Multilingual Metal Music
EMERALD STUDIES IN METAL MUSIC AND CULTURE

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Metal Music Studies has grown enormously over the last 8 years from a handful of scholars within Sociology and Popular Music Studies, to hundreds of active scholars working across a diverse range of disciplines. The rise of interest in heavy metal academically reflects the growth of the genre as a normal or contested part of everyday lives around the globe. The aim of this series is to provide a home and focus for the growing number of monographs and edited collections that analyse heavy metal and other heavy music; to publish work that fits within the emergent subject field of metal music studies; that is, work that is critical and inter-disciplinary across the social sciences and humanities; to publish work that is of interest to and enhances wider disciplines and subject fields across social sciences and the humanities; and to support the development of early career researchers through providing opportunities to convert their doctoral theses into research monographs.

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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
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 Diaz 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 Ondfødt, 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 Desafio’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 Tvarno 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