3
 National identity, 2, 63, 86
 Nationalism, 235, 238
 Natural language processing, 253
 Nature, 51
 Nazareth (band), 191
 Neckbeard Deatchcamp (band), 73
Neformaly, 32
 New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM), 160n4
Non Serviam (album), 244
 Non-English lyrics, 4
 Non-Jewish musical genres, 15
 Non-metal bands, 191
 Non-socialist music, 186
 Nordic metal scene, 80
 Nordic-ness, 137
Norrønasongen: Kosmopolis Nord, 57
 Norse themes, 2
 Norse-themed metal music, 51–52
Norsk Språkrad, 53
 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 99, 108
 Norway, 1, 28, 49, 51–57, 165, 237
 Norwegian metal bands, 50
 cultural identity, 50–51
 Enslaved, 56–57
 glimpse into socio-cultural history of Norwegian languages, 52–53
 intentions and motivation, 53–55
 Norse-themed metal music, 51–52
 Solefald, 57
 Wardruna, 55
Number of the Beast (album), 196
 Nynorsk, 53

 Old Norse, 226, 228–233
 Ondfødt(band), 82–83
 Oppression, 114–115, 126–128
Ordkunst, 56
 Orm (Danish band), 3, 134–135
 black metal as disembarrassment, 146–147
 coping, 145–146
 cultural intimacy and embarrassment, 140–143
 fieldwork and intimacy, 143–145
 Ir, 136–138
 prism of intimacy, 133–134
 suicide and sequestration of death, 138–140
Oshikura Manju (game), 214
Oy gevalt, 16
Oyfn pripetshik (song), 17
Oyfn veg shteyt a boym (album), 19

 Pagan metal, 62, 82, 224
 ‘Paganism’ (see Polytheism)
Papirosn (songs), 21
Parkelj, 276
 Parody through lyrics, 157–158
 Parody through music, 156–157
Partizaner Lid (Partisan Song), 21
Pennellen (song), 163
 People’s Republic of China (PRC), 115n2
Perestroika (re-structuring), 29, 31, 34, 36, 40
 Baudelaire, Politics, and, 31–33
Persona mortuae cutis, 253
Petits poèmes en prose (Little Prose Poems), 30
Pluvius Aestivus (song), 244
 ‘Pod sencami vejevja’ (song), 276
Poema de mio Cid (The Poem of the Cid), 65, 69–70, 72
Poète maudit, 28
 Poetic analysis of anti-war song
 Desafio, 98–99
 lexis, 105–109
 plot, 100
 poetics, 100–105
 Poetry, 27
 Baudelaire, 30–31
 Chernyi Obelisk, 29–30
 literature and authenticity in metal music in Soviet Union, 33–35
 metal music, 28–29
 under *Perestroika*, 30

- politics, *Perestroika* and, 31–33
 Spleen, 35–38
 Une Gravure Fantastique, 38–42
 Political activism in Taiwanese metal, 115–117
 Politics, 114
 Polytheism, 51
 Pop artists, 227
 Post-traditional communities, 50
 ‘Postvention’, 146
 Postvernacular Yiddish language and music, 11–14
 Postvernacularity, 1, 12–13
Power of the Power of the Power (song), 156
 ‘Pozadi Amerika’, 193
Princeps, 256
Prologue for R. R. R. (song), 88–89
 PTT, 114n1
 ‘Pyl’naja Byl’ (album), 37

Raido (song), 55
 Recapitulation, 73–74
Red for Fire: An Icelandic Odyssey, Pt. 1 (album), 57
Redemption at the Puritan’s Hand (album), 139
Reign in Blood (song), 104
 Religion, 52
Rengenizdat, 187
 Republic of China (ROC), 114n2
 Resistance songs, 21–22
Revenge of Tizona (song), 69–71, 74
Rex Regi Rebellis (song), 84
 RIITIIR (band), 56
Road of Resistance (song), 210, 212–213
 Rock demenziale, 3
Rock demenziale (band), 154–156, 163
 Rock music, 188
 Rockdemenziale, 3, 154–155, 163
Romancero del Cid, 65
 Romantic nationalism, 51
Rozhinkes mit mandlen (album), 19
Rúnar munt þú finna, 228–233
 Rune, 55–56, 228n3

 Russia, 1, 3, 32, 34, 37, 186, 190, 197
 Russian language, 190, 197

Sagenlieder, 178–179
Sahti Waari (song), 85–86
Se predlaga brezplačno (album), 22
Sedative Rain (album), 124
 ‘Self-impersonification’, 161
 Seraphim (band), 114
Siann, 119
Siddur (album), 16
 Slavenor, 275n4
 Slavic and Slovenian motif
 identification, 265–266
 Slavic content, 266, 270–271
 ‘Slavic Content Database’, 271–277
 Slavic deities, 273
 Slavic mythology, 264
 Slovenia, 172, 189–190, 264–265
 Slovenian folklore, 267, 276
 Slovenian heavy metal, 264–265 (*see also* Italian heavy metal)
 annotation periods, 267
 bands in terms of ‘Slavic Content’, 270–271
 determining lyrics database, 266
 hypotheses, 267
 language(s) of Slovenian metal
 lyrics, 268–270
 MA lyrics availability for Slovenian
 metal bands, 267–268
 methods, 265
 results and analyses, 267
 Slavic and Slovenian motif
 identification, 265–266
 ‘Slavic Content Database’, 271–277
 systematic data annotation, 266–267
 Slovenian language, 268, 271
 Slovenian lyrics, 266
 Slovenian music, 264
 SMAP (band), 205
 Socialist music, 186
 Socialist musician, 186
 Society, 52

- Solgrav 'Sun's grave' (band), 84
 Song lyrics, 243–244
 'Sonic knowledge', 174
Sorg (album), 138
 Sound blocks, 120, 122–124
 Sound history, 173–177
Sound of Music, The (film), 172
 Soviet Russia, 186
 Aria and authenticity, 196–197
 Aria case study, 192–196
 authenticity, 188–189
 authenticity and *vnye*, 191–192
 authenticity in Socialist context, 190–191
 authenticity of language, 189–190
 metal music in, 188
 music in, 186–188
 Soviet Union, metal music in, 33–35
 Spain, 63–65, 68, 71–73, 98, 103, 107–110
 Spanish
 cultural identity, 64
 heavy metal bands, 98
 heavy metal lyrics, 98
 nationalism, 64, 66, 72
 Spleen (Quand le ciel bas et lourd...)' (song), 29, 35
 Spleen', 30, 35–38
 Splin (band), 37
Stand Up and Fight (album), 87
Stand Up and Fight (song), 85
Striges (album), 251
 Suicide, 138–140
 bereavement, 139–140
Suicidio a Sorpresa (song), 155
Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot, 86
 Swedish language in Finnish Scene, 83–85
 Swedish-speaking Finn community, 80
 bands studies, 81–83
 Christianisation of Nordic area, 88
 Finland-Swedish minority, 80–81
 in heavy metal scene, 81
 intertextuality, 88–89
 linguistic choices, 83
 particular use of Finnish language, 85–87
 presence of historical references, 87
 Swedish language in Finnish Scene, 83–85
 Viking era, 87–88
 Swiss nationalism, 235
 Switzerland, 28, 234–235
 Systematic data annotation, 266–267
 Taiwan, 113–118, 120, 126–128
 Taiwanese metal, 113–114 (*see also* Italian heavy metal; Yiddish metal)
 culture, 2
 methodology, 117–119
 political activism in, 115–117
 politics, 114–115
 problematics of, 126–128
 troubled past in *Just Not Meant to Be*, 119–126
 Text use and reuse, 249–253
 Textual data, 243
The Land of Hope and Glory (song), 85
 'The Longest Day' (song), 101
The March of the Varangian Guard (song), 84
 The Project Hate MCMXCIX (TPH), 244
The Varangian Way (song), 85
The Varanguian Way (album), 87, 225
 Theory of 'sonic knowledge', 174–177
To Holmgard and Beyond (album), 87
To Holmgard and Beyond (song), 84
Today's Metal-Bulgaria (Bulgarian metal webzine), 22
 Torka (band), 276
Torment of a Flower (song), 124
Torment of a Flower/Rainy Night Flower (song), 124
 'Toska', 37n8
Tourmentone Vol. I, 163–164
 Tradition, 9–11, 13, 18, 23, 35, 39, 231, 247
 'Transgressive subcultural capital', 229

- Trauma (band), 65n2
 Triana (band), 98
 Trudovaia knizhka, 187
 'Trueness', 159
 Tshiribim tshiribom (songs), 19
 Tsvety Zla (album), 32, 35, 41
 Tum Balalaika (folksong), 16, 20
 Turisas (band), 82
 Tutte Cagne (song), 157
 Umorismo demenziale, 154
 Umskiptar (album), 230
 Under the Free Sun—Legion of Morana (album), 273
 'Une Gravure fantastique' (song), 29, 38–42
 Unemployment, 187
 Unintentional Islamophobia, 72–73

 'V spomin čarovnicam' (song), 276
 Varuly, 177–180
 Veles, 274–275
 Verba Bestiae (VB), 3, 245–248, 253, 258
 Verbatim, 254
 Verdigris, 136–138
 Viking, 52, 54
 era, 87–88
 metal, 56, 224, 228–233
 Vikingligr Veldi, 229–230
 Vikings in heavy metal, 62
 Virgil, 250
 Visual imagery, 225
 Vnye, 186
 authenticity and, 191–192
 Vocal-instrumental ensemble (VIAs), 186, 191, 197
 Voice, 119
 'Vokal'no-instrumen'tal'nyi ansambl' (see Vocal-instrumental ensemble (VIAs))
 Vulcanius, 255

 Walls of Jericho (album), 160
 War, 2, 39
 Wardruna, 55
 Warfare, 159–162
 Warriors of the World (album), 158
 Warriors of the World United (song), 158
 Western perspectives on Kawaii Metal, 202–205
 White Christian Middle Ages, 73
 White nationalism, 71
 White supremacy, 73
 White Terror, 114n2
 Word Cloud, 257
 Wordplay, 207–210
 'World metal', 57

 Yiddish lyrics, 4
 Yiddish metal, 10, 14–15 (see also Taiwanese metal)
 'bands' repertoires, 18
 Dibbukim, 17–18
 Gevolt, 15–17
 love songs, 20
 lullabies and children's songs, 19–20
 original compositions, 22–23
 postvernacular Yiddish language and music, 11–14
 resistance songs, 21–22
 theatre songs, 20–21
 Yiddish music, 10–11
 Yiddish-language heavy metal music, 10
 Yiddish-speaking culture, 11, 13
 Yidl mitn fidl (songs), 20

 'Zhizn' zadarom', 194
 Živa, 274
 Zog nit keynmol (song), 16, 21–22