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Studia de Cultura

Metal Music Studies
in Central and Eastern Europe.
Subject Areas, Research Methods
and Perspectives

editors

Jakub Kosek and Miroslav Vrzal

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Introduction from the Editors

In the autumn of 2021, a network of researchers interested in metal studies in the Central and Eastern Europe region began to emerge, based on the Czech Metal Studies initiative. The idea was to connect individual researchers in the field of metal (music) studies in the given region and create a platform for international cooperation. At this time, the head of Czech Metal Studies, Miroslav Vrzal, and members of Polish metal studies, led by Jakub Kosek and Karolina Karbownik, began to communicate regarding this idea. Both Czech Metal Studies and Polish Metal Music Studies have existed independently for several years and have already generated five annual Czech and Polish academic conferences on metal in the national languages. At the inception of the network, several researchers from Hungary (especially János Fejes, who has his own metal studies blog) and Germany joined.

In December 2021, Miroslav Vrzal organized the first Metal Studies online workshop in Central and Eastern Europe under the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University (Czechia), where one of the most important figures in metal studies and co-founder of the International Society for Metal Music Studies, Karl Spracklen, was invited as a key speaker. At this workshop, Jakub Kosek also officially announced the intention to publish a special issue of the journal *Studia de Cultura*, focused on Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. In this volume, which is the result of the international collaboration between Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe, you will find nine studies by researchers from Czechia, Poland, and Hungary. The articles are devoted to various topics related to metal and the approaches they represent show the multidisciplinary that is simultaneously inherent in metal (music) studies.

Miroslav Vrzal's article, *Czech Metal Studies: 5 Years of the Study of Metal (and Religion)*, deals with the genealogy, development, and activity of Czech Metal Studies, including a brief description of the origins of Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. The article also describes the effort of Czech Metal Studies to move from its original focus, on the study of religions towards greater interdisciplinarity and internationalization, which also led to the establishment of Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe network. Through close readings, János Fejes' *The Variety of Similarity. Hungarian High Literature, History and Folklore in the Lyrics of Dalriada* provides an analysis of the lyrics of the Hungarian folk metal band Dalriada. It focuses on how the band reinterprets Hungarian history, high literature, and folk traditions throughout its career. The main subject of Jakub Kosek's article is the artistic activity of Acid Drinkers, one of the first thrash metal bands in Poland. Particular attention is paid to the intertextual iconography of Acid Drinkers' album covers, selected protest songs created by the band, and (ironic) interpretative covers, which also constitute an important element in the group's discography.

The next article is a philosophically-tuned article by Vojtěch Volák: *Heaviness: A Key Concept of Metal Music Through the Lens of Deleuzian Philosophy*. It considers definitions of heaviness within metal music studies. He specifically uses the

concepts of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to understand the highly contextual field of musical meaning. Andrzej Juszczyk's article deals with the development of local metal scenes in Africa and Asia in relation to the metal mainstream. The author addresses the problem of western centrism in the current perception of metal music and introduces researchers to the current interests of non-Western music scenes. Juszczyk also proposes a psychosocial look at the functioning of local metal scenes and, at the same time, the global imaginary metal community. Michal Puchovský's *Czech Pagan Metal: A Short Introduction to Major Local Trends* provides a basic overview of Czech pagan metal and its characteristics. Specifically, Puchovský focuses on 3 metal bands: Inferno, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, and Žrec. He shows how paganism is discursively constructed in their music and lyrics and how they approach paganism. Karolina Karbownik tries to verify the thesis that metal culture can be classified as a counterculture. She supports her arguments with research she conducted in Poland in 2018–2020. The main research questions concern controversy in metal music and manifestations of social discord, as well as other issues that could constitute the recognition of metal culture as a counterculture. Based on this research, Karbownik proposes to change the definition of the counterculture to one that is more relevant within the contemporary.

The next article is *A Man Behind Everything? Motivational Sources of Metal Listening Among Female Audiences* by Gabriela Stašová, Jana Nenadalová, and Miroslav Vrzal. The study is an ongoing output from Stašová's qualitative research based on seventeen semi-structured interviews with female participants in the Czech metal subculture. It focuses on female metalheads' understanding of their position within the subculture, their visual appearance, and the reasons behind their inclination to metal. Ondřej Krajtl and Michal Puchovský's *Eso-kitsch in Czech Folk Metal: A Case Study of the Band Odraedir*, explores the possibility of using the term "esoteric kitsch" (eso-kitsch), based on Tomáš Kulka's analytical-aesthetic theory of kitsch, instead of the term "commercial production", through their analysis of the selected case of Czech pagan/folk metal band.

At the end of the current issue of *Studia de Cultura* is a report by Jana Nenadalová and Gabriela Stašová from the international hybrid conference *Metal and Religion* (7–8 September 2022 in Brno, Czechia), where researchers from different parts of Europe, including Finland, England, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary, and also from Mexico, Canada or the USA, presented their contributions. The keynotes of the conference were given by Marcus Moberg and Niall Scott. The conference was organized at the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University by Miroslav Vrzal in cooperation with Czech Metal Studies with the goal of making Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe internationally visible.

Jakub Kosek
Miroslav Vrzal

A Word from the Editor-in-Chief

I am delighted to announce a new monographic issue of *Studia de Cultura* dedicated to metal studies. This is a relatively new trend in cultural studies, which – through various projects and research – engages specialists in musicology, sociology, literary studies, ethnology, media studies, and especially media cultural studies, but also specialists from the fields of philosophy, aesthetics, or linguistics. It is often researchers representing these disciplines, in trans- and interdisciplinary projects in relation to contemporary music and related creative industries, cultural phenomena and performances, and media rituals, that can provide in-depth reflections on the eponymous phenomenon.

This is not the first time the phenomenon of metal studies have been discussed in the pages of *Studia de Cultura*. Previous subjects of analysis have included: historical, theoretical, and methodological aspects, especially cultural and literary research into the culture of metal music (*Studia de Cultura*, no. 10.3/2018), as well as the ritual and media contexts associated with the work of selected metal bands and artists (no. 11.3/2019).

This time, the authors collected in this volume are concerned with the geographical, political, and cultural conditions of metal music studies in Central and Eastern European countries. This issue showcases new perspectives and research strategies on issues such as: analyses of musical texts in broad philosophical, aesthetic, and sociological contexts; the presence of local and global trends in metal music; new articulations and fields of artistic expression in contemporary popular music; strategies for the (self) promotion of music and its creators using (new) media. Studies and analyses on the reception of music, in relation to the categories of biological and cultural gender, have a special part to play in the presented research.

The authors of the texts in this volume used a variety of research strategies: from those proximate to textual analyses, through case studies dealing with specific forms of interaction between music and its audience in different social contexts, to studies strictly focused on the problem of the reception of musical messages.

I hope that the articles collected in this volume will serve as a source of inspiration for research into contemporary music culture and into the phenomenon of metal music itself, and that they may open up fields for further in-depth studies dedicated to the complex relationship between music, media, and contemporary culture.

Agnieszka Ogonowska

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DISCOURSES AND STUDIES

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Czech Metal Studies: 5 Years of the Study of Metal (and Religion)

Introduction

The inspiration for writing the article¹ was the first chapter of the book *Global Metal Music and Culture: Current Directions in Metal Studies* (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, Scott 2016) describing the origin of metal (music) studies as a result of conversations among individual scholars interested in metal in relation to specific conferences about metal. Furthermore, I was also inspired by the keynote lecture by Karel Spracklen² (2021) titled *The Genesis and Evolution of Metal Music Studies* at the first online workshop of Metal Studies in Central/Eastern Europe, in which Spracklen provided a retrospective on the circumstances of the origin and development of metal (music) studies.

Metal (music) studies now forms a relatively broad multidisciplinary and international academic current that focuses on metal as a global phenomenon (see Wallach, Berger, Greene 2011). Although there were pioneers of the academic study of metal, such as Deena Weinstein and Robert Walser in the 1990s, metal was a rather marginal topic in the study of music subcultures. Although, for example, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Britain began focusing on music subcultures in the 1970s, the subcultural studies attention was primarily focused on punks, skinheads, and later, on techno. Nevertheless, metal (music) studies started to grow in the end of 2000s (see Brown 2011: 218).

The growth of metal (music) studies was also a result of conversations among scholars such as Karl Spracklen, Keith Kahn-Harris, Niall Scott, Andy Brown, Brian Hickam, and others. In connection with some specific academic conferences on metal, they began to discuss the need to constitute metal (music) studies as an independent academic discipline. In this regard, two landmark conferences—the first

¹ The article is a revised and expanded version of the popular-scientific text *Czech Metal Studies: 5 years of the study of metal (and religion)*, which was published in the Czech language (Vrzal 2022a).

² Karl Spracklen is one of the main faces of metal (music) studies. He is also one of the founding members of the International Society for Metal Music Studies and the first editor of the journal *Metal Music Studies*.

on heavy metal music and culture in 2008 and also the *Heavy Fundamentalism* conference in 2009, both in Salzburg—played a significant role in the emergence of this field of study (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, Scott 2016: 8–10; Wallach, Berger, Greene 2011: 29). At the same time, the number of academic conferences on metal began to grow in Europe and elsewhere. In 2013, the International Society for Metal Music Studies was formed, followed in 2014 by the first publishing of the specialized academic journal *Metal Music Studies*.

In response to the formation and expansion of metal (music) studies, Czech Metal Studies (CMS) was also established in Czechia in 2017 as an association of scholars and students who have set themselves the goal to focus on metal studies in the Czech environment. Like Spracklen (2021), in this text, as the founder and current head of CMS, I would like to look back on the origins, evolution, activities, and academic production of CMS retrospectively and reflexively, specifically in the periods from 2017 and 2021. Concerning the origin of CMS in the study of religion and its initial primary focus on the field of metal and religion, I would also like to outline possible challenges and the future direction that CMS should take, in my view, in terms of the aim toward greater multidisciplinary within CMS (which is also related to the variety of topics featured in Czech academic conferences on metal that are co-organized by CMS) and in relation to the academic profiles of new CMS members; as well as in connection with the efforts to internationalize CMS and international cooperation with other local metal studies researchers in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), especially regarding the recent establishment of an international network called Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe (MSCEE) in the autumn of 2021.

Before proceeding, I would like to take a moment to highlight one terminological remark. Often the term “music” is used in collocation with “metal” in the label “metal music studies” as in the nomenclature of the International Society for Metal Music Studies and its journal *Metal Music Studies* and as in the name of the Polish metal studies organization, Metal Music Studies PL. The term “metal music studies” was, after all, also used in the call for papers for this special issue of *Studia de Cultura*. As Spracklen (2021) pointed out, the use of the term “music” is necessary so that we are not included in the field of materials science.³ However, the word “music” is missing in the name Czech Metal Studies. There is a reason for that. I see the use of the term “music” in metal studies as an inclination to terminological reduction, which also implies a focus of metal studies on music and evokes a primary connection with the field of musicology. However, metal music as such is only one part of the social phenomenon called metal, and therefore I perceive it as a certain terminological contradiction with the multidisciplinary of metal studies. I will use the word “metal” (without “music”) as a designation (which is also emic) for a broad global culture coalesced around the genre of metal music that possesses its own val-

³ This happened to me personally when I received an email after one conference where I had a contribution about Paganism in Norwegian black metal in connection with the church-burnings (revised text later above as Vrzal 2017a). I was asked if I would like to publish the text in one of the journal focuses on materials.

ues, symbols, and meanings (see Geertz 2000 culture definition) and is a distinctive social phenomenon, including material artifacts of metal culture. From the point of view of the subject of study, there is also no reason why metal studies operating primarily in the field of social sciences and humanities (so far) should be something less than the fields of natural and technical sciences that study materials, specifically metals. The word “metal” is not just a word of natural scientists interested in materials, but also of metalists, and it is intrinsically linked to metal culture and identity. In my view, there is no need to add any other distinguishing word like “music.” Metal as a complex culture and social phenomenon should be studied in multifaceted ways rather than focusing on the music itself. Therefore, in this article, I will continue to use the term “metal studies” and not “metal music studies”.

Background of the Origin of Czech Metal Studies

The establishment of CMS in 2017 is existentially related to the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University (DSR MU) in Brno. I was there a doctoral student at the time, and most members of CMS were also recruited from the DSR MU. The study of religions was crucial and formative for a CMS research orientation that was focused on the area of metal and religion, especially in the early years.

Metal is logically interesting for the study of religions in that, compared to other major music subcultures such as punk, hip-hop, skinheads, and techno, metal works significantly with various religious or spiritual themes (Vrzal 2017b).⁴ Although metal also intersects with a wide range of other topics, from its very beginnings, metal incorporated an occult discourse in its identity, which was also associated with contemporary horror (pop)culture (see Vrzal 2015).⁵ In certain subgenres of metal, some specific religious or spiritual identities are explicitly emphasized, such as in black metal Satanism (see for example Introvigne 2016) or more generally dark spirituality (see Moberg 2009). For example, Paganism is strongly connected with black, pagan, or folk metal (see for example Weinstein 2014). However, there are, for example, Christian metal (see Moberg 2015) and bands that incorporate Islam, Judaism, or Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Some metalheads (whether seriously or not) also talk directly about metal being a religion to them.⁶

⁴ Nevertheless, for example, in skinhead subculture we can also find a partial interest in pre-Christian pagan mythology.

⁵ Christopher Partridge (2004; 2005) points out the connection between popular culture and religion, respectively with alternative spirituality. He uses the concept of occulture, which represents the broad cultural-religious field that has developed in the West, and it mixes different ideas, practices and symbolic resources. This field then influences popular culture and vice versa (Partridge 2004; 2005). Partridge also talks about the dark occulture, which draws on the sources of Christian dualism and demonology, including metal (Partridge 2005).

⁶ For example, in the British census in 2011, 6,242 people listed heavy metal as their religion, which is more than what has been reported for Scientology or Baha’i, but also for Satanism (Voas 2011).

Various religious leaders are often critical of metal's apparent connections with the occult and satanic discourse. They of course also take issue with what they find as offensive metal lyrics, especially those of extreme metal bands, that disparage religion, mainly Christianity in the West (Vrzal 2017b; after 7–8 Vrzal 2022b). Thanks to this, metal is becoming part of the public debate (for example in 2014 in Slovakia due to the Gothoom festival or in Czechia in connection with the cancellation of the concert featuring bands Root and Törr in Valašské Klobouky in 2016, see Vrzal 2022b; Rapčanová 2017) and even the subject of moral panic (e.g., in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s in the context of the so-called “satanic panic”⁷). Alternatively, metal is sometimes the object of repression in connection with anti-blasphemy legislation (e.g., in some Middle East countries and in Europe, especially in Poland).

Metal and religion is also an important domain for metal studies (Vrzal 2017b; for a brief summary of the study of metal and religion, see Scott 2014). Marcus Moberg suggests that there are two research orientations in the study of metal and religion: religion/spirituality in metal, which focuses on the presence of various religious/spiritual elements and identities in metal; and the study of metal as a religion, with some researchers, from a functionalist perspective, interpreting metal as a religion and performances of metal groups as religious rituals (Moberg 2012). However, there is also a third important pillar in the study of metal and religion in the form of the study of protests and public debates about metal, in which religious actors play an important role (Vrzal 2022b).⁸

Unfortunately, except few studies (see e.g., Vrzal 2009; [Jan] Vaněk 2010), the fact that metal and religion/spirituality are two very closely connected vessels (Vrzal 2017b; Vrzal 2022b) has long escaped the systematic attention of Czech scholars' study of religion. It should be added that partial attention was paid to metal in Czechia in the 1990s among scholars who, within the study of new religious movements, were interested also in Satanism (and its “dangers”) (see Vojtíšek 1998 or Remeš 1998). On the topic of Satanism in metal and its dangers, see also the article in the religious studies journal *Dingir* by Petr Korál⁹ (1998), which tries to alleviate any fears about Satanism in metal. Nevertheless, metal was also largely ignored in other fields of study in Czechia, such as musicology. However, since the beginning of the new millennium, Czech political science and security studies have been of particular interest in metal, especially black and pagan metal (see, for example, Mareš 2003; Mareš 2005; Kupka, Laryš, Smolík 2009; Smolík 2010b).

⁷ Satanic panic, which spread in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the United States but also in other countries, was based on conspiracy theories about the secret criminal networks of Satanists performing obscene rituals involving orgies, cannibalism, murder, but also child abuse (see Fraknfurter 2001). In the context of satanic panic, metal was considered a way of evangelizing a satanic conspiracy, and it is said that secret satanic messages were also incorporated into the lyrics (Partridge 2005: 247).

⁸ Weinstein (1991) and Walser (1993) have already dealt with this in part, responding to the campaign against metal, especially in the USA in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁹ Petr Korál is one of the prominent Czech publicists in the field of rock and metal music. He also recently taught about popular music at the Prague Conservatoire.

Other exceptions were some other chapters or paragraphs in books on music subcultures (see Smolík 2010a; Daniel 2016), popular culture (Daniel, Kavka, Machek, et al. 2013), the history of rock music in Czechoslovakia, for example by Miroslav Vaněk (2010), or in the field of anthropology and folk culture (see Heřmanský, Novotná 2011).

The study of music subcultures has generally been a marginal field in Czechia for a long time, although the situation has improved especially in the last ten years. For example, in 2009 the Centre for the Study of Popular Culture was established which in part has been focused on research on music subcultures. Specific conferences on subcultures are also emerging, such as the recent conference *Mládež, populární hudba a třída v časech postsocialistické změny* (Youth, popular music and class in times of post-socialist change) in 2021.

However, as abroad, metal has long been a neglected subculture in the Czech study of music subcultures. This is illustrated, for example, by the otherwise important book *Revolta stylem: Hudební subkultury mládeže v české republice* (Kolářová 2011), which was based on qualitative field research on punk, skinheads, hip-hop and techno. But metal is sorely missing here. This also applies, for example, to the more recent book *Mikrofon je naše Bomba: Politika a hudební subkultury mládeže v postsocialistickém Česku* (Charvát, Kuřík et al. 2018). Nevertheless, in the last five years (thanks in part to CMS), the situation in the field of metal studies in Czechia is beginning to change. In addition to the research output of CMS members (see below), several recent studies and book chapters on metal have been published that add to the understanding and expansion of metal studies in Czechia, especially those by Ondřej Daniel (Daniel 2018; Daniel, Almer 2018; Daniel 2019).

However, it should be added that after the fall of communism in 1989, a number of publications in the field of music journalism dealing with rock and metal¹⁰, including books, began to be published in Czechoslovakia (and after 1993 in the Czech Republic with the split of Czechia and Slovakia). For example, there can be mentioned the book *Ohlasy písní těžkých* (Korál, Špulák 1993), which amounts to an encyclopaedia of Czech and Slovak hard rock and heavy metal bands until 1993. Also published were specialized metal fan magazines (the most important is *Spark* magazine since 1992), a number of metal zines (since the communist era in Czechoslovakia) and a huge number of fan-operated websites and blogs. Metal is one of the most important music subcultures in Czechia, with a strong fan base and several large metal festivals. Some festivals boast up to about 20,000 attendees, such as the heavy metal-focused Masters of Rock festival or the extremely metal Brutal Assault festival, both of which also have a strong international audience. Czechia is even in 15th place in the world in terms of the number of metal groups per 100,000 inhabitants (Dempsey 2021).

¹⁰ Metal experienced a significant boom in Czechoslovakia already in the 1980s. Rock and later metal music journalism had a tradition under the communist regime before 1989. Since 1985, for example, the most widespread youth magazine *Mladý svět* has contained articles on domestic and foreign heavy metal (Daniel 2013: 275).

Czechia was also integral in the history of metal studies. Some of the first conferences on metal studies took place here. The third *Global Conference of Heavy Fundamentalism: Can I play with Madness? Metal, Dissonance, Madness and Alienation* (2010) and the fourth *Global Conference of Music Metal and Politics: Heavy Metal Generations* (2012) both took place in Prague. Unfortunately, these conferences did not garner much attention from the Czech academic community nor did they exert much influence on metal studies here. At that time, most current CMS members were just starting their university studies or were still in high school.

This aforementioned deficit in the study of metal in Czechia was one of the impulses for founding CMS in 2017. The goal of the CMS was first to situate metal as a significant social phenomenon, not only in the study of religions, but also in other social sciences and humanities. Secondly, the organization of a metal studies in Czechia was meant to reflect the boom in metal studies abroad and make it relevant for the work on metal being done by a host of scholars here.



Image no. 1. Czech Metal Studies logo. Author: Andrej Kapcár.

The very origin of CMS is also specifically related to the courses in *Contemporary Satanism* and *Religious Aspects in Metal Music and Subculture* that I have been teaching at the DSR MU for many years. As part of this teaching, I organized a one-day student conference called *Religiózní aspekty v metalové hudbě a subkultuře (Religious Aspects in Metal Music and Subculture)* in 2017¹¹ during which my students had the option of participating in the conference as part of the completion of the course. It was the first Czech academic conference on metal.

¹¹ Program is available on: https://www.facebook.com/events/312808339172498/?active_tab=about (access: 28.10.2022).



Image no. 2. Banner of the first Czech conference about metal. Author: Miroslav Vrzal.

Inspired by the fact that the *Modern Heavy Metal Conference* in Finland was directly connected to a metal festival, a cultural section was included at the end of the first Czech conference on metal where Tomáš Vítek from the rock and metal magazine *Spark* and representatives of the pagan folk metal band *Žrec* were invited to the discussion. We discussed with the band *Žrec* for example its relationship to Paganism and how the band's singer makes contact with pagan deities during the performance.

Together with four other students in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs at Masaryk University (MU) in Brno and one student from Charles University in Prague, we subsequently established CMS. Matouš Mokrý was a student from Charles University, and at that time he was studying in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies with interests in black metal, chaos-gnosticism, and Thursatru. Except for one CMS member (Petra Lantorová, now Kalášková), who was a doctoral student in Scandinavian studies at MU and interested in Paganism and black metal, all founding CMS members from MU were religious studies students at DSR. One of these was doctoral student Andrej Kapcár (DSR and formerly the Department of Archaeology and Museology at MU) who was engaged in field research on the metal scene in Georgia and the aesthetics of the death of *Treha Sektori*. There was also Michal Puchovský who was researching the concept of the metal god, ezo-kitsch, and Paganism in metal, and Daniela Vašková who focused on Satanism in relation to the band *Ghost*. My primary interest at the time was black metal with a focus on Satanism (partly Paganism), right-wing extremism and radicalism in black and pagan metal, and metal in the context of satanic panic and controversies and public debates about metal stimulated by religious actors.

Subsequent Czech Academic Conferences on Metal

The following year, a regular academic conference called *Metal, náboženství a spiritualita (Metal, religion, and spirituality)* was organized.¹² The conference was

¹² Program is available on: <https://metalkonference2018.phil.muni.cz/program> (access: 28.10.2022).

again organized under DSR MU, the venue for all subsequent Czech conferences on metal. Josef Smolík from the Department of Social Studies at Mendel University in Brno, who has been studying subcultures for a long time, was invited as the keynote speaker. At the conference, he gave a lecture entitled *Výzkum subkultur mládeže v kontextu sociologických škol: Metal jako náboženství?* (*Research on youth subcultures in the context of sociological schools: Metal as a religion?*). Based on the model of the previous conference, the cultural section was preserved by inviting representatives of *Spark* and a metal band to the final discussion. This time the invitation was accepted by members of the black/dark metal band *Root* led by Jiří Big Boss Valter who is also the founder of the Czech branch of the Church of Satan. In the discussion, we addressed the issue of Satanism as well as conflicts between the band on state authorities during the communist era. The establishment of CMS was also officially announced at this conference. At this point, CMS had already started operating its website where we wanted to create a continuously updated list of the Czech academic bibliography on metal, including bachelor's and master's theses at universities in Czechia.¹³



Image no. 3. František Štorm and his keynote lecture on Master's Hammer. Photo: Veronika Konečná.

In 2019, the third Czech academic conference on metal was organized at DSR MU. This time it was called *Metal, okultura, umění (Metal, Occulture, Art)*¹⁴ and focused again on the topic of religion, specifically occult elements in metal and its connection with the so-called occulture, especially with dark occulture. The keynote was given by František Štorm, the frontman of the famous black metal band *Master's Hammer* and a well-known typographer, painter, and graphic designer. He previously worked as the head of the studio at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. Štorm lecture *"Okultní" vlivy v hudební a vizuální tvorbě Master's Hammer 1987–2019: Reflexivně-retrospektivní pohled* (*"Occult" influences in music*

¹³ Means a list of publications on metal from authors in Czechia: <http://czechmetalstudies.com/odborna-bibliografie-o-metalu-v-cr/> (access: 28.10.2022).

¹⁴ Program: <https://religionistika.phil.muni.cz/metalkonference2019/program> (access: 28.10.2022).

and visual production of *Master's Hammer 1987–2019: A reflexive-retrospective view*) looked back at the band's history and highlighted how the group was inspired by occult influences, which he associated with artistic decadence, spiritism, and shamanic rituals involving ayahuasca.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we, unfortunately, had to move the 2020 conference *Metal made in Česko(a)Slovensko: IV. česká odborná konference o metalu (Metal Made in Czechia(and)Slovakia: IV. Czech Academic Conference on Metal)*¹⁵ into the online mode. Ondřej Daniel from the Institute of World History at Charles University was the keynote speaker. His lecture was titled "*Muzika jen pro lopaty?*": *Metal ve světle sociologie hudby ("Music just for the shovels?": Metal in the light of the sociology of music)*. This time Radek and Hana Hajda from the folk/doom metal band Silent Stream of Godless Elegy were invited to the final discussion, with whom we discussed folklore and pagan influences in the band's work and why metal in Czechia has such a strong base in northern Moravia. This conference foreshadowed a partial departure from the primary focus on metal and religion, although this component still plays an important role in the activities of CMS and the conferences it organizes.

With the next conference, we wanted to be even more open to fields outside of religion. As such, the 2021 conference, which took place in person once again, had the theme of *Scény, gender, identity (Scenes, gender, identities)*. Contributions from the field of religion (such as religious identities within individual metal scenes) were still emphasized in the call for papers. Our keynote was given by Marta Kolářová from the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Her lecture was titled *Čarodějky a mužská bratrstva: Genderové aspekty subkultur (Witches and Brotherhoods: Gender Aspects of Subcultures)*. Jan Müller from the band Tisíc let od ráje, who is also a martial arts trainer, accepted the invitation to the cultural section this time as a special guest. He presented the work of his band, in which women have always played a key role. In his story, he also recounted the "wild" 1990s and subcultural violence in Brno. This time, the conference attracted wider attention both within the metal subculture and in some larger public groups on Facebook. In this setting, we met with some negative reactions. Metalists, for example, have argued that academics cannot understand metal¹⁶ and that metal should not be studied but lived. Moreover, few people in Czech metal culture are even aware of the academic discipline of metal studies. On Facebook, some online commentators turned to criticize the supposed uselessness of the social sciences and humanities in general, all while particularly emphasizing that the research presented at the conference was a waste of time. The focus on gender was also controversial since there is generally a negative perception of gender studies in Czech society. From this experience, we learned more about the disconnect between academic work in the humanities and social sciences and the public's opinion of it. In response, we resolved to do more to make the activities of CMS more accessi-

¹⁵ Program is available on: <https://religionistika.phil.muni.cz/metalkonference2020/program> (access: 28.10.2022).

¹⁶ It is also possible to add here that most members of CMS, but is also true for metal studies in general (Spracklen 2021), are at the same time listeners of metal music and participants in metal culture.

ble. As part of this effort, we created a CMS Facebook group and created a YouTube channel to publish videos of presentations at our conferences.

CMS Publishing Activities

The orientation towards the study of religion and the religious studies backgrounds of most CMS members has helped guide the organization's publishing activities. Moreover, we have been inspired by and have relied on similar academic sources and theoretical foundations. In this regard, I would like to mention in particular Keith Kahn-Harris, Kennet Granholm, Marcus Moberg, Christopher Partridge, and Massimo Introvigne, all authors whose writings have been critical in teaching the aforementioned courses that some CMS members participated in.

The metal-centered publications of CMS members¹⁷ have focused primarily on the analysis of religious/spiritual elements in metal, mainly from the perspective of sociology. In terms of metal genres, CMS has focused mainly on black metal and pagan metal, in which the connection between metal and religion is quite clear. Regarding religious currents in connection with metal, the CMS focused mainly on Satanism or Paganism or more generally on dark spiritualities. Based on contributions from the first conference on metal and some papers from the course on contemporary Satanism, we organized a special issue of the religious studies journal *Sacra* (volume 15, no. 2, 2017) focusing on the topic "Metal and Satanism". Overall, most of the publications of CMS members up until 2021 were published in *Sacra* and two in the religious studies journal *Dingir* (Vrzal 2009; Vrzal 2015; Vrzal 2017b; Vrzal, Řezníček 2017; Morký 2016; Lantorová 2017; Vašková 2017; Kapcár 2018; Nanadalová 2019; Vrzal 2020; Puchovský 2020). So far, only one study (Vrzal 2017a) has been published in a foreign academic journal as of 2021. Recently, another of my own articles was published in the international journal *Metal Music Studies* (Vrzal 2022b). One of the goals of CMS is to expand its publishing activities to other academic journals, including foreign ones.

A particular problem with such a close-knit group of scholars like that of CMS is that there is a danger of a certain insularity. Indeed, the research and publications of those associated with CMS have begun to circle similar themes and theoretical approaches. Moreover, the articles published by CMS members up until 2021 tend to cite the same body of research done by the key set of authors mentioned above. As such, I think it is of critical importance for CMS to move toward more multidisciplinary perspectives while simultaneously working to attract members from outside the field of religious studies.

Further Directions for Czech Metal Studies

Especially over the last two years, the "Brno school of metal studies" based on the study of metal and religion has begun to enter the next phase. In an effort for

¹⁷ However, in addition to metal studies, all members have devoted themselves to other areas such as: sociology of religion, new religious movements, esotericism, cognitive science of religion, Baltic languages, and Egyptology.

greater multidisciplinary, CMS gradually began to grow to include new members with interests in other thematic areas within the framework of the study of religions as well as new members whose expertise and research agenda lay in other areas entirely.

Jan Král (PhD student, DSR MU) joined CMS with an interest in the current black metal scene. He had previously researched the Orphaned Land band and its efforts to integrate and “reconcile” various religions. Another new member Jana Nenadalová (PhD student, DSR MU) focused on the spirituality of Colin H. van Eeckhout and the Church of Ra in connection with the performance of the post-metal band Amenra and its stage rituals working with pain.

In 2021, two members who joined CMS with experience outside the field of religious studies include Gabriela Stašová (Department of Musicology, Masaryk University), who is currently engaged in qualitative research on the role and position of women in Czech metal subculture; and there Vojtěch Volák (PhD student, Department of Electronic Culture and Semiotics, Charles University), who deals with topics related to the transfer of meanings in metal music and grasping the concept of heaviness. In 2022, Jiří Lukl from the Department of English and American Studies at Masaryk University also joined CMS. Regarding the study of metal, he is interested in various social, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic phenomena, such as gatekeeping, the online communication of metalheads and the discourse of metal YouTubers and with the reception of J. R. R. Tolkien’s work in metal music.

In the future, we would like to further strengthen our cooperation with other researchers in Czechia in the fields of the study of music subcultures and the study of popular culture. In 2022, Ondřej Daniel also joined CMS. As a member of the Centre for the Study of Popular Culture, Daniel already has several publications on metal (mostly focused also on black metal) (Daniel 2016; Daniel 2018; Daniel 2019), including a study published abroad together with Jiří Almer (2018).

In 2021, CMS also began conducting interviews with scholars in the study of metal and with key figures in metal culture itself. The first of such was an interview by Matouš Mokřý with Kennet Granholm for *Sacra* (Mokřý 2017) with the aim of also later publishing it on CMS’s website. We began making efforts to conduct video interviews as well, the first of which was with Ondřej Daniel. As part of our work to directly engage representatives of metal culture Gabriela Stašová and Matouš Mokřý interviewed the leader of the controversial Czech black metal band Inferno. Inferno is controversial mainly because of its supposed association with the far-right, a notion espoused by anti-fascists who mainly cite old interviews with the band. Here it would be good to emphasize that CMS focuses on metal from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities, and the aim of CMS interviews is to provide insight into the various currents, ideologies (e.g., religious, political, environmental), and views of the world present in metal culture, even when it is extreme. Without reflecting on the perspectives of those enmeshed in metal culture themselves, knowledge about metal culture can only be partial at best. In this context, interviews conducted by CMS are not fan interviews, but a collection of important data about metal culture itself. The next (online) interview was done in 2022 by Miroslav Vrzal with the Pagan (Ásatru) musician Styrbjørn from the pagan black metal band Dark Seal

and Viking metal band Tears of Styrbjörn. The interview included questions about Styrbjörn's Pagan faith and its relationship with metal and the perception of metal performance as a pagan ritual.

In general, CMS currently has the following goals:

- publish studies and other academic texts in the field of metal studies
- maintain the website czechmetalstudies.com with an overview of the current Czech academic bibliography on metal
- conduct interviews with scholars in the field of metal studies and studies of music subcultures and popular culture, as well as with representatives of metal culture itself
- maintain the YouTube channel Czech Metal Studies
- maintain the public Facebook group Czech Metal Studies
- establish cooperation with scholars in metal studies and the study of music subcultures and popular culture in Czechia and abroad
- take part in the organization of upcoming Czech and international academic conferences on metal and possibly organize other academic or popular-scientific events related to metal

Another goal of CMS is the internationalization and integration of CMS within European metal studies. This effort has already begun, and in line with this goal I created a network called Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe (MSCEE) in the autumn of 2021 that currently brings together scholars in various fields of metal studies from universities in Czechia, Poland, Hungary, and Germany. In this regard, I would like to also mention the important role of Ondřej Daniel in the formation of MSCEE. The original idea he came up with in our email communication (and on the basis of his discussions with Wolf Zaddach) was the creation of an international section at the last Czech conference on metal in 2021. In the end, this section was not included in the program. Nonetheless, the idea to create an interconnected network of scholars interested in metal studies in the CEE region was raised, and I started working to make it happen. Daniel would send me information about scholars who may be interested in such a network, then I would reach out to them (for example, János Fejes from Hungary who presented at the Nordic Metal Music Seminar in 2021 where Daniel also gave a presentation¹⁸). I also contacted Polish metal studies scholars associated with Metal Music Studies PL since I knew they had been organizing their own conferences on metal since 2017, just like CMS. I established especially close contact with Karolina Karbownik and Jakub Kosek in this regard. To create the MSCEE network, a closed Facebook group was established, to which several other people interested in metal studies in CEE were gradually added, including members of CMS and, for example, Karel Spracklen. Currently (28.10.2022) this Facebook group boasts 32 members.

The need for a constitution and international organization for MSCEE was discussed at the first online meeting which I organized in September 2021. I also declared my intention to organize the first online MSCEE workshop and to subsequently organize an international conference focused on *Metal and Religion* in Brno,

¹⁸ See: <http://nordicmetalmusicseminar.tilda.ws/start> (accessed: 28.10.2022).

which would be the first in-person meeting among some MSCEE members. We also agreed at the meeting that the long-term goal was to make MSCEE visible on the world map of metal studies.

The CEE region is decidedly on the periphery of the interest of metal studies. One aspect that has emerged through collaboration and discussion within MSCEE is that the region experienced specific circumstances that have shaped metal culture in the region. For example, the states on the east side of the former Iron Curtain have historical experience with communist regimes and post-communist transformations. In Czechia (previously Czechoslovakia) there was a huge boom in musical subcultures in the 1990s (see Daniel 2016) in connection with the post-communist transformation. The collective memory of this period continues to play a crucial role in shaping the identity of musical subcultures. Central and Eastern Europe also have very strong metal scenes in some areas as well as famous and globally recognized metal bands such as the Polish death/black metal band Behemoth. There is also a very vibrant pagan black and folk metal scene in Eastern Europe such as in Ukraine. It is yet to be seen what the long-term effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will have on musical subcultures, metal in particular. Undoubtedly though, it is likely that the reverberations of the war will greatly impact metal culture in Ukraine, Russia, and the entire CEE region. All this suggests that the CEE region is definitively an important area for metal studies and it will continue to be for quite some time in the future.

Under the auspices of DSR MU and CMS, the first (online) MSCEE workshop was organized on December 8, 2021, at which Karl Spracklen provided a keynote speech. Scholars from Czechia, Poland, Hungary pagan black and folk metal, and Germany also made important contributions at the meeting. MSCEE workshops and conferences are likely to follow, a promise we made in the concluding round table of the workshop. An important objective is to expand the MSCEE network to other countries in the region. At the same time, it was announced that a special issue focusing on metal studies in Central and Eastern Europe of the Polish journal *Studia de Cultura* would be edited by Jakub Kosek and Miroslav Vrzal. This project is thus one of the tangible results of international cooperation within MSCEE.

In conclusion, although CMS is moving towards greater multidisciplinary, the work of CMS members will likely remain largely focused on the area of metal and religion/spirituality. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, metal and religion are two connected vessels: religion and spirituality in part provide the substance of metal culture while metal actively works and interacts with religion and spirituality. Metal and religion was also the topic of the 6th Czech academic conference on metal held on September 7–8 in Brno. In connection with the goal of internationalization of CMS (and MSCEE), the conference solicited international participation and invited two foreign keynotes whose work has been vital to the global development of metal studies. The first was Marcus Moberg, who has long been interested in popular culture (including metal) and religion (e.g., Moberg 2009; 2012; 2015); and the second was Niall Scott, who is the current editor-in-chief of *Metal Music Studies* journal and is also interested in the area of metal and religion (see Scott 2014). The *Metal and Religion* conference, which was done in hybrid form, was attended by participants

from various European countries, and by those from Mexico, Canada, and the USA. This conference played a significant role in the international recognition of CMS and MSCEE in the field of metal studies.

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Abstract

In 2022, the association of scholars interested in metal studies in Czechia, Czech Metal Studies, (CMS) celebrated its fifth anniversary. The article retrospectively looks at the origins of CMS in the context of the deficit of academic study of metal in Czechia and reflects on the development of metal studies abroad. The very origin of CMS was closely connected with the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University in Brno, resulting in the primary research orientation of CMS toward the topic of metal and religion. The text surveys the current academic production of CMS members and other CMS activities, including the organization of Czech academic conferences on metal. Finally, the further direction of CMS is discussed in connection with the effort for greater multidisciplinary and internationalization. The multidisciplinary of CMS is manifest in attracting scholars from outside the field of religious studies, and internationalization is apparent in the founding of the research network Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe.

Czeskie Metal Studies: 5 lat studiów nad metalem (i religią)

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł powstał w celu uhonorowania stowarzyszenia uczonych zainteresowanych muzyką metalową w Czechach, Czech Metal Studies (CMS), które w 2022 roku obchodziło 5-lecie swojego istnienia. Artykuł opisuje historię powstania CMS w kontekście deficytu akademickich studiów związanych z muzyką metalową w Czechach i nawiązuje do refleksji nad rozwojem metalu poza granicami tego kraju. Samo powstanie CMS było ściśle związane z Katedrą Badań nad Religiami Uniwersytetu Masaryka w Brnie, co również świadczy o pierwotnej orientacji badawczej stowarzyszenia (muzyka metalowa i religia). Artykuł odnosi się do aktualnej aktywności naukowej członków CMS oraz innych działań, w tym organizacji czeskich konferencji naukowych na temat muzyki metalowej. W ostatniej części tekstu omówiono kierunek dalszego rozwoju CMS w związku z dążeniem do większej multidyscyplinarności i internacjonalizacji Stowarzyszenia. Multidyscyplinarność CMS przejawia się w częściowym wyjściu poza obszar religii, a internacjonalizacja w dążeniu do stworzenia sieci badawczej nad metalem w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej.

Keywords: metal, metal studies, Czech Metal Studies, study of religions, religion, Czechia, Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe

Słowa kluczowe: metal, studia nad metalem, czeskie studia nad metalem, religioznawstwo, religia, Czechy, studia nad metalem w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej

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The Variety of Similarity: Hungarian High Literature, History, and Folklore in the Lyrics of Dalriada**Introduction**

Among the diverse elements that make up the metal scene, folk metal, more than any other genre, gathers much of its lyrical and/or visual inspiration from national history and cultural heritage. As many genre-defining acts originate from Northern Europe (either the Germanic countries or Finland), the subgenre of Viking Metal is the most well-researched field to date (see the works of Karl Spracklen or Imke von Helden, Spracklen 2015 and 2020; von Helden 2010 and 2017). Nevertheless, folk metal bands from other regions similarly draw from their national heritage, history, and mythology.¹ Although many Northern metal bands are primarily interested in pre-Christian mythologies (Granhölm 2011: 530–531), the importance of national epics like the Kalevala in Finland is also significant in certain cases (compare: Kärki 2015).

In this article, I analyze the lyrics of Dalriada, a Hungarian-style folk-power metal band with an intense interest in Hungarian culture and historical tradition. The band's lyrics coalesce around romanticized elements of Hungarian history and tradition, centering the nation's violent past while also stressing the constructed or imaginary nature of historical heritage (Spracklen 2020: 19–21). First, I introduce the band and contextualize the group within both regional and international scenes. In doing so, I also discuss the lyrical traditions of both folk and power metal and situate Dalriada's oeuvre in relation to these genres. The second, longer portion of the article focuses on multiple verbal manifestations of the band: the name of the group, the album titles, and song lyrics. Concerning lyrics, I center my analysis on the band's orientations to their mother tongue and national heritage.

¹ A great case study can be found in Spracklen (2015: 370–371) that highlights the Irish folk metal band Cruachan and their conscious interest in local Irish topics. I also published a study in 2017 on Mesopotamian, Israeli, Roman and Romanian cultural heritage that may provide insight. Compare: Fejes (2017).

The Band and the Setting

In 2003, in Sopron, on the Western borderlands of Hungary, the founding members of Dalriada created the band out of the ruins of a previous group they had started in 1998. Most details about the band are available both in Hungarian and English on their Facebook page.² Therefore, here I will only highlight the most important points of their story to date. The band consists of seven members: Laura Binder, vocals; András Ficzek, guitars and vocals; Mátyás Németh-Szabó, guitars; István Molnár, bass; Gergely Szabó, keyboards; Ádám Monostori, drums and harsh vocals³; and Ádám Csete, folk instruments.

Dalriada maintains a distinctive folk metal image: romanticized clothing made of animal fur (compare with promotional material from bands like Аркона, Turisas, Skyforger, etc.) and use of traditional garments typical of the 19th century Hungarian countryside and the occasional use of folk instruments. The band's self-presentation on stage and promo shoots follow established Northern European patterns of using nature as scenery, this stressing the group's connection to folklore (von Helden 2017: 104–108, 144; Dornbusch, Killguss 2005: 109–111). There have been many personnel changes over the years thanks both to turnover in some positions and to the later addition of keyboards and folk instruments. Since 2009, Dalriada has collaborated with the folk band Fajkusz Banda both in the studio and in numerous live performances. This leads to a central question: what kind of music does Dalriada play? The easiest answer is, of course, folk metal. But given the band's heavy/power metal roots, it may be more accurate to categorize Dalriada as a power metal-driven folk metal band. The problem of defining folk metal is an ongoing issue that is beyond the scope of this study.⁴ However, I simply want to make it clear at this point that the music I examine here is connected to at least two branches of the metal family tree.

All of Dalriada's lyrics are in Hungarian. It is easy to see why a folk metal band would choose to work in their mother tongue (note for example critically acclaimed bands such as Korpiklaani, Moonsorrow, Finntroll, and Skyforger). However, for the purposes of this study, I will translate the lyrics into English. This allows for focusing on small but important details that may be obvious for a native listener but are much less so for those unfamiliar with the Hungarian language and culture who might only encounter Dalriada's lyrics in translation.⁵ The career of the group is an ever-ascending star on the sky map of Hungarian metal. They have produced

² Dalriada Facebook page is available here: https://www.facebook.com/Dalriadahu/about_details (access: 27.06.2022).

³ The band uses three different vocal styles, namely clean female and male vocals and harsh vocals. Issues surrounding the choice of vocal style is a musicological problem beyond the scope of the current study.

⁴ For more details, see the problem of "Mittelalter Metal" in Germany addressed by Dobszhenzki (2015: 114).

⁵ Compare the approach of Imke von Helden (2017) in her monograph using translations of Norwegian lyrics to make them accessible for non-Norwegian speaking readers.

fourteen records, including a demo, ten full-length albums, and three compilation releases, all unique in their own way.

In part, this article seeks to illuminate the lyrical interests of folk and power metal. Decades ago, Deena Weinstein suggested that the dichotomy between “Dionysian” and “Chaotic” types of metal lyrics is not sufficient without sub-classification (2000: 35–43). Moreover, according to *The Metal Archives* (<https://www.metal-archives.com>), a well-known source of material for all metal studies scholars, we see that both power and folk metal bands’ lyrics often coalesce around literature, fantasy, history, mythology or simply “storytelling”. It is this fundamental interest in reinterpreting the past that is a key element in my analysis. There is an expectation that Dalriada is an authentic folk metal band with an exclusive interest in Hungarian folklore and history. This way, I suggest their lyrical content occupies a new, sub-category in the big umbrella-like system of Weinstein’s “Chaotic” realm. Most of the music and all the lyrics of Dalriada are written by vocalist and guitarist András Ficzek (alongside Laura Binder, the only founding members in the band’s current line-up). I was able to interview him in September 2018 (personal communication, September 6, 2018), and I refer to information gathered during this interview throughout this article.

Some Notes on the Method

I employ a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach as I provide close readings of lyrics rather than a statistical analysis of Dalriada’s overall lyrical output. Fiske (2010) suggests that the textual products of popular culture can be read and analyzed in the same ways as those of high culture (2010: 83–101), paving the path for us to use a close reading approach based on theories by Stanley Fish (1980) and Wolfgang Iser (1972) on interpretive communities and the reading process. I focus on the lyrical subject matter and frame of interpretation of Dalriada’s music while also addressing the metal community’s expectations concerning the verbal. In this aspect, I regard the folk and power metal community as two separate entities with different cultures of taste, especially regarding literacy. Stanley Fish suggests that an interpretive community is defined by patterns of “reading” and interpreting both literature and the non-textual world in accordance with a system of rules received from the community itself (1980: 147–173). For example, young adults’ interpretation of a certain piece of literature would differ from that of the older generation, as the two have different tastes, experiences, interests, etc., that will lead each to divergent reception of the same artifact. Proceeding from this notion, metal subculture is a distinct interpretive community with distinct yet related subgenres (e.g., folk metal, power metal, black metal, etc.). This sort of categorization, in part, defines the verbal aspects of Dalriada’s music. On the other hand, an individual layer may also be present, following the methodology of Wolfgang Iser (1972). The phenomenological process of reading focuses on the individual’s own inner method of interpretation. Two such layers of interpretation, the community’s expectation and the individual’s own world, are relevant for the study of Hungary’s rich cultural heritage of history, high literature and folk tradition(s).

The Textual Layers of Dalriada

Layer 1: The Band's Name and the Concept of Album Titles

A band's chosen name is perhaps the first textual layer where we may encounter a band. With Dalriada's founding in 1998, they were first known as Echo of Dalriada with the "Echo of" dropped in 2006. On first impression, the name seems to evoke the ancient kingdom of Dál Riata that flourished in present-day Scotland and Northern Ireland in the 6th and 7th centuries. This Celtic connection suggests a neo-Pagan revivalesque vibe, especially given that the band's first folk/heavy metal demo included some literary references to Celtic history (see below). According to András Ficzek, however, the name of the band does not have anything to do with this. The elements of the word Dal and Riada make a composite expression: *dal* means 'song' in Hungarian, while *riada* is a romanticized, old form of *riadó* meaning 'warning'. Thus "Dalriada" is a neologism in the Hungarian language playing with the idea of music that serves as a warning in dangerous times. In light of Hungarian history and literature, this interpretation suggests a certain historical nostalgia, even without considering what the music sounds like. In summary, the first layer is identified: a warlike scene is established, with a slight Hungarian flavor.

The second layer concerns the sequence of album titles. The albums released so far by Dalriada follow a consistent pattern based upon the Wheel of the Year (an annual cycle of festivals observed by modern Pagans), with each album named according to the succession of old, Romanticized Hungarian names of the months (compare "Jeles napok"). This is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table no. 1: Old Hungarian names for the months and album titles of Dalriada.

Name of Month	Old Hungarian name(s)	In English	Romantic (19 th century) name	In English	Album titles
January	Boldogasszony hava/Tél hava	Month of Blessed Mary/Month of Winter	Fergeteg hava	Month of Storm	Fergeteg (2004)
February	Bőjtelő hava/Télutó hava	Pre-Lent Month/Post-Winter Month	Jégbontó hava	Month of Ice-crusher	Jégbontó (2006)
March	Bőjtmás hava/Tavaszelő hava	Post-Lent Month/Pre-Spring Month	Kikelet hava	Month of Springtime	Kikelet (2007)
April	Szent György hava/Tavasza hava	Month of Saint George/Month of Spring	Szelek hava	Month of Winds	Szelek (2008)
May	Pünkösöd hava/Tavasutó hava	Month of Pentecost/Post-Spring Month	Ígéret hava	Month of Promise	Ígéret (2011)
June	Szent Iván hava/Nyárelő hava	Month of Saint John/Pre-Summer Month	Napisten hava	Month of the Sun God	Napisten hava (2012)
July	Szent Jakab hava/Nyár hava	Month of Saint James/Month of Summer	Áldás hava	Month of Blessing	Áldás (2015)
August	Kisasszony hava/Nyárutó hava	Month of Virgin Mary/Post-Summer Month	Új kenyér hava	Month of New Bread	Nyárutó (2018)

September	Szent Mihály hava/ Őszelő hava	Month of Saint Michael/Pre-Autumn Month	Földanya hava	Month of Mother Earth	Őszelő (2021)
October	Mindszent hava/Ősz hava	Month of All Hallows/ Month of Autumn	Magvető hava	Month of the Sower	–
November	Szent András hava/ Őszutó hava	Month of Saint Andrew/Post-Autumn Month	Enyészet hava	Month of Decay	–
December	Karácsony hava/Télelő hava	Month of Christmas/ Pre-Winter Month	Álom hava	Month of Dream	–

I focus my analysis on the second, fourth and sixth columns; the other three columns are present to help understand the differences and similarities in English. First, the old Hungarian names (first recorded in the early Modern era when Hungarian spread widely as a written language) are represented only in one case (the similar names are highlighted with bold typesetting); in all other cases, the ‘Romantic’ forms of the names are used. The “Romantic (19th century) name” column contains the month names inspired by the national romantic movement of the 19th century. In this regard, this calendar is known today as the “Szekler calendar”, referring to the name of a highly respected Hungarian-speaking minority in Transylvania, in present-day Romania (Constantin 2012: 26–42). The problem of the Szeklers and their origin will be explored later, but for now, I only refer to the phenomenon as telling of Dalriada’s interest in national romanticism. Just as album titles follow the Wheel of the Year, so do the lyrics also thematically center on the theme of each month in one way or another. This suggests a Pagan or at least naturalistic, traditionalist attitude. Neo-Pagan religious beliefs and the neopagan movement aiming to return to the purity of Nature (especially in connection with Germanic neo-Paganism) have greatly impacted popular culture, including metal (Dornbusch, Killguss 2005: 97–124). Only three of the band’s recordings depart from this system, including *Arany album* (2009), *Mesék, álmok, regék (Tales, dreams, legends, 2015)*, and *Forrás (Spring or Well, 2016)*, which are all compilations including various covers, re-recordings or live performances.

Layer 2: Dalriada’s Relation Towards the Mother Tongue

All the lyrics written by András Ficzek are entirely in Hungarian. Most folk metal bands refuse to write songs in English. Rather they choose to follow the rich, expressive power of their mother tongue. Famous examples include Moonsorrow of Finland and Skyforger of Latvia, both of who only use English in their band name. In this way, Dalriada, Moonsorrow, Skyforger, and other such bands share a similar approach toward language. Ficzek states that one element in the authenticity of a Hungarian folk metal band is situated in its use of language. Such bands do not necessarily expect to reach a broad international audience. As such, the audience for many folk metal bands is limited to those who share the band’s native language; thus only indirect internationalization is likely for such folk metal groups thanks to their choice to use local or regional languages.

Dalriada's second and third albums, *Jégbontó* (2006) and *Kikelet* (2007) provide some interesting points for analysis. *Jégbontó*, their second full-length effort, aimed to reach an international audience as rough English translations are contained in the CD booklet. The translations are indeed rather raw, as they bear no sign of professional translation: their only purpose is to make the Hungarian language—often regarded as obscure by outsiders—more decipherable. In this regard, the 2008 album *Land* by the band Týr parallels such an approach as the original Faroese lyrics are given English translations in the album insert. In these cases, we see that bands aim to remain authentic in using their native languages, but they are also aware that this choice is problematic for reaching a wider international audience (compare Einar Selvik's thoughts on problematic lyrical matters at The Quietus: Wardruna Interview (Cory 2017)). As such, they strike a compromise by providing translations in a widely understood, essentially international language that provides an entryway for non-native speakers to grasp the lyrical content of the music. Meanwhile, the back cover of the album features a complex amalgam of languages as the song titles are listed in English, Hungarian, and in an archaic Hungarian runic typesetting.

Kikelet features a decidedly different strategy regarding the use of written language, though ultimately meaning is still mediated through translation. On the album insert, the lyrics are similarly structured in two columns. In one column is the familiar Hungarian language rendered in Latin typeset. However, in the other column is the same Hungarian lyrics, this time written in the old Hungarian runic alphabet as had appeared on the back cover of *Jégbontó*. Instead of aiming to reach an international audience with English translations as before, here Dalriada instead uses a dead alphabet, largely unfamiliar to their Hungarian audience, to make an introspective turn, in the process reinforcing their links with national folklore, cultural heritage, and language. In this way, Dalriada doubles down on the romantic-nostalgic authenticity that lay in the use of their mother tongue. This, of course, has some impact on the band's reach. As Dayal Patterson suggests, the limited popularity of a band must be understood at least in part as resulting from Dalriada's uncompromising use of language (2013: 310–319). The reasons behind Dalriada's orientation to language are now clear.

Layer 3: Dalriada's Relation Towards National History and Heritage

The main textual corpus of Dalriada's lyrics largely focuses on: 1) national history; 2) romantic high literature; and 3) Hungarian folklore. We might also include a fourth "miscellaneous" grouping, including songs that do not fit into these three categories. A systematic analysis of all of Dalriada's songs is beyond the scope of the present study. Rather, I use selected examples to illustrate the primary mechanics of Dalriada's lyrics and, in doing so, also situate Dalriada on the map of both power and folk metal.

Dalriada's lyrics largely emerge from the band's understanding of certain historical events and cultural theories. Dalriada's songs often center on the origins of origin of the Hungarian people. Academic historiography in states that the ancestors, the so-called "Magyar tribes" (Magyar is the endonym of Hungarians) arrived in the

Carpathian Basin around the year 896 and systematically conquered it, led by seven chieftains (Kristó 2006: 48–67). The father of the leading chieftain was Álmos, who is the main figure and narrator in Dalriada's song "Amit ad az ég (Álmos búcsúja)" ("What the Sky gives [The Farewell of Álmos]", 2015). Traditionally viewed as a shaman, warrior chief, and sacral leader (Kristó 2006: 76), Álmos foresees the destiny of his children with a prosperous kingdom forged by blood and iron in the West, far from the steppes where the tribes originate. This notion fits conventional academic opinions about the migration of Magyars to present-day Hungary (e.g., Kristó 2006; Györffy 1988). On the other hand, an alternative history that suggests a tentative kinship between the Huns and the Magyars is explored in at least two of Dalriada's songs, "Égnek ostora" ("The Scourge of the Sky", 2008) and "Hadak útja" ("The Road of Hosts, Ígéret", 2011). Such a kinship is historically unproven yet based on medieval Hungarian historical manuscripts, such as *Gesta Hungarorum* (Györffy 1988: 72–73). Of course, the brotherhood of the Huns and Magyars has an ethnographic layer, which contains an indirect relation, blooming from the Scythian and other Iranian influences gathered during the long migration of the Magyar tribes (Kristó 2006: 37–47). "Égnek ostora" focuses on the great king of the Huns, Attila, characterizing him in a familiar Romantic manner: the Scourge of the Sky, sent forth by God to punish an empire. Being a great warrior himself, Attila is imagined in terms of typical steppe imagery, surrounded by falcons and a large host of cavalry (Bóna 1993: 57–92). The Roman Empire is never specifically named in the song, yet it is alluded to in general terms as Attila builds his empire. "Hadak útja" touches on another problematic topic, the question of Szekler kinship with Hungarians and Huns. Szekler people live mostly in the territory of modern-day Romania in the region of Transylvania. Since the Middle Ages, Szeklers have been regarded as being related to the Huns, and thus to Magyars and Hungarians (Kristó 2002: 31). According to a local legend, Prince Csaba, the last Szekler ruler, and his cavalymen ascended to the Milky Way on the Road of Hosts but will return when his people are in mortal danger (Benedek 2015). Dalriada refers to this precise story in their song, placing the Szekler hero within the Hungarian context once again, serving the purpose of claiming Szekler identity as part of Hungarian national heritage.

Besides the mythical past of the nation, marginal medieval historical figures can also be found in the lyrics of Dalriada. "Árpádházi Margit balladája" ("The Ballad of Margaret of the Arpads", 2006) focuses on a lesser-known historical figure, Margaret of the Arpads, not the well-known Saint Margaret. The song's storyline is set in 1204 when a palace revolt took place and the Latin crusaders captured the city of Constantinople once again (Ostrogorsky 2001: 345, 353–354). The ballad depicts the grief of the Hungarian princess sinking into despair at the downward spiral of Byzantine power. She looks for refuge in her homeland, which she was never to see again. The marginal yet tragic story of Margaret is a great example of Ficzek and Dalriada's deep interest in Hungarian history.

In terms of Hungarian national heritage, perhaps the greatest inspiration for Dalriada is the long period of Ottoman occupation. I have selected six songs in this regard: "Hunyadi és Kapisztrán nándorfehérvári diadaláról" ("The Triumph of Hunyadi and Capistrano at Belgrade", 2012), "Kinizsi mulatsága" ("The Feast of

Kinizsi”, 2011), “Szondi két apródja, Part 1” (2006) and “Part 2” (2007) (“The Two Pages of Szondi, Part 1” and “Part 2”) and “Thury György balladája” (“The Ballad of György Thury”, 2018). I have ordered these songs to follow the chronology of historical events rather than the songs’ release dates.

The Ottoman period of Hungarian history is generally understood as an era of constant struggle for the survival of the nation as it hoped to avoid succumbing to the superpowers on the borders: the emerging Hapsburg dynasty and the Ottoman Empire.⁶ The wars that were meant to restore the integrity of Hungary after the defeat at the battle of Mohács (1526) and the capture of the capital Buda (1541) were nationwide efforts led by Christian leaders against the infidel aggressors (Sinkovics 1985b: 220–221). One of the greatest victories over the Turkish troops was fought by the leaders János Hunyadi and Giovanni Capistrano at the walls of modern-day Belgrade, in Hungarian known as Nándorfehérvár. The siege took place in 1456 and to celebrate the Christian victory, the pope enacted the ritual of ringing church bells at noon to commemorate the triumph (Engel, Kristó, Kubinyi 2001: 211–212).⁷ Dalriada’s prayer-like provides some details of the siege and the success of the defenders, asking for the Lord to help the Hungarian nation to endure. The narrator of the song speaks from the perspective of a contemporary of Hunyadi. While the song is somewhat nostalgic, on another level, the song also suggests that these sorts of historical heroes are the ones we still need today. Judging by the contemplative manner expressed in other examples of Dalriada’s music, the song does not recount actual historical details. Rather, it stands as an interpretation of historical facts, as in the case of the Finnish metal scene and “history culture” (Kärki 2015: 131–137).

“Kinizsi mulatsága” (“Kinizsi’s Feast”) recalls the great victory of Hungarian troops over the Ottoman army at Kenyérmező in 1479 (Engel, Kristó, Kubinyi 2001: 259–261). At the time, Pál Kinizsi was one of the leaders of the Hungarian army. Today, he is regarded as a legendary historical hero with Hercules-like status. Dalriada once again reimagines historical events in this song by making Kinizsi’s victory an even greater achievement than it actually was. The title and lyrics of the song suggest that the battle was mere entertainment, an easy feat for such a powerful warrior who vanquishes the Ottomans for fun. This, Dalriada suggests, is a true Hungarian hero. Likewise, the “Ballad of György Thury” once again centers on a legendary military hero from the Ottoman period. Thury is known as the “Hungarian El Cid” regarding his efforts in the reconquest of the then Pagan-occupied territories of Hungary. Dalriada’s song commemorates his bravery and tragic death at the hands of the Turkish army using the traditional ballad, a genre historically used to sing tragedies and elegies.⁸ The mood of the ballad reflects the bravery of those who know that they are doomed to die in battle but do so anyway, serving as an example for all patriots. The lyrics work to encourage such warriors and arm them meta-

⁶ The notion of a long period of historical struggle is fertile ground for metal lyrics (e.g., Weinstein 2000: 35–43).

⁷ The edict of pope Callixtus III ordered all Europe to commemorate the siege by bellring at midday that is a custom in Hungary present day as well.

⁸ Thury’s death occurred in 1571, close to the fortress of Kanizsa, a long-held fort and key location in controlling South-West Hungary (Sinkovics 1985a: 605).

phorically with the powers of thunder and storm, referring to the passing of these natural forces when their work is done.

Another important ballad covered by the band is “Szondi két apródja” (“The Squires of Szondi”). The original text of the song was composed by János Arany, one of the most important romantic-era Hungarian poets (Keresztury). The folkloristic romanticism of János Arany is best displayed in his ballads that were inspired by original folk material (Benedek 1970: 10–22). “Szondi két apródja” is one of the most well-known pieces written by Arany, remembering the capture of the castle of Drégely by the Ottomans in 1552. The excerpt below may paint a better picture of the song’s atmosphere:

The ruins of Dregel have sunk in the clouds
The setting sun peers back, fight-worn is its red gaze,
opposite, a gentle green-grassed hill of mounds
with a spear and a flag that the wind frays.

Two youths are kneeling with lutes in their hands
– looks as if there were a cross struck to the spear’s stem –
with victory shouts, proud Ali cheers his bands
and he dances and praises and feasts them.

[...]

Go good father Marton, this is my response:
Szondi never wanted mercy from your master –
from the hands of Jesus flow true mercy’s fonts;
it’s to Him I commend the disaster!

[...]

Szondi fought with thousands! Alone, he, and in vain!
Holding off the ruin with his own back merely –
armies fell in droves by his mighty sword slain
in his left hand his hauberk shone fiercely...

True... He fought like Rustem’ – it can’t be denied –
though his knees and sinews by our guns were broken,
true... I saw the fight... But stop! Ali will chide,
and his wrath must not vainly be woken!

Like crops fell the corpses, the Turks fell or fled,
littering the valley like landfill all gory.
He stood on the blood-soaked peak of his death
and awaited his own end with glory.⁹

⁹ For the full, bilingual text of the ballad please visit: https://www.visegradliterature.net/works/hu/Arany_J%C3%A1nos-1817/Szondi_k%C3%A9k_apr%C3%B3dja/en/1972-The_two_pages_of_Szondi (access: 05.08.2022).

György Szondi parallels György Thury, not just in their names but in their heroic manner towards the overwhelming enemy. Dalriada's first big hit was a cover of the important Arany ballad of Arany "A walesi bárdok" ("The Bards of Wales")¹⁰ which revolves around a marginal historical event in medieval England. Edward I, also known as "Longshanks," was infamous for his cruelty in uniting the islands of Britain and Ireland. Moreover, after the war of 1282–1283, he purged the Welsh bards who refused to sing his praises (Elton 1992: 70–71). As Arany's poem suggests, this story parallels the situation of the Hungarian people under Hapsburg oppression during the second half of the 19th century (Benedek 1970: 90). Dalriada's cover of this ballad is included on the compilation *Arany album* (a pun since Arany means 'gold' in Hungarian, making the work's title *Golden Record*) that contains only musical interpretations of Arany ballads. Besides historical pieces, there is also included a series of tragic folk stories on the album, which some teachers often use to teach about Arany's poetry.

The last thematic set of three examples of Dalriada's songs demonstrates the band's contrasting orientations to Hungarian folklore. "Táltosének" (2007) praises the old Hungarian shaman tradition. A *táltos* is a person who bears all the traits of a shaman: gifted with visions, experiences dream-voyages, and is an expert in healing and ritual practices (Kovács 1982: 168–169). The final verse of the song focuses on the *táltos* as a necromantic channeler, an ability that encompasses one's whole existence from life to death. "A Nap és Szél háza" ("The House of Sun and Wind", 2008) is another example of a musical reimagining, but this time of a folktale rather than historical events. The origin story of the Pleiades constellation (in Hungarian *fiastyúk* or "mother bird with sons") speaks of eight sons changed into ravens and scattered around the world who are later reunited in the sky with their mother as the constellation (Bakos 2008), using the "smallest child" motif well-known to European folklore. Dalriada's lyrics follow the general storyline of the original folktale:

There was a poor woman and her seven sons
 She went for day labour day-by-day
 One day she got nothing but
 a jar of milk

She bid the seven sons:
 That little milk is their only food.
 No one should drink it
 But should be increased with wheat.

The woman comes home in the evening, and there was no milk
 In her anger, she said to her sons:
 As now you have eaten all the milk,
 Become seven ravens!

¹⁰ For the full, bilingual text of the ballad please visit: https://www.visegradliterature.net/works/hu/Arany_J%C3%A1nos-1817/A_walesi_b%C3%A1rdok/en (access: 05.08.2022).

[...]

Now the shaman-boy is on his route
Looking for his brothers
He visited the House of Sun and the House of Wind
At last, Wind said what to do

Mill torments their bodies, but they do not die
Spill your blood in their food.
The curse of the seven sons is broken thus
They will remain together forever

Eight stars shine upon the sky
They may shine until the world stands still
Woman, if she comes out on a summer night
Looks up and sees her eight sons together.¹¹

More than just a folktale, the story centers on notions of Hungarian kinship. The story comes from Moldova where the *csángós* (a relative of Hungarian tribes) live.¹² Such kinship stories provide an important great perspective on Carpathian Hungary and its ethnographical heritage.

The final folkloric example is “A dudás” (“The Bagpiper”, 2012). Originally a folk song of medieval origin, “The Bagpiper” tells the tale of a musician who gains musical virtuosity by making a deal with the devil. Since Goethe’s *Faust*, such a scenario is well known in popular culture, and here we see it again as the story suggests that the bagpiper could only learn how to play his instrument by descending to Hell (Isenberg 1986). Dalriada’s cover of “The Bagpiper” draws an interesting, if ironic, connection between learning to play the bagpipes and playing metal music. All bagpipes are difficult to play (the Hungarian version included), and metal music has cultivated a sense of virtuosity all its own. As such, Dalriada’s version of “The Bagpiper” makes metaphorical equivalence to the bagpiper’s selling his soul and the perennial perception that metal music is a tool of Satan. Interestingly, a bagpiper has been part of Dalriada’s personnel since the recording of the album *Napisten hava* (2012) (for the topic of musical diversity within metal please see the case study of Keith Kahn-Harris 2010: 95–104).

Apart from thematic material, the actual composition of Dalriada’s lyrics is also of interest. The first example is “Búsirató” (“Mourner of Sorrow”, 2018). Several folk songs’ lyrics are stitched together in this piece and the song cleverly pairs two of these texts in dialogue with one another. In the performance, one text is sung with a woman’s voice, while the other is performed with male vocals. The woman sings of banished love and curses her former lover. Meanwhile, a man sings of his decision to join the Hussar regiment to embark on a military career. The texts that Dalriada uses here are taken from separate and distinct folk songs. As such, they originally have nothing to do with one another. Yet, in the band’s ingenious arrangement, the texts

¹¹ For the Hungarian lyrics please visit: <https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Dalriada/Szelek/192701> (access: 05.08.2022).

¹² For more information, see Klára Sándor.

are melded together to generate new meaning in that the female and male narrators' fates are now intertwined. For example, we now understand that the banished lover is indeed the man who runs off to join the cavalry. Another excerpt for illustration:

Beat the one, God, the heart that loves two or three
Embraces one, laughs with the other, as many he sees as many he loves,
But I only love one, and suffer so much,
Nobody's companion, nobody's curse I will be no more!

I thought until I live, I would not suffer sorrow,
But I joined you in that, I live my days in sorrow,
But it will have an end, I had enough,
It is over now, let the wind take my mournful sorrow!

[...]

I told you not to love me,
Like you, I only love with my two arms,
Love one who has horse and a chariot,
Let sorrow kill you with him!
Love one who has horse and a chariot,
Let sorrow kill you with him!

The Hussars pass by our house,
My sweet mother, I will join them,
I will be the first captain,
That three years is nothing.
I will be the first captain,
That three years is nothing.¹³

"Galamb" ("Dove") from 2006 also uses portions of folk songs. The song is set in the Ottoman period when the song's hero is set to battle the Pagans. Anachronistically, however, the hero refers to the national tricolor of Hungary. This is historically inaccurate since the tricolor flags of European countries emerged much later after the French Revolution. This could be called romantic anachronism, as the patriotic feelings are elevated with a national symbol that is projected back to the most heroic age of Hungarian history, providing an epic aura for the setting of the song.¹⁴

Conclusion

The songs I have discussed in this paper provide only a glimpse into the complete oeuvre of Dalriada. I have described some representative examples that are meant to illustrate larger patterns that pervade the entirety of their work. In conclusion, three questions arise:

¹³ For the Hungarian lyrics please visit: <https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Dalriada/Ny%C3%A1rut%C3%B3/677622> (access: 05.08.2022).

¹⁴ Compare the similar treatment of Viking history and literature in Viking metal (von Helden 2010: 257–264).

- 1) Is Dalriada a (neo)Pagan band? In the manner of Eluveitie, Týr or Bathory it is perhaps incorrect to say that Dalriada is specifically Pagan as my analysis shows that the band's primary interest lay in a Hungarian heritage inclusive of both Pagan and Christian references. Many pre-Christian "Magyar" figures (shamans) and mythological topics are covered in Dalriada's music. Yet, important home-defending wars that often pitted Christians against the Ottomans are given equal space. Thus, it is not the religious interest of the narratives but the topics themselves that constitute Dalriada's song texts.
- 2) Is Dalriada a romantic metal band in the manner of many examples of "Pagan romanticism" from contemporary Europe? Yes, Dalriada follows the path of other groups driven by 19th-century ideals, for example, bands like Eluveitie, In Extremo, Leaves Eyes, etc. The aim to recreate, reinterpret or even actualize national history is a well-observed concept within metal music, here having an impact in Hungary as well.
- 3) Does Dalriada use their music to preserve and popularize Hungarian traditions? Yes, their original goal was to revitalize lost folklore. Two key motifs in the band's output are, first, the problem of authenticity in the use of the Hungarian language; and, second, the need and willingness to revive almost-forgotten elements of national history and Hungarian ethnography. Dalriada is a romantic band with no overt religious or political sentiments apart from purely celebrating their homeland's heritage, traditional values, and history.

Dalriada is a rising star on the international scene. After many years of work in Hungary, the group has achieved great success not just in Europe but also on the other side of the Atlantic and even in the Far East with a short tour in Japan. Dalriada's work is clearly rooted in Hungarian material, but it also demonstrates a great variety of subject matter and methodology in the preservation of culture.

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Abstract

This article comprises a case study of the lyrical program of the Hungarian folk metal band Dalriada. I employ a close reading based method that relies on ideas drawn from reception studies, metal studies, history and literary studies toward an understanding of Dalriada's reinterpretation of elements of Hungarian history (e.g., Medieval figures, the period of Ottoman occupation), folk traditions (e.g., folk songs) and high literature (the works of János Arany). I conclude by discussing some common patterns in these interpretations that run through Dalriada's overall output.

Różnorodność podobieństwa. Węgierska literatura wysoka, historia i folklor w tekstach Dalriady

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi studium przypadku programu lirycznego węgierskiego zespołu metalowego Dalriada. Przeprowadzono badania metodą *close reading*, które opierały się na ideach zaczerpniętych z badań nad recepcją, metal studies, historii i literaturoznawstwa w celu zrozumienia reinterpretacji elementów węgierskiej historii przez zespół Dalriada (np. postaci średniowiecznych, okresu okupacji osmańskiej), tradycji ludowych (np. pieśni ludowe) i literatury wysokiej (dzieła Jánosa Arany'ego). W interpretacjach zauważono pewne wspólne wzorce, pojawiające się w całym dorobku artystycznym grupy.

Keywords: Hungarian high literature, Dalriada, folk metal, Hungarian history, folklore

Słowa kluczowe: węgierska literatura wysoka, Dalriada, folk metal, historia Węgier, folklor

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“Acidofilia”: The Work of the Acid Drinkers in the Discursive Landscape of Metal Music Culture

Introduction

In recent years, Polish metal music has become increasingly popular abroad. Metal bands, especially black and death metal groups such as Behemoth, Vader, Mgła, Decapitated and Batushka tour abroad and frequently perform at prestigious festivals such as Wacken Open Air, Bloodstock Open Air, Brutal Assault and Graspop Metal Meeting. In Poland, it is mainly TSA, Turbo, and the band Kat (later Kat & Roman Kostrzewski), sometimes referred to as the “big three of Polish metal” in national music criticism, who are mentioned as pioneering heavy metal bands. Also worth mentioning are distinguished national bands such as the Acid Drinkers, Closterkeller (with their charismatic vocalist Anja Orthodox), Hunter, Luxtorpeda, Frontside, the Sixpounder and Flapjack, as well as bands that are less frequently mentioned today but are still important for the development of metal sub-genres: Fatum, Destroyers, Wilczy Pająk, Hellias, Hammer, Exorcist, Imperator, Armagedon, Taranis, Neolith, Corruption, Graveland, Pandemonium and Dead Infection.¹

The focus of this article is the artistic activity of one of the first thrash metal bands in Poland, the Acid Drinkers, founded in 1986 in Poznań. I begin with an outline of the state of research in the field of indigenous metal music studies and survey key perspectives and research categories related to song studies and the multimodality of popular music culture. I then analyze selected aspects of the Acid Drinkers' creative output.

The State of Metal Music Studies in Poland

Research in the field of metal music studies in Poland is still in its early stages, although there has been a noticeable increase in the popularity of this area in recent

¹ Obviously only selected national music groups are listed. In the international online database of metal bands, *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives*, nearly 4,000 Polish groups are included. It must be noted that many of the groups listed ended up at different stages of their careers, cf. <https://www.metal-archives.com/lists/PL> (access date: 8.07.2022). On the Polish black and death metal scene of the 1990s, see an interesting book *Rzeźpospolita* (Dorosiński 2021).

years. The first national academic publication on metal culture was Barbara Major's post-doctoral book entitled *Dionysus in bovver boots. Ecstatic of heavy metal music* [pl. *Dionizos w glanach. Ekstazyzm muzyki metalowej*] (2013) which is set in the current of cultural anthropology. This was followed by some isolated articles in academic journals and chapters in edited volumes. The situation remained the same until 2017 when a national academic conference called *Towards a Polish Variant of Metal Music Studies* [pl. *Ku polskiemu wariantowi Metal Music Studies*] was held at the Pedagogical University of Cracow [Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie] on 8–9 June. During the conference, papers were presented by male and female representatives of various scientific disciplines from key academic centers in Poland. Speakers included experienced independent academics, early-career scholars, and students. While this and other similar events were partly inspired by conferences organized in Poland on the study of rock culture and counterculture (mainly in Tułowice and Korfantów near Opole as well as in Toruń and Poznań), the most important impetus was to encourage the study of metal music in Poland by engaging with the ever-internationalizing field of metal music studies.

Since the Major's landmark book, there have been four multi-author publications in Poland devoted exclusively to metal music culture. These include two thematic issues of the journal *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura*, namely *Metal Studies. Studies in Metal Culture* [pl. *Metal Studies. Studia nad kulturą metalową*] (volume 10, issue no. 3. [2018]) and *Metal Culture in Ritual and Media Space* [pl. *Kultura metalowa w przestrzeni rytualnej i medialnej*] (volume 11, issue no. 3 [2019]). Two collective works have also been published, *Artists and Scenes of Metal (Counter)Culture* [pl. *Artyści i sceny metalowej (kontr)kultury*] (2020) and *Elements and Ideologies in the Narratives of Metal Music* [pl. *Żywioły i ideologie w narracjach muzyki metalowej*] (2022). More events and publications are planned, which hopefully will encourage further development in national metal culture studies.

Metal Music as Multimodal Discourse

Popular music studies draw on a wide range of disciplines and scientific perspectives, including musicology, cultural studies, literary studies, linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, media studies and social communication. In recent years, Poland has seen a sharply increased interest in so-called song studies (cf. e.g., Gajda, Tański 2022: 4–7; Tański 2021: 31–40; Regiewicz, Szargot 2021 and others). In Polish music criticism and academic studies, the term *piosenka* / *pieśń* is used most often, though alternatively, the term *utwór słowno-muzyczny* [meaning a musical work with text] or *song* is also used. I prefer to use the latter here as it allows for broader coverage of the issues of interest. As Waldemar Kuligowski points out in his introduction to the work *Song Studies. The Poetics and Politics of Song Production* [pl. *Song Studies. Poetyka i polityka wytwarzania piosenki*] (2021):

The advantage of the English noun *song* lies [...] in its extended meaning, indicating both a 'musical composition' and 'lyrical poem or ballad' and derived from the Old English

sang, meaning ‘voice’, ‘song’, ‘art of singing’, ‘psalm’, ‘poem’. This vast semantic field clearly indicates that we are interested in the process, the becoming of meaning, the ways in which songs are sung and used (Kuligowski 2021: 7).

One of the most influential perspectives in song studies is espoused by Simon McKerrell and Lyndon C.S. Way who consider music as a communicative component embedded in a multimodal discourse² alongside modes such as text, still images, moving images, color, gesture and other sounds (McKerrell, Way 2017: 1–2). In an article published in the journal *Popular Music*, Simon McKerrell, characterizing the method of multimodal discourse analysis from a music studies perspective, rightly stated:

Multimodal discourse analysis incorporates text alongside other ‘modes’ such as sound and image as communication, and starts from the position that people construct their own stories, their own worlds and culture, and that the analyst’s job is to get their hands dirty and draw out the surface and subtextual meanings that emerge from music as social communication (McKerrell 2016: 427).

An important approach to the study of multimodality as an important feature of contemporary media is the sociosemiotic perspective. As Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz has noticed, social semiotics is a perspective derived from the work of Michael Halliday and described in depth in the work of Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen.

The theory has extensive links with the field of film, art history, iconography, and draws on the work of Michel Foucault, Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, Stuart Hall. At its core is an analysis of the use of signs – belonging to different resources – as products of social and cultural contexts. For multimodal studies of interaction and discourse, the text is a window that allows the individual user to be seen and known. A sociosemiotic analysis of texts as the result of the use of multiple modalities, shaped by a variety of collective agendas and values, can provide us with a window into the whole culture (Lisowska-Magdziarz 2019: 120).

Songs as multimodal text-and-music narratives are also worth considering from a transmedial optics (cf. Kosek 2022; Kosek 2019) and performative perspective (cf. Eckstein 2010; Tański 2021b). Metal composition functions in a dense network of genre, scene, media and discursive relationships and connections. “Narrative texts” (Bal 2012: 3) of metal culture would have to be analyzed with a social dimension, polycontextually, in trans-discursive optics. Concerning the study of literature, these planes and categories are insightfully described by Adam Dziadek. The researcher notes: “If the reality is polycontextual, the description of the associated text should be the same. The text is not confined to literature alone, as Roland Barthes’

² The notion of *discourse* itself is, of course, variously defined and semantically fuzzy. A number of extensive studies have been devoted to this issue, cf. the chapter *The Study of Discourse* (Teun van Dijk 1997: 1–34), the book *Discourse* (Howarth 2000) or *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis* (van Leeuwen 2008). Here, we shall adopt a broad definition of discourse as a set of “socially sanctioned utterance practices that define both the place of the subject and the status of reality” (Markowski 2006: 536).

Mythologies brilliantly demonstrates – the book attempts to capture and describe the diverse phenomena of French reality in the 1950s” (Dziadek 2013: 35). Dziadek pays attention to the social and economic foundations of each text; he also states that “a text, especially a literary text, inevitably involves naming the world, naming experiences, sensations, feelings, emotions, things and phenomena around us” (ibid.).

The lyrics of metal songs, although they often operate with simplicity, specificity and platitudes, frequently also touch on important, up-to-date, socially and politically involved issues. This paper highlights the multidimensionality of selected songs by a group of merit to the Polish ‘scene’ – understood in the broad terms proposed by Keith Kahn Harris (2007) – and to national musical culture as a whole from the perspective of multimodal and (trans)discursive song studies. The specificity of song research is well captured by Waldemar Kuligowski:

In the work of research known as *song studies*, we assume that we process a multitude of different information when we come into contact with a song. What kind of information is concerned? These are musical features (melody, form, rhythm, instruments used), lexical features (language, words), information concerning the performance (style, attributes) and performers (voice, gender, age, identifications), but also reception (time, place) and recipients (their expectations, emotions, reactions). It is these elements that make up the “worlds” of songs, they bring to life their “socially created realities” (Berger and Luckman), this is “poetics and politics” that is most appropriate for them (Clifford and Marcus). (Kuligowski 2021: 12).

Of course, exploring these ‘worlds’ of songs of a single band or artist, taking into account all the aspects indicated above, is a complex task. It would require extensive expertise and likely involve a multidisciplinary research group consisting of cultural scientists, anthropologists, linguists, literary scholars, musicologists, music theorists, media scholars, sociologists or psychologists and other specialists. Technological and production aspects should also be borne in mind. In this context, song studies should open a dialogue with representatives of technical and scientific sciences, including specialists in electronics and acoustic engineering.

This paper focuses on selected narrative texts of the thrash metal group Acid Drinkers, text-media relations, and intertextual dialogue with other motifs and productions present in Polish and world metal culture. The perspectives proposed by Keith Negus and Pete Astor are relevant here. They advocate for an ‘architectural’ approach to popular songs that treat songwriters more as ‘architects’ than romantically inspired expressive artists (Negus, Astor 2015: 226). They moreover indicate that repetition and playing with ambiguity are important and integral components in the architecture of songs (ibid.).

Dimensions of the Acid Drinkers’ Output

The Acid Drinkers was formed in 1986 in Poznań. The founding members of the group were Tomasz “Titus” Pukacki (vocals, bass guitar), Robert “Litza” Friedrich (guitar, vocals), the guitarist Dariusz “Popcorn” Popowicz and the drummer Piotr

“Chomik” Kuik. There have been several personnel changes in the group. Currently, alongside band founder Tomasz Pukacki and guitarist Dariusz Popowicz, the line-up includes drummer Maciej “Ślimak” Starosta (since 1989) and guitarist Łukasz “Dzwon” Cyndzer (since 2017). Importantly, the band composed English lyrics from the very beginning. Their use of English reinforces a certain dialogue with the Anglo-Saxon roots of hard rock and heavy metal music. The group’s lead singer repeatedly mentioned his musical fascinations and inspirations in interviews, including bands associated with the New Wave of British Heavy Metal (i.e., Iron Maiden, Saxon, Judas Priest, and others), the achievements of Motörhead, early albums by Metallica and the Polish group TSA. The band’s debut album, titled *Are You a Rebel?* was released in 1990. To date, the group has released fifteen original studio albums (cf. Discography), two albums containing covers of various popular rock and metal songs in unobvious, sometimes even “subversive” arrangements (*Fishdick*, Loud Out Records, 1994; *Fishdick Zwei – The Dick is Rising Again*, Mystic Production, 2010) and several compilation and concert albums. It is also worth mentioning the Acid Drinkers tribute album *Ladies and Gentlemen On Acid* (Makumba Music, 2019), released on the occasion of the group’s 30th anniversary. The album features artists of note in Polish popular music, such as Katarzyna Nosowska, Krzysztof Zalewski, Ania Rusowicz and the bands Vader, Decapitated, Illusion, Proletaryat and Corruption.

Accumulated over more than three decades, the group’s artistic output could be the subject of a separate, comprehensive dissertation. Some have attempted to write a biography of the band. An interesting book, especially from a fan perspective, is *Report on Acid Drinkers* [pl. *Raport o Acid Drinkers*] by music journalist Leszek Gnoiński. Published in 1996, it naturally does not cover the remarkable years that came later.³ Analysis of the impact of the Acid Drinkers might be considered from the viewpoints of musicology, production or cultural studies in addition to the historical-biographical perspective. In this paper, I particularly emphasize a cultural studies approach in my analysis, highlighting the group’s well-thought-out image and artistic, visual, and textual strategies as led by Tomasz “Titus” Pukacki.

The band’s visual identity was an important factor in putting the Acid Drinkers on the map of the domestic metal scene. The group’s provocative name refers to consumers of cheap alcoholic beverages, especially the cheap wine commonly called *jabol* [pluck, vino] in Polish punk rock circles. A creatively logoized version of the band’s name has become an important trademark present on album covers, stage props, gadgets, T-shirts worn by fans, etc.

Album cover iconography is a key element of the band’s visual communication. In this context, a central figure in Polish graphic artist Jerzy Kurczak, the creator of cover projects for several famous Acid Drinkers albums as well as albums by other bands that have achieved iconic status among Polish music fans, such as *Ostatni Wojownik* [*Last Warrior*] by the group Turbo and *Oddech Wymarłych Światów* [*The Breath of Extinct Worlds*] by Kat. The cartoonish, comic aesthetic is a hallmark of

³ Also noteworthy are the audio-visual materials dedicated to the group, cf. exemplary productions listed in the “Filmography” to this article.

the visual sphere of the Acid Drinkers. Categories such as humor, irony and the grotesque are essential elements of the poetics of numerous cover images, this reflected and reinforced by the band's song lyrics. The subversive combination of the humorously depicted components on the cover of their 1990 debut album (e.g., lighted sticks of dynamite placed in the mouth of a cartoon character tied to a chair with a rope; a runaway dog and a mouse; a keg of beer; women's underwear) with the genre-ambiguous musical layer (a collage of heavy metal, thrash metal, glam, punk rock and elements of acoustic blues and rock and roll) was something of a novelty on the Polish phonographic market. Even the title of the group's debut album *Are You a Rebel?* had a communicative and provocative function. It was a kind of "test", an introductory question addressed to the listener. The person choosing to listen to the album should, by definition, be open to musical, spontaneous, rebellious, trans-genre, or crossover (to borrow terminology from music journalism) artistic material.

The covers of Acid Drinkers albums often allude to the titles of specific albums and songs in a clear, humorous convention (e.g., *Strip Tease* including a peculiar depiction of the Statue of Liberty; and *25 Cents For A Riff* with an image of a US quarter and the figure of a stout man in a suit, presumably intended to symbolize a greedy representative of the music industry). Such iconographic elements often refer to pop culture, especially American symbols (e.g., Coca-Cola cans, dollar banknotes, a T-shirt of one of the male characters on the wrapper of the 1991 album *Dirty Money*, *Dirty Tricks* adorned with the logo of the tobacco brand Marlboro, etc.). In terms of intertextuality (cf. e.g., Głowiński 1986; Nycz 1990), we can also find references to symbols associated with metal culture. An example: the cover of one of the band's most important albums, *Infernal Connection* (1994), features a chicken carcass wearing a white T-shirt with a black emblem that alludes to the iconography of the famous British band Venom, particularly the cover of their *Black Metal* album. The contrast of elements, depending on the viewer of the visual image, can have different effects, including a humorous one due to the unusual nature of the concept. However, it may also arouse distaste, for example among representatives of vegan circles due to the use of slaughtered poultry on the cover, or satisfaction, especially among fans of the band Venom, who, when choosing to listen to the album *Infernal Connection*, hope for artistic references to this group.

The Acid Drinkers' cover iconography can also be perceived using the category of self-intertextuality (cf. Głowiński 1986: 80). Frequently, the band's later albums are visually reminiscent of their earlier album covers, particularly in the ways key motifs are reused and adapted, especially American pop culture symbols and animal figures. In this context, the cover of the *Ladies and Gentlemen on Acid* compilation album, released in 2019, is an interesting graphic concept. This album is a collection of covers of Acid Drinkers songs recorded by various performers from the Polish music scene. The cover artwork refers to the visual sphere of several previous albums. Thus, it depicts a character with a jester's hat on his head (an allusion to the revered 2008 album *Verses of Steel*) and dynamite in his mouth (*Are You a Rebel?*), seated on a cow (1998's *High Proof Cosmic Milk*). The cover also features, among other images, the iconic Coca-Cola can (debut and *Strip Tease*), a small chicken

carcass wearing a Venom T-shirt (*Infernal Connection*), and banknotes (*Dirty Money*, *Dirty Tricks* and *Fishdick*, among others).

This (self-)intertextual play is part of a wider, complex artistic strategy. Of course, there is a ludic function involved, but the message, particularly in the lyrics, is not limited in this way. In the textual layer of Acid Drinkers’ songs, there are many themes and motifs characteristic of numerous artists and bands, especially heavy and thrash metal musicians. Therefore, in the group’s discography, we can find stories oscillating thematically on such topics as interpersonal relationships, sex, stimulants, dangers, and conflicts of the modern world, violence, death, and war. The pieces such as “Barmy Army”, “Anybody Home??!!”, “Drug Dealer”, “Pizza Driver”, “Poplin Twist”, “The Joker”, “I Fuck the Violence (I’m Sure I’m Right)”, “Swallow the Needle”, and “The Ark” constitute lively highlights during the band’s concerts. It is worth noting, however, that some songs clearly feature socially engaged narratives and that some could even be regarded as “protest songs” (cf. Eyerman, Jamison 1998; Dillane, Power, Devereux, Haynes 2018: 1–10; Gajda 2021: 81–87) constituting verbal and musical manifestos mostly directed against specific ideas, phenomena, institutions or actions.

Songs of this type are present on the band’s first album, including, for example, “Barmy Army”, which talks about a crowd following a madman (dictator). An excerpt from the last stanza:

I’m a shooter and a target, I’m a hero – killer.
 If I kill more, I’ll get a monument
 I’ll die with desire, I got their word:
 Fire will burn over my head!
 (Acid Drinkers, “Barmy Army”, *Are You A Rebel?*, Under One Flag 1990)

The song addresses the senselessness of war and human suffering in a blunt manner using uncomplicated language. The composition provides a glimpse into wider social problems, manipulation of those condemned to death on the battlefield and authoritarianism of certain groups and those in power. All this highlights the opposition of “us” (soldiers, victims of war, messengers to carry out top-down orders) vs. “them” (rulers, politicians making promises to reward obedient followers by erecting monuments in their memory, etc.). An important element in the “architecture” of the song is also the chanted refrain: “Barmy Army! Dead Army! Barmy Army! Shadows Army!”. Amounting to a kind of socially-critical slogan, these words work not only as strong structural elements in the music but also provide meaningful resonance in the lyrical context of the song and have become equally resonant in the mouths of fans when collectively chanted during the band’s energetic concerts.

In another song, also from the debut album, a clearly expressed declaration against violence can be heard in the chorus: “I fuck the violence and I’m sure I’m right”. The theme of war returns in the song “Nagasaki Baby”, a description of the victims of an attack, possibly a nuclear attack, as the title of the song might suggest. However, it is important to bear in mind that works dealing with social and political issues are sometimes misunderstood and exploited in different ways by

the audience. Simon Frith argues that songs are not so much about the ideas themselves, but about the way they are expressed. Writing about protest songs, he notes:

In pop terms, these don't function to convey ideas or arguments but slogans. And the paradox here is that the political power of a pop song—as a slogan—need not bear any relationship to its intended message at all. Irony, in particular, seems to be a doomed lyrical strategy. The Strawbs' 1973 single "Part of the Union," for example, was meant as an anti-union song, but its ironic chorus ("they can't get me, I'm part of the union!") became a gleeful picket line chant [...] (Frith 1996: 165).

Frith provides other examples: the misuse of John Lennon's famous ballad "Imagine" by participants in a Tory pre-election rally and Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" and the attempted takeover of the popular song by the Republican Party during the 1984 presidential election (ibid.).

It is like that many Acid Drinkers fans, giving in to the ludic atmosphere of the band's live performances, chant "Barmy Army! Dead Army!" without much thought about the pacifist content of the song. However, it is notable that among the group's fans there are also some very engaged people who carefully analyze each release, exchange insights and opinions in online forums or closed groups on social media, prepare and share covers of songs in the digital space, and are active and creative members of the culture of participation.

Occasionally, Acid Drinkers' songs also include references to the biographies of real-life people. One example of this is the album *La Part Du Diable* from 2012. The album's title evokes associations with an opéra comique by French composer Daniel Auber (1782–1871) with libretto by Augustin Eugène Scribe. The album features the song "Andrew's Strategy", the lyrics of which refer to the crimes committed by Anders Breivik, the far-right terrorist responsible for the two attacks of 22 July 2011 in Norway in which 77 people were killed and several hundred injured. The song's chorus contains subversive words that direct the listener's attention to the figure of the killer:

Andrew having random fun
firing his machine gun
Andrew having random fun
(Acid Drinkers, "Andrew's Strategy", *La Part Du Diable*, Mystic Production 2012)

Another song from the same album, "Bundy's DNA", concerns famous American serial killer Ted Bundy who was sentenced to death for killing many women between 1974 and 1978:

Arrested twice – ran away twice
Leadin' this death race is what he likes
Aspen was cold, as cold as ice
Killin' ain't fun when hunger strikes
when Lisa died the feeling was there
inside his soul venom would brew
sit back, relax, behold the chair

Ted, it's your fate waitin' for you
 (Acid Drinkers, “Bundy's DNA”, *La Part Du Diable*, Mystic Production 2012)

Tomasz “Titus” Pukacki, who writes most of the band's lyrics, dedicated one of the songs on the album to the nature of the electric chair (“Old Sparky”). This, in turn, is a reference to the manner of Bundy's execution, which took place on 24 January 1989. In the text of the song, the narrator addresses an anthropomorphized chair, which has a somewhat absurd effect:

There were so many names
 women, children, men all just
 Ted, Virginia, Martha, James
 they were all turned into dust
 and so many have been waitin'
 for your manly, warm embrace
 though your reputation's shakin'
 the respect you had was ace
 (Acid Drinkers, “Old Sparky”, *La Part Du Diable*, Mystic Production 2012)

The ironic, often absurd, and grotesque effect in the lyrics of Acid Drinkers' songs is intensified by stylistic devices such as hyperbole, animation, colloquialism, numerous metaphors, repetitions, paradoxes, and exclamations. While media discourses sometimes stereotype metal lyrics as banal and worthless, the Acid Drinkers' songs demonstrate a diverse thematic lyrical range that is near-journalistic in character and sensitive to social phenomena.

Acid Drinkers brings the same creativity to their cover songs as well. According to the *PWN Polish Language Dictionary*, a cover is a new version of a musical work previously performed by another artist or group.⁴ Kurt Mosser categorizes covers into *reduplication covers*, *interpretive covers*, *send-up (ironic) covers* and *parody covers* (cf. Mosser 2008). Metal culture researcher Deena Weinstein claims that covers exist on a continuum, from those that are radically different from the original to those that are nearly identical to the original (Weinstein 2010: 245). On the other hand, P. D. Magnus, the author of the recent work *A Philosophy of Cover Songs* (2022), proposes a division into *mimic covers* (close to the original) and *rendition covers*, whose creators do not attempt to imitate or ‘impersonate’ the original. In the case of the latter differences from the original can occur along a number of different dimensions (cf. Magnus 2022: 43–47).

On the Acid Drinkers' albums *Fishdick* and *Fishdick Zwei – The Dick is Rising Again*, we find mostly covers of rock and metal hits, including “Ace of Spades” by Motörhead, “N.I.B.” by Black Sabbath, “Another Brick In The Wall” by Pink Floyd, “Whole Lotta Rosie” by AC/DC, and “Highway Star” by Deep Purple. Despite performing cover songs, the band's personality and musical character are present in, for example, Tomasz “Titus” Pukacki's distinctive voice, humorous interludes, and music-text transfigurations. The second album includes some surprising covers of songs that seem far afield from the metal scene. For example, they cover “New York, New

⁴ Cf. <https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/cover.html> (access: 10.07.2022).

York” originally performed by Liza Minnelli and popularized by Frank Sinatra with a heavy/thrash metal aesthetic and “Et si tu n’existais pas” by the French-American singer Joe Dassin for which drummer Maciej “Ślimak” Starosta provided lead vocals for the Acid Drinkers’ rendition. The band also covers some iconic metal compositions, rendering them in peculiar and, for some listeners, highly controversial ways. For example, in the case of Metallica’s famous ballad “Nothing Else Matters”, the Acid Drinkers version features Czesław Mozil, who is primarily associated with alternative pop music, and a musical arrangement featuring accordion, flute and clarinet. Perhaps even more peculiar, thrash metal band Slayer’s already classic song “Seasons in the Abyss” was reworked as a country song by the Acid Drinkers.

In many cases, artists use surprise effects and contrasts to achieve a humorous and original effect in the songs they cover. The Acid Drinkers’ covers are, therefore, not reduplicative; they are creative interpretations (*rendition covers*) and frequently also ironic variants (*send-up covers*), playfully distancing themselves from the originals. While multimedia extensions of songs through music videos and other audiovisual media are beyond the scope of the present study, it is worth noting that the Acid Drinkers’ cover of the iconic The B-52’s hit “Love Shack” and created a music video for it, forming a dialogue with the American group’s humorous audiovisual narrative.

Conclusion

The word “Acidofilia”, borrowed from the name of the album by the band Acid Drinkers released in 2002 and used in the title of this article, is a neologism that uses the suffix *-philia* (in Polish *-filia*) from the Greek word *philo*, expressing, as the last segment of a compound word, ‘a liking for something’. The title of the album and the songs can be interpreted as a “liking” for acid, stimulants, especially when considering the lyrics of the song, in which we find references to figures of deceased rock artists such as Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison and Bon Scott. The refrain of the song contains phrases such as: “My body’s falling apart / I feed on Acidofilia / It’s very difficult art / You better don’t ask to heal ya”. Fans of the band may also understand the title of the album as a kind of positive attitude towards the band, a fondness for the long-standing and inspiring run of the group.

This article seeks to distinguish several dimensions of the Acid Drinkers’ output which amounts to a complex multimodal narrative that engages in dialogue with those who came before as well as their contemporaries in rock and metal (sub) genres. In metal culture, different institutional, ideological, ethnic, cultural and media discourses collide. The Acid Drinkers operate in this trans-discursive space of metal art and culture. Conscious artistic and visual endeavors, a well-thought-out musical and textual architecture of the songs, numerous awards in industry referenda and national prizes, as well as recognition from other artists, have all contributed to the important position that Acid Drinkers takes in the history of Polish popular music.

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Abstract

The main subject of this article is the artistic activity of one of the first thrash metal bands in Poland, the Acid Drinkers founded in 1986 in Poznań. The text outlines the state of indigenous metal music studies and identifies selected theoretical contexts related to song studies and the multimodality of popular music culture. In the analysis of the Acid Drinkers' work, particular attention is paid to the intertextuality of the iconography of Acid Drinkers' album covers, selected protest songs created by the band, and ironic interpretative covers, which also constitute an important element in the group's discography.

„Acidofilia”. Twórczość Acid Drinkers w dyskursywnym krajobrazie kultury muzyki metalowej

Streszczenie

Głównym tematem niniejszego artykułu jest działalność artystyczna jednego z pierwszych zespołów thrashmetalowych w Polsce, założonej w 1986 roku w Poznaniu grupy Acid Drinkers. W tekście nakreślono stan badań z zakresu rodzimych metal music studies, a także wskazano wybrane konteksty teoretyczne związane z badaniami nad songami oraz multimodalnością kultury muzyki popularnej. W analizie twórczości polskiego zespołu zwrócono szczególną uwagę na intertekstualność ikonografii okładkowej Acid Drinkers, wybrane protest songi stworzone przez zespół oraz ironiczne covery interpretacyjne, które stanowią również istotny punkt w dyskografii grupy.

Keywords: metal music studies, Polish metal music, creative activity of Acid Drinkers, covers, song studies

Słowa kluczowe: studia nad muzyką metalową, polska muzyka metalowa, twórczość Acid Drinkers, covery, studia nad piosenką

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Heaviness: A Key Concept of Metal Music Through the Lens of Deleuzian Philosophy

Introduction¹

One of the main elements attributed to metal music is the quality of heaviness. Very few academics have devoted research to heaviness, even though it is very often used to describe metal music. My goal in this paper is to construct a way of understanding heaviness as a vehicle for musical meaning. In my analysis, I use concepts developed by French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari because I believe that through their metaphysical concepts, we can more readily grasp the ever-changing and highly contextual field of musical meaning.

First, I review current academic research that deals with heaviness, and I present the individual definitions that are presented by the various authors. Then I outline relevant aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, more precisely the notion of a bloc of sensations as a compound of affects and percepts and the notion of intensity as a genetic source of qualities and extensities. Through this conceptual position, I suggest an interpretation of the notion of heaviness, that combines all antecedent definitions of heaviness.

Heaviness as a Product of Intensity

Heaviness as a term for sound quality appears in many works about metal music and is the subject of theorizing. For example, Phillipov (2012), Wiederhorn (2013), and Weinstein (2000) use the notion of heaviness to describe the sound qualities of metal music and its subgenres. However, these authors never explain what precisely heaviness means. Rather, they rely only on popular connotations of the word. On the other hand, some have provided some degree of contextualization, conceptualizing heaviness as the quality of electric distorted guitars (Berger 1999; Berger, Fales 2005), while others observe these qualities – mostly distortion (Herbst 2017, 2018)

¹ Note: This short text is based on an original academic paper "Stávání se tíhou: Filozofie difference a metalová hudba" ("Becoming Heaviness: Philosophy of Difference and Metal Music") that is a part of the peer-reviewed collection *Sémiotika a ideologie* (*Semiotics and Ideology*) which will be published in late 2022. The text has been modified, reduced, and translated from Czech to English by the author.

and tuning (Kahn-Harris 2007; Mynett 2012, 2013) – as key to perceptions of heaviness throughout the history of metal music. Some argue that metal music “becomes heavier and heavier over time” (Berger 2004: 182; Herbst 2018: 2).

So, what makes it heavier? For some, it is the distinctive timbre and pitch range of electric guitars (Mynett 2013: 44), while others believe that the quality and quantity of distortion make for a greater feeling of heaviness over time (Berger 1999: 58–60). Two of Berger’s claims are important:

Any element of musical sound can be heavy if it evokes a sense of power or any gloomy emotion, and the history of metal music can commonly be seen as a pursuit of heavier and heavier (Berger 2004: 131).

Heaviness is a comparative term, and in any act of listening, the quality of the metal fan’s heaviness experience is shaped by his past experience with the distorted sounds of the electric guitar (Berger, Fates in Greene 2005: 196).

Berger’s observations here show us two important aspects of heaviness – its double-fold of the physical objectivity of certain sound qualities and the mental, experience-based subjectivity of the individual. This is a bloc of sensations, defined by Deleuze and Guattari as a “compound of percepts and affects” (2001: 142). Accordingly, Deleuze and Guattari further suggest that it is the artist’s goal is to “create blocs of percepts and affects” (ibid.: 143). To preserve this bloc, the artist needs a substance that can endure. However, what has an effect on us when we come into contact with art is not the substance itself, but its percepts and affects. “Sensation is not realized in the material without the material passing completely into the sensation, into the percept or affect” (ibid.: 167). Percept in this case means perception that is not burdened by its creator or by the one who receives the percept. And affect “exceeds the power of those who undergo it” (ibid.: 142). The artist thus creates an affect by working with the substance. So, it depends not only on the substance itself and the intention of the work but also on ourselves. We are part of the whole creative process together with the affects that influence us: “Affect is becoming” (Deleuze, Guattari 2010: 256). Deleuze and Guattari thus argue about art:

The artist shows affects, invents affects and creates affects in relation to the perceptions or visions he offers. However, he does not create them only in his work, but gives them to us, we become with them, we are part of the compound (Deleuze, Guattari 2001: 153).

Heaviness, as a bloc of sensations, is created by the artist but its final completion takes place only in the listeners themselves. We can perceive this as the ability of the listener to infer², that is whether they can, from the percepts available to them, feel and become the heaviness together with the affects.

Listening to metal music, or any other music with the quality of heaviness, listeners are introduced to blocs of sensations, which consist of various percepts and affects. The perception of heaviness then depends on the degree of their ability to contextualize the individual percepts and affects with their previous listening experience. This is crucial for heaviness perception. When we listen, we engage our

² For more on musical inference, see Švantner (2019: 93–115).

ability to perceive levels of intensity, through percepts and affects, and compare this level with our past or current experience. We also engage our ability to perceive several overlapping percepts and affects as an individual sensation. It is because of this perception that determines whether we perceive a composition as unstructured noise, resembling white noise, or as a densely layered array of individual intensities that overlap one another so that some of them rise above all the others and together with us become heaviness.

I briefly turn my attention to the notion of intensity:

For it is not figures already mediated and related to representation that are capable of carrying the faculties to their respective limits but, on the contrary, free or untamed states of difference in itself; not qualitative opposition within the sensible, but an element which is in itself difference, and creates at once both the quality in the sensible and the transcendent exercise within sensibility. This element is intensity (Deleuze 1994: 144).

Intensity is perceived as pure difference in itself, which is itself incomprehensible to our senses. It is a certain force, which we perceive through its influence, its effect on the world. It thus exceeds the possibility of empirical grasp, yet it is accessible to us through the extensities it precedes, which in turn makes the perception of intensity. It is a type of virtual conflict – pure difference that is actualized through the extensities it creates and which we perceive as a certain degree of a given intensity. Intensity is a part of the real, but it does not exist anywhere but in its extensity. However, it is not identical, nor at all similar, to the intensity from which it originated; it is only one instance of it. We have a double possibility of difference here: extensive and intensive. When we divide the extensive difference (i.e., length, content, volume) in two, we end up with two halves of the same extensity (wood cut into two halves, pouring half a glass of milk into another glass results in two half-glasses of milk). On the other hand, intense differences (i.e., temperature, pressure, sound) must undergo a material change in this division, because we cannot divide or add a few units of that given difference without causing material change. Because intensity is a certain type of encounter, a feeling that does not correspond to any empirical category, it forces our mental faculties into a transcendent act, namely the creation of new identities and ideas.

Heaviness is therefore a concept we use to describe a notion of specific comparative change in our musical experience. We compare our previous musical experience with the current listening experience, and we sense the difference between those two individual events. For Berger, it would be the difference in the level of distortion of electric guitars in each individual listening event. I do not agree with all of this assertion since heaviness is a comparative term. But it is not an exclusive quality reserved only for the timbre of distorted electric guitars, because we can find it in other, guitar-less genres of music. It is thus important for us to know that heaviness is a kind of vehicle of musical meaning that does not depend on some pre-experiential essence but on the listener's experiential ability to correctly determine points of importance, to determine which relationships are clearer and closer than others.

The determination of sound as heavy thus lies in the reciprocal relationship between the virtual object and the listener's ability to differentiate the sound as heavy

music. And that differentiation is the result of a learning process. The perceived assemblage of a sound is the comparison of the degree of present becoming-intensities. We interpret it as listeners – we recognize the difference, the relationships between the individual levels of intensities and we give them meaning based on previously learned relationships. This explains why listeners unfamiliar with the semantic relationships of metal music rarely hear more extreme metal genres as music, and by analogy why a listener unfamiliar with jazz does not recognize bebop's intricate relationships or why listeners perceive the heaviness of distorted guitars as increasingly heavier and heavier (Berger 1999: 58–60).

Physical Properties of Sound as Extensities and Qualities Created by Intensity

Heaviness does not depend only on the listener's experience and interpretive ability. The physical properties of sound play an important role as well, as it is precisely these extensities through which the given intensities are present and available to us. First, it is necessary to individually consider the sonic elements of heaviness that we perceive based on our experience with the environment and those that are evolutionary encoded within us; those elements that emerge from culture and cultural customs are therefore of a purely contextual nature. The ecological approach suggests that, based on our experience with the environment, we will learn certain physical assumptions and essentials of the world, which we then apply to our understanding of certain phenomena, such as the magnitude of the force that produces a sound: “[Knowledge] stems from our basic experience of what sorts of noises are produced by light tapping as opposed to heavy thumping” (Zagorski-Thomas 2012: 141). Low-pitched sounds need more energy than high-pitched sounds to actualize, and “this association... is a matter of ecology rather than culture” (Zagorski-Thomas 2015: 123). David Huron comes to a similar conclusion in his acoustic-ethological model which is his refinement of Morton's model (Morton 1977: 855–869). Here, he adds volume intensity to a tone's pitch. This creates a model with four acoustic conditions:

- (1) High pitch and high volume – associated with alarm, fear and energy, (2) high pitch and low volume – associated with calm or friendliness, (3) low pitch and high volume – associated with aggression and seriousness, (4) low pitch and low pitch intensity – associated with sadness, drowsiness, and relaxation (Huron 2015: 343).

Thus, not only by changing the pitch but also by changing the intensity of the volume, do we change the perception of a sound. How does this manifest in metal music?

We need to look at metal through the concept of the primary and secondary domains of music. The primary domain of music deals with tempo, meter, rhythm, melody, and harmony. That is what we might call matter or content in music. The secondary domain is the domain of form, it is what shapes the matter and determines how it will be accessible to us. Its constituent elements are therefore texture, timbre, and location (Moore 2012: 29). However, the perception of these two domains as divisible is somewhat misleading, as it implies the superiority of the

primary dimension over the secondary. We could compare this illusion to the illusion of identity as superior to difference. The secondary domain is what differentially defines the primary domain as an identity that we can (differentially) distinguish from other perceptions as unique. However, we also cannot designate a secondary domain as superior to primary domain. Rather, we would call their relationship an assemblage, a body that consists of certain singularities that have relationships with each other. These relationships are not fixed and can be severely interrupted at any time, followed by finding and creating new relationships and connections. Thus, it is impossible to determine the superiority of one over the other, because the meaning is formed precisely by the creative combination of both dimensions into a reciprocal assemblage, which subsequently becomes something more than just the sum of its parts. That said, I now focus mainly on the last element of the secondary domain, namely location.

This concept best demonstrates the objective physical aspects of sound, as it becomes within space, more precisely the location of the sound source and receptor in space, as well as the space itself, in which sound becomes. One way of exploring this concept is by using the soundbox model (Moore, Dockwray 2008: 219–241). As it was later refined (Moore 2012: 29), Moore describes the purpose of this model as “providing a way to conceptualize the texture in which the recording takes place by allowing us to hear the recording in space” (ibid.: 30).

Even though Moore talks about the soundbox exclusively within the recording of sounds and music, this model can also be applied to live listening because listening also takes place in a certain space and this space is accounted for in performance. However, Moore speaks of the soundbox as “a heuristic model of how sound source location works in the recording process, and acts as a virtual spatial enclosure for resource mapping.” (ibid.: 31). He further describes four aspects of the soundbox (ibid.: 31): time, as the only component of the soundbox, does not deal with space, but rather with duration in space. The first purely spatial aspect is laterality. This is based on the human properties of the binaural perception of sound. Our ears amount to a pair of auditory receptors with which we are (not necessarily consciously) able to distinguish even minimal differences in the properties of sound. For example, we determine a sound’s directionality based on the difference in time (measured in milliseconds) it takes for the sound to reach our left and right ears respectively (Huron 2006: 103).

The second aspect is prominence, comprising a “relative dynamic level and degree of distortion” (Moore 2012: 31). Prominence deals with our ability to distinguish two different sounds from within a soundscape and to measure them against each other within space to determine their (approximate) distances. This aspect is very important for heaviness, as Mynett notes that “the sounds contained [in heaviness] will be perceived not only as containing great power and great size but also as sounding very close and intimate to the listener” (Mynett 2013: 46). Listeners’ ability to discern the proximity of and between individual sound sources is the ability to discern a certain intensity of proximity through its extensities and qualities. In this case, it may be the volume that is “a factor of both the dynamic level and the level of distortion” (Moore 2012: 32).

The third and final spatial aspect is register. This deals with pitch in a given space, but differently than laterality or prominence. Rather, the concept of register concerns only the pitch of a tone, namely its contextual evaluation of perception within the passage of time. If we hear a sequence of tones, we can determine when the sequence falls and rises in pitch. As such, we tend to perceive higher pitches spatially high, just as low pitches are perceived low within space. If we hear two different instruments playing the same pitch – such as a whistle and a clarinet (ibid.: 32) – we can determine which sound seems higher in space. This is thanks to the quality of timbre, i.e., the sound of a musical instrument that contains not only the fundamental frequency but also many other overtones. The sound of the whistle in this case contains a higher concentration of higher harmonic and non-harmonic components, thanks to which we perceive it spatially higher compared to the sound of the clarinet, which does not have such a large ratio of these components (ibid.: 32).

Our mental abilities to evaluate these physical properties of sound within space is a form of collision with pure difference – a collision with intensity reaching the borderline degree of laterality, prominence and verticality. Our experience compares this differentiability with previous differentialities, thus assigning meaning to a given intensity. Metal music often uses this evaluation of intensities in the form of heaviness. How do we achieve heaviness in the production of electric guitar music, an instrument symbolic and indispensable for metal music?

The two most commonly used techniques for creating the heavy intensities of electric guitars are tuning (Kahn-Harris 2007; Mynett 2012; 2013) and distortion (Herbst 2017; 2018). Usually, an electric guitar used to play heavy metal has six strings that are tuned to the pitches E2 A2 D3 G3 B3 E4. However, the guitar sound most associated with contemporary metal music is achieved by altering this standard tuning, either by using “dropped” tunings (most commonly “drop D”), fully down-tuning the entire set of strings by a half- or whole-step, or using modified guitars that include one or more extra bass strings. In this way, tunings containing D2, B1, A1 or G1 are common in contemporary metal, but some bands also use tunings that reach as far as C0, B0 or A0³. These lower frequencies affect our perception of the register, i.e., the intensity of the verticality of the sound. For example, if there are frequent jumps between low and high octaves, an impression of height is created within the space.

The second major aspect is distortion. Distortion affects our perception of sound on several levels. Berger and Fales speak of distortion as a technique that:

Compresses the signal and creates harmonious and non-harmonic overtones, sustains and also flattens the dynamic envelope. These acoustic effects lead to clearer sound, roughness and amplitude fluctuations, which is perceived as the noise surrounding the sound (Berger, Fales 2005: 184).

³ Use of these types of tunings can be found in a genre called *thall*. An example is the song “Suneater” from the album *Prophet of Despair* (2016) by the Moldovan band Fractalize. Available from (Thall Tv): www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nxN2x3_xsl (access: 15.05.2021).

By distorting sound, we influence the form of several extensities and qualities that occur in music. The flattening of the envelope affects the perceived proximity of the sound. As distortion reduces the differences between the phases of the envelope, the sound is perceived by the listener as immediately reaching maximum intensity and holding at this level without significantly reducing sound intensity (what we perceive as sustain, a relatively stable degree of intensity of a sound).

If the producer wants to evoke a sense of closeness in a sound, by bringing it closer to the listener, rather than increasing the sound volume, the producer adds a small amount of distortion (Moore 2012: 37).

In addition to flattening the dynamic range of the envelope, distortion also adds overtones that are part of the higher harmonic series. Distortion thus changes the timbre of an electric guitar by adding higher frequencies that its sound does not normally contain (Berger, Fales 2005: 194). This affects the register of the guitar timbre; the sound is perceived as fuller and more vertically spacious. From the perspective of the primary domain, it also makes the sound harmonically richer, because through compression the stratifications of individual frequencies are denser, so the difference in intensity of volume is obscured.

This whole projection of sounds takes place at high volumes (Moore 2012: 37), in which we perceive the guitar sound as, according to the models above, coming from a spatially powerful source (body) that is able to create a large amount of energy to produce such an intense sound. If we take a closer look at each of the qualities listed above, we again notice that we observe the same phenomenon, only differentially different, i.e., actualizing itself in different qualities and extensities that are different from each other and are not reminiscent of each other. But their purpose is the same: the formation of a sign to indicate an intensity that reaches a certain threshold and/or many intensities perpllicated within themselves. As such, we can make the following statements about the qualities and extensities that give us the feeling of the heaviness of the guitar sound: The sound of a distorted guitar is perceived as close (reaching a certain intensity of intimacy); as harmoniously extensive (exhibiting many perpllicated intensities); as spatially reaching staggering sizes (vertical and lateral, i.e., reaching a certain spatial power) and as mighty (evoking a feeling of spatial intensity).

Conclusion

Heaviness is an experiential, comparative designation for a specific aspect of the musical experience and indicates the degree and amount of intensity perceived through given extensities and qualities. It consists of an objective part: extensities and qualities sharing certain physical properties, which indicate the degree of intensity that produces them (high volume = a large amount of energy); and a subjective part: the listening experience and the degree of the ability to distinguish individual sounds as sounds of musical expression, which listeners then contextualize with the present listening experience, allowing them to determine the difference in intensity of the current composition compared to their previous experiences.

Heaviness can be achieved on many levels of musical composition. However, it is always a matter of working with intensities, with the boundary levels they reach and with the layering and stratification of intensities and their divergent perplexations. Important sonic aspects of heaviness are proximity, sound density and spatial power. Metal music achieves these aspects through many music recording and reproduction techniques that simulate the behavior of sound in the normal natural conditions of the world, allowing for modification of their intensities to create extensities and qualities of proximity, density and power. Using these physical properties of sound, which are experienced in the same context by every listener in their ordinary lives and are thus objective, metal music achieves a feeling of heaviness, i.e., a feeling of material size, power and great weight. This is associated with burden, that is intangible pressure, seriousness and a certain difficulty not of material origin, but cognitively psychological and based on a certain overwhelming of our mental abilities by layered, stratified and perplexed intensities. For proper recognition of these intensities as musical elements of metal music, listeners need previous experience with smaller degrees of heaviness as a vehicle for musical meaning.

The concept of heaviness as I have discussed it here is a possible convergence point for current definitions of heaviness within metal music studies. In this semiotic view of heaviness that covers all the important points related to current definitions of the term, heaviness is understood as a contextual concept, because in all cases, perceptions of heaviness are based on the listener's sound experience (not only cultural and social experience with musical sounds but also ecological experience that includes the objective physical properties of sound) and the listener's ability to recognize intensities and distinct levels of intensity. This is possible because of the relationship between the current sound and all the sounds that have already happened in the listener. The intensities between these sound experiences are pure differences, and the differences in their levels and the amount of these intensities are heaviness. Metal music takes heaviness as a central constitutional element, which is evident through the history and current practice of metal. We can claim this because we find a direct and indirect effort to achieve heaviness in all phases of metal musical creation: in composition, recording and reproduction of metal music. We thus find in metal music an effort to auralize the feeling of heaviness, the percept arising from contact with staggering differences in intensity. This percept is accepted by listeners, thus affecting each other and, through their previous sound experience, both become heaviness.

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Abstract

This work focuses on the concept of heaviness and its use in the context of metal music. It first examines the concept in the works of other academics interested in metal music and then seeks to find a common point of convergence between the various definitions of heaviness through Deleuzian and Deleuze-Guattarian philosophy. In doing so, this thesis brings together both a cultural approach to the study of music and an ecological approach, creating a cognitive-semiotic conception of heaviness as a perplexity of the physical-spatial properties of sound and the listener's musical experience.

Ciężkość: kluczowe pojęcie muzyki metalowej w świetle filozofii Gilles'a Deleuze'a

W artykule skoncentrowano się na pojęciu ciężkości i jego wykorzystaniu w kontekście muzyki metalowej. Najpierw analizowano tę kategorię w pracach innych badaczy zainteresowanych muzyką metalową, a następnie starano się znaleźć punkt zbieżności pomiędzy różnymi definicjami ciężkości poprzez filozofię Gilles'a Deleuze'a i filozofię Deleuzo-Guattariańską. W ten sposób w pracy połączono zarówno kulturowe podejście do badania muzyki, jak i podejście ekologiczne, tworząc poznawczo-semiotyczną koncepcję ciężkości jako ambaras fizyczno-przestrzennych właściwości dźwięku i doświadczenia muzycznego słuchacza.

Keywords: metal music, heaviness, intensity, percept, affect

Słowa kluczowe: muzyka metalowa, ciężkość, intensywność, percepcja, afekt

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The Global and Local Dimension of Metal Music

Broadly speaking, metal music is perceived as a phenomenon that belongs to Western culture including primarily North America and Western Europe. In this article, I aim to expound in a nutshell – the activity of African and Asian metal scenes, with particular emphasis on their connection with the metal mainstream and their relationship to local culture. I also reflect on the mechanisms influencing the development of metal scenes on the so-called “periphery” of the West.

As fans commonly perceive them, the most important bands, most influential labels, most significant festivals, and concert tours, and most important music media come from the western world. Commercial success of an artist is the result of the sale of records or tickets to concerts in America or Western Europe. Although metal has been long established in other parts of the world, the global metal scene is considerably oriented toward the Western world. In metal fans' opinions non-Western bands are regarded as curiosities or discussed in terms of their ability to break into the metal mainstream. The presence of Western stars in non-Western markets is perceived as a manifestation of effective expansion, winning markets, and audiences so far resistant to metal.

A good example of the current nature of the audience (and academic) awareness of metal music is, for example, *The Virgin Encyclopedia of Heavy Rock* edited by Colin Larkin (1999), also published in Poland under the title *Encyklopedia Muzyki Popularnej. Heavy Rock (Encyklopedia Muzyki Popularnej 2000)*. Both the introductory essay describing the historical development of metal music (or perhaps even more broadly, heavy rock) and the selection of entries about specific artists demonstrate how “heavy rock” is essentially British-American, with a little input from mainland Europe. The Polish edition adds a dozen or so entries about local artists, which does not change the fact that the book is full of information about bands, sometimes rather insignificant, but included precisely because they operated in the US or Great Britain.

Quite contrary to the picture mentioned above, metal music has been developing outside North America and Western Europe for a long time. Local scenes are often surprisingly self-sufficient, essentially isolated from mainstream metal forums

(festivals, tours, press, etc.), yet still very active and dynamic. Recognizing the vitality of metal culture in regions previously considered marginal leads to a better understanding of the local conditions governing popular music. Moreover, it also raises important questions regarding the aims of research on metal music in general. Should the locality of a scene be the basic filter imposed on the perception of music created outside the Western “center”? And if so, should the notion of “locality” affect only the perception of “marginal” phenomena and not be taken into account in characterizations of metal music created in North America or Western Europe? Is this local, “exotic” aspect really the most characteristic feature of metal music in Africa and Asia, or is it just the opposite: the development of these scenes shows the global potential of metal that can be launched anywhere and anytime, regardless of local conditions?

It is significant that in recent years, research on metal music has featured a rather strong trend toward describing and analyzing non-Western music scenes, in the process, taking into account local cultural, aesthetic, political, and moral concerns and their importance for shaping music in Asia and Africa. Examples of this growing interest in the decentralized nature of metal music include the documentary film *Global Metal* (2007), by filmmaker Scot McFadyen and Canadian anthropologist and musician Sam Dunn; the book *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (2008) by Mark Levine, a musician and professor of Middle East and African History at the University of California; the volume *Living Metal: Metal Scenes Around the World* edited by Bryan Bardine and Jerome Stueart (2022) including studies of local scenes from different regions of the world; and books by Edward Banchs of Florida Atlantic University including *Heavy Metal Africa: Life, Passion and Heavy Metal in the Forgotten Continent* (2016) and *Scream for Me Africa: Heavy Metal Identities in Post-Colonial Africa* (2022). The growing frequency of publications on global metal scenes reflects the intensive development of metal outside Europe and North America in recent decades. It also reflects a growing realization among metal music researchers that the West-centric view of metal is no longer relevant.

According to Adam Mayer and Jeffrey M. Timberlake, at the time of metal music's initial period of popularity in the 1980s, there were about 3,200 metal bands in North America and Western Europe, including both big names with global reach and bands that never achieved any sort of international status (Mayer, Timberlake 2014: 28). At that time, even though metal music appeared outside the Western mainstream, it was on a very limited scale. On the other hand, in 2008 the number of metal music performers around the world was estimated at around 75,000 bands in nearly 130 countries (Mayer, Timberlake 2014: 28). Mayer and Timberlake attribute this increase in metal performers and audiences to the ever-expanding worldwide digital accessibility to music, which not only allowed listeners from Africa and Asia to access the metal mainstream (so far limited by small imports of music on physical media), but also allowed a large number of artists to freely distribute their work (2014: 29). The result of this process was not so much the global expansion of the traditional metal market (though to some extent this was the case), but a kind of decentralization of metal music. Now, all over the world, regional metal scenes have a local (concerts, festivals, fans) and potentially global (presence on streaming

channels) reach. Interestingly, these scenes, which are physically separate from Western markets, are largely self-sufficient, and their participants generally do not have any ambition to achieve international stardom. Of course, there are spectacular careers of local artists such as The HU from Mongolia, but the general tendency is rather different.

Exotic Metal?

One might guess that the local character of metal music might be associated with some kind of fusion of ethnic and Western elements. However, even a cursory glance at these scenes tells a very different story. Indeed, the music of most metal artists from Asia and Africa is devoid of any trace of folkly exoticism (which is so welcomed by Western listeners). Rather, bands tend toward the reproduction of and innovation within the universal character of metal, often with a great predilection for its more extreme varieties.

This is quite an interesting phenomenon, because this “exotic otherness” may be attractive to metal fans looking for new sounds and inspirations.¹ Non-Western metal bands could potentially capitalize on elements of cultural fusion, however they eschew such a strategy, instead latching on to specific “pure” types of metal (death metal, black metal, grindcore, etc.).

Non-Western metal scenes are very diverse, and their development has depended on multiple local conditions. It is therefore difficult to compare, for example, metal from Japan, where listeners and creators have had virtually unlimited access to mainstream metal music as well as instruments, equipment, and recording studios; with metal from Botswana or Mozambique, places where musicians and audiences have had comparatively limited access to metal recordings and musical instruments as well as more fundamental issues, such as problems with access to electricity (Banchs 2016a: 313).

In Africa, metal music varies depending on the country and its internal situation. The first African bands inspired by Western rock—for example, Jimi Hendrix, Black Sabbath, and Deep Purple—appeared in the 1970s in Zambia. This strong Zambian rock scene (so-called Zamrock) coalesced around bands such as WITCH, Musi O-Tunya and Amanaz. Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, rock and then metal music was often suppressed by local authorities who associated it with the hostile civilization of the white West (Barone 2016: 26). In South Africa, however, metal developed without any significant obstacles, though only within white South African communities. The first black metal band composed exclusively of non-white musicians (Demogoroth Satanum from Soweto) was established there only in 2009 (Irizarry 2017).

There was an influx of metal music to Africa in the 1980s and 1990s via imports of European and American vinyl, cassettes and CDs. Regardless of the prevailing religion or the model of state power, in most African countries metal was subject

¹ Here it is worth mentioning the use of oriental ornamentations that appear quite often in Western metal and hard rock, for example, in the works of Deep Purple (“Perfect Strangers”), Metallica (“Wherever I May Roam”), Rammstein (“Giftig”), etc.

to restrictions, and local performers and fans faced repression and social ostracism (as was the case in Egypt, Morocco, Angola, Cameroon, and Mozambique) (Knopke 2015: 112).

For example, in 1997 about 90 metal fans in Egypt were violently taken from their homes and imprisoned on charges of “contempt for heavenly religion”, obscenity, and promoting political extremism. The local media jumped on the topic and wrote about satanic rituals, orgies, animal sacrifice, etc. (Matsue 2003: 14). In 2002, members of two Moroccan metal bands (Nikos and Reborn) were accused of Satanism, arrested, and held for two months (Robertson 2015: 75). In turn, in 1980s South Africa, under the influence of the “satanic panic” in the USA, the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) and government-imposed sanctions on the import of metal albums on charges of spreading Satanism and demoralization. This coupled with a serious lack of access to instruments, sound equipment, and electricity meant that metal music was largely forced underground where the scene was inevitably limited.

Extreme Code

It is difficult to generalize about “African” metal and “Asian” metal since each comprises a host of often divergent national scenes. It is also not easy to determine which performers are particularly important or popular because the most accessible data centers on the number of plays of individual songs on streaming services, and this is not always the best source of information. Therefore, for this study, I also include data from scientific publications and information from websites, blogs, and fan forums.

A key feature of the development of local metal scenes, regardless of their location, is their independence and self-sufficiency revolving around a specific globality and stylistic orthodoxy with a relatively small number of “ethnic” elements in the music itself. Many metal artists from around the world seriously consider whether to make music “their way” (and thus creatively use local music traditions) or according to conventional rules of the ostensibly global metal code. Several scholars have described this in a range of local metal scenes. For example, Ekkehard Knopke has written about the development of the local scene in Kenya. He recalls numerous statements of Kenyan metalheads who, on the one hand, feel that they should somehow refer to their own traditions and shared experiences with local audiences (indeed, a few such experiments took place there). On the other hand, they fear that their music will become an exotic curiosity and not be taken seriously (Knopke 2015: 109).

What is also important here is a completely different approach to the local musical tradition from the Western one: for a Western listener, the sounds of African folklore or the local language are simply exotic; while for Kenyans, the musical tradition is always associated with a specific place, tribe, and/or ethnic group. Just as people may be divided along the lines of language use, the evocation of specific musical traditions may also have similar (and serious) consequences. As Edward

Banchs notes in his study also devoted to the metal scene in Kenya, tribalism is a living and difficult issue, yet metal music becomes a way of overcoming ethnic tensions and conflicts that may be difficult for outsiders to understand (Banchs 2016: 320).

Following Benedict Anderson, Knopke notes that metal music offers artists and audiences the opportunity to participate in a specific, imagined community, based at once on a common global metal code (Weinstein 2000: 6) and local socio-moral and ideological conditions (Knopke 2015: 106). So, even if the music sounds similar in different parts of the world, the motivation to perform it may be fundamentally different. Even though metal itself is rebellious music that allows one to express disagreement with various forms of oppression (Brown 1995: 451), the experience of this oppression varies from place to place, and in turn, the reasons for performing or listening to metal music also vary accordingly.

For example, following Mark Levine, Jennifer Milioto Matsue notes that heavy metal in the Middle East might be used to forge a positive cross-regional identity among young people opposed to institutional, religiously motivated violence (Matsue 2003: 14). Stefan Barone, in his research on Tunisian metal, states that metal has given young Tunisians the opportunity to escape from a national ethos founded on religious hypocrisy, conformism, ignorance, and violence and that the local metal scene formed its identity in rebellion against “standard Tunisian mentality” (Barone 2016: 31). Similarly, young Kenyans’ choice of metal music is a reflects a break from rural, traditionalist culture in favor of aspirations to a modern, metropolitan lifestyle (Banchs 2016: 314).

Many non-Western metal scenes are notable for their cultivation of specific genres of metal. Even a cursory glance at some African and Asian scenes demonstrates that they are dominated by extreme types of metal: black metal, death metal, grindcore², doom, sludge, etc., while interspecies fusions are rare (most often in the circle of Arab and Mongolian metal). The information collected on the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* website proves useful for analyzing the data on genre preferences in individual local metal scenes. Although it is a fan initiative, this resource nonetheless provides important material for analysis (*Encyclopaedia Metallum*).³

It is impossible to present statistics for all local, non-Western metal scenes, so I have selected only a few scenes from Africa and Asia, taking into account the total number of metal bands assigned to a given country and the number of bands performing extreme metal genres such as black metal, death metal, doom, grindcore, goregrind, sludge, and their variants (terms used by the creators of *The Metal Archive*). I include both active and inactive groups.

² This observation is based on the analysis of the content of metal music websites in Africa and Asia and the genre assignments contained in the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* website where artists and fans are able to collectively edit information.

³ Over 1.5 million users are registered on the site. *The Metal Archives* section contains information on over 157,000 groups from all over the world. The archive is updated by users and verified on an ongoing basis by the moderators of the website.

Country	Total number of metal bands	Extreme metal performers	Percent
Africa			
Algeria	31	24	77
Botswana	9	4	44
Egypt	47	29	61
Kenya	8	5	62
Lebanon	61	36	59
Mozambique	2	2	100
South Africa	277	192	69
Tunisia	34	20	58
Asia			
China	387	257	66
India	297	197	66
Indonesia	2228	1871	83
Korea	279	120	43
Pakistan	57	37	64
Malaysia	696	295	44
Poland	3936	2748	69

Tab. 1. Participation of bands performing extreme types of metal within local scenes (own study).

In most cases, the percentage share of bands playing extreme types of metal in the entire local metal scene is about 60–70%. Although sometimes, as in the case of Korea, Botswana, or Malaysia, this number is 43–44%, and sometimes, as in the case of Indonesia, it even reaches 83%. Of course, this raw data does not tell the whole story about the nature of metal culture in individual countries. But it is indeed significant, as it indicates what kind of metal musicians and their fans prefer. The data does not capture how successful, influential, or popular a given artist's work is. However, the data provides insight into genre preference and therefore illuminates a portrait of general trends in this regard. This data also provides an important point of comparison for genre preferences in long-standing and well-grounded metal scenes, such as in Poland. The relatively small share of performers who indicate genre preferences with primarily local orientations (e.g., ethno-metal, folk metal) is also noteworthy. In the end, the data confirms that participants of the metal scene in certain non-Western regions prefer to adhere to the requirements set by the conventional metal code and be compared to artists performing similar music around the world.

The choice of extreme genres may also have another motivation; perhaps the brutality associated with the music is directly proportional to the external limitations affecting it. Metal's transgressive and rebellious potential is still rather potent,

although today metal does not arouse hysterical reactions from local authorities as in times past.

Metal Dreams

Many researchers of non-Western metal scenes emphasize the sociopolitical aspects of the music. Just like representatives of other musical genres of “foreign” provenance, many metal artists, by their very existence, somehow undermine the political and moral status quo. Many have also been directly involved in social and political movements, especially by using their music to comment on current events and criticize those in charge. In this regard, metal artists have been considered iconoclastic and dangerous simply because of the nature of the music they perform. This only confirms the subversive potential of metal, a potential aptly sensed by the authorities.

However, it also seems that these specific uses of radical metal’s transgressive potential result rather from its specific fluidity and susceptibility to narratives that are external to it. Metal almost always becomes a tool for creating a new, imaginary community in opposition to established traditional forms. As have others (Barone 2016: 31; Brown 1995: 446), Edward Banchs suggests that heavy metal is attractive to local musicians outside the West because it allows them to “escape into something new and unfamiliar”. This then becomes the basis for the emergence of subcultural projects in some sense aimed to revolutionize orientations to national belonging. In this context, listeners and performers are comfortable expressing themselves through a seemingly exogenous Western approach to music (Banchs 2016: 322).

The question is if the popularity of extreme forms of metal in the non-Western world is a significant or marginal phenomenon? In the grand scheme of the global music industry, artists who are isolated from the mainstream on local stages and who have no aspirations for international recognition also have no significant influence on the shape of the global music market. However, this very phenomenon is so widespread that it testifies to ways of participating in the global metal code in creatively meaningful ways that promise few if any monetary returns.

Markus Verne’s article “Music, Transcendence, and the Need for (Existential) Anthropologies of the Individual” (2015) analyzes the ultimately failed careers of two Malagasy metal musicians, Rija and Klara. Verne describes Rija and Klara as artists trying at all costs to overcome technical and financial adversities to make music on par with what they consider the world’s best metal. However, from a pragmatic point of view, such an effort is never fully appreciated by local audiences nor by the Western music market. Nevertheless, Verne concludes, their struggle is important regardless of the end result. It is the effort itself, not necessarily its specific outcome, that impacts a person’s identity, worldview, and desires. What is important here is the need for artists, in their own imaginations, to belong within the global metal scene despite slim chances it will ever happen. The artists subordinate their lives to this need, and it gives them a purposeful identity (Verne 2015: 79). Even if the self-perception of a musician as a metal artist is imaginary, the struggle is authentic, and we can hear its traces in the music.

Perhaps similar efforts, exerted by aspiring metal bands on the periphery and around the world, are what will drive the development of metal music in the future – outside the big market. And when one looks at other genre scenes in the world, for example, at the extremely developed, though also self-sufficient, and outside the mainstream contemporary new wave scene, it can be assumed that such a model of popular music functioning as a generator of imaginary global-local communities. Perhaps this is the direction in which metal is headed as well.

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Abstract

This article deals with the development of local metal scenes in Africa and Asia in relation to the metal mainstream. The article addresses the problem of Western centrism in the current perception of metal music and introduces researchers to the current interests of non-Western music scenes. The article also proposes a psychosocial perspective on local metal scenes and, at the same time, the imaginary global metal community.

Globalny i lokalny wymiar muzyki metalowej**Streszczenie**

Artykuł dotyczy rozwoju lokalnych scen metalowych w Afryce i w Azji w odniesieniu do metalowego mainstreamu. Autor porusza problem zachodnio-centryzmu w dotychczasowym postrzeganiu muzyki metalowej oraz przybliża aktualne zainteresowania badaczy nie-zachodnimi scenami muzycznymi. Proponuje też psychologiczno-społeczne spojrzenie na funkcjonowanie lokalnych scen metalowych i zarazem globalnej wyobrażonej wspólnoty metalowej.

Keywords: Global metal, extreme genres of metal music, local music scenes, African metal, Asian metal

Słowa kluczowe: metal globalny, metalowe gatunki ekstremalne, lokalne sceny muzyczne, metal afrykański, metal azjatycki

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Czech Pagan Metal: A Short Introduction to Major Local Trends

Introduction and Study's Goals¹

Metal music already has been part of the global music scene for more than fifty years now (Walser 1993, Weinstein 2000). A community of passionate fans has emerged around this music, together with a specific lifestyle. Metal music is constantly evolving, and new trends continue to emerge. As part of this process, Pagan or Paganism-inspired bands began hitting the global metal scene in the 1990s (see Helden 2010: 257–265; Heesch 2010: 71–81; Weinstein 2014). Bands like Bathory introduced a fascination with Nordic mythologies and aesthetics. The thrash metal band Skyclad popularized the use of traditional folk instruments in metal. Death metal band Amorphis popularized the Finnish national myth of Kalevala in their lyrics (Urešová 2022: 57–60). Since the breakthrough of Pagan-inspired bands like Eluveitie, Amon Amarth, and Korpiklaani into the metal mainstream within recent decades, the so-called Heathen, pagan or folk metal has increased in popularity. In the Czech metal scene, metal inspired by Paganism began to emerge in the late 1990s.

This article surveys current trends in Czech pagan metal and focuses specifically on how Paganism is discursively constructed in three bands associated with different sub-genres of pagan metal. These bands include Inferno as a representative of black metal, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy as an example of doom metal and Žrec as a model for folk metal. My analysis provides new insight into understanding ways that metal's fascination with pre-Christian European history, culture, and spirituality is translated and acculturated in the Czech context. How do Czech bands approach Paganism? In what ways, if any, is Czech pagan metal unique? Or do Czech pagan metal bands simply copy global trends? How important is spiritual identity in the personal lives of pagan metal band members? The focus of my analysis is on the lyrics of pagan music, but I also discuss the sound, image, and spiritual identity of band members with a focus on their understanding of what "Pagan" means. The findings of the study are also complemented with data from my broader work on

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Czech Pagan including music collected at concerts during field research between 2018 and 2022, seven interviews with fans and from an online questionnaire distributed via Facebook in 2021 with 336 participants from across the Czech Republic.²

Genre as a Horizon of Expectations

The concepts “genre” and “scene” are now widely used in popular music studies. I review relevant aspects of these notions below, setting the stage for further analysis and framing of later discussion of modern Pagan music in the Czech Republic.

In 1993, the American musicologist Robert Walser published the ground-breaking book *Running with The Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* which situates heavy metal as a set of practices, techniques, and aesthetics that are discussed and negotiated by all people interested in metal (1993: 27–28). In line with Walser’s insights, analysis of genre can be divided into two parts: a) genre analysis, which explores the common horizon of possibilities, expectations, and conventions within the genre, and b) discursive analysis, which focuses on exploring why songs in each genre are composed in a certain way or why a given genre’s lyrics are written and discussed in a particular style (Walser 1993: 27–34).

Musical details are therefore important because they shape discourse, which in turn shapes genre. Numerous discourses engage with defining genre. For example, music critic discourse may differ greatly from fan discourse (Walser 1993: 20–26). In the case of Pagan music, there is a clear difference between neo-Pagan religious discourse and secular understanding of the meaning of Pagan music, which can include a range of experiences from partying hard to transformative spiritual encounters. In this way, definitions of what Pagan music is often come into conflict with one another as discourses struggle for dominance (Weinstein 2014: 70). In the context of this study, I use “folk metal” to refer to a branch of death and heavy metal with Pagan lyrics, and I use “pagan metal” to refer to black metal with Pagan lyrics.

Genre represents not only a “horizon of aesthetic expectations” but also a codification of values and ideologies that are important to and shared by a particular community of people (Walser 1993: 29). For example, the lyrics of Pagan music generally reflect popular views of modern Pagans including themes such as belief in pre-Christian deities, a positive protective relationship with nature, patriotism, and idealization of the past along with a rejection of capitalism and consumerism. Questionnaire data suggests that alternative spiritual communities are attracted to Pagan music. Almost 20% of respondents subscribed to some sort of Pagan beliefs and 2.1% to Satanism, 1.5% to shamanism, while those inside responding “Other” (13.5%) indicated beliefs associated with New Age movements (“my faith comes from respect for nature, inspiration is for example the goddess Gaia, PachaMama, the elements, etc.; new age magician”). For comparison, this is a relatively high proportion compared to 2021 census data in which 2995 Czech citizens (0.0285%) adhered to Paganism and druidism, and 998 people (0.0095%) adhered to Satanism.

² The text is abbreviated chapter from author’s dissertation thesis *Moderné pohanstvo a hudba v Českej republike* aimed to be finished in 2023.

Walser also argues any deep understanding of genre must include an analysis of the music itself (Walser 1993: 39–41). Musical analysis allows us to make connections between qualitative understandings of genre and embedded meanings encoded into the structure of the music. The actual sounds of music (pitches, chords, rhythms, etc.) are essentially empty vessels that only acquire meaning through specific uses in particular circumstances. While a thorough musicological analysis is beyond the scope of the current study, suffice it to say that the sounds and meanings of music are inextricably linked within a complex web of cultural signification. All gestures mean something, and discourse motivates us to use them in genre-appropriate ways and in culturally recognizable forms.

In this way, genre might, in a sense, be defined by both interpretation and expectation. There are always many possible interpretations, but in each context, certain interpretations emerge as preferred or, in other words, “normal”. It is in this way that the interpretation of heavy metal varies across countries according to the needs of the community, which will be reflected in the sound and lyrics of the music. Pagan bands often use folk instruments from their countries of origin (in Slovakia, the *fujara* or shepherd’s pipe; in Scotland, the bagpipes) and thus create localized interpretations of the sub-genre.

Access to certain technologies also influences the shape of a musical genre (Walser 1993: 41–44). In Communist Czechoslovakia, the sound of rock music was influenced by the limited availability of quality equipment, which made rock recordings of the 1960s sound badly produced in comparison with mainstream Western recordings (Berka, Frešo 2013: 259–273). This problem was due not only to inadequate hardware, but also first-generation producers’ misunderstanding of the needs of rock music. They forced guitarists to muffle distortion or were unwilling to record a distinctive bass (Frešo 2011: 71–72). Similarly, in the case of Pagan music, there is often difficulty getting good quality folk instruments since they are often only obtainable from traditional artisans, which makes them relatively hard to get and expensive. Using instruments of lesser quality or poor recording of folk instruments can in turn lead to a less-than-authentic sound, which can easily become a target for criticism from fans and critics. Music is firmly rooted in matter and body, not just in our minds, and research needs to reflect this.

Walser’s (1993) approach to the study of music, through its emphasis on the discursive dimension of music, becomes particularly useful for studying how the genre and textual content of Pagan music are negotiated among fans, musicians, and the world of the music business.

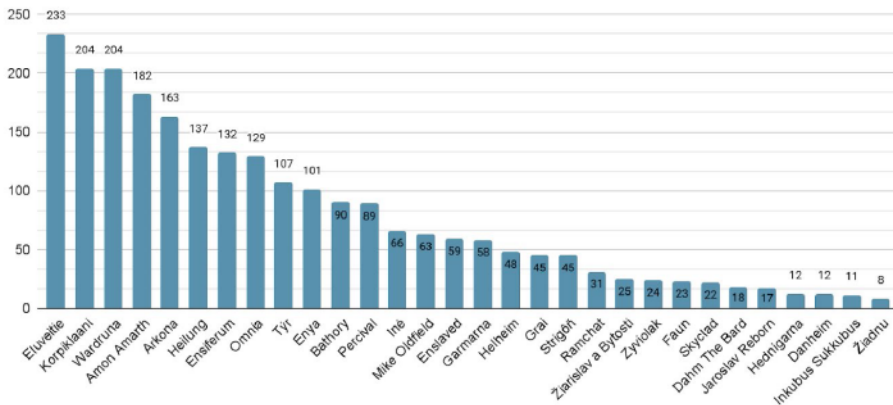
Scene as a Framework

I consider the music “scene”, as described by Keith Kahn-Harris (2007: 9–68), one of the key concepts for the analysis of modern Pagan music. Discourse and genre are largely abstract concepts, which is why Kahn-Harris finds it necessary to situate them in a concrete space: the scene, an umbrella term for the activities of a group

of people in a particular time and space associated with a particular kind of music (Kahn-Harris 2007: 13–15, 32–34). The activities of a scene can thus include music production, concerts, reviews, reports, interactions between fans and musicians, and visual artifacts, all of which can also be framed geographically and thematically. This elegantly solves the problem of “what to include in all this research” (Kahn-Harris 2007: 21). Any activity associated with music is a manifestation of engaging with the scene and keeping it alive. A scene can feature one privileged center (e.g., the Norwegian black metal scene, the new wave of British heavy metal) and many peripheral nodes, localities where the music may have spread outward from the center. Each activity related to music has its own meaning and would not exist without the scene. In theory, even if someone were a great songwriter, without engagement within a scene, there would be no network to disseminate and critique their music and it would fall into obscurity. Proceeding from Kahn-Harris, this is why I find a holistic approach to the study of musical micro-worlds appropriate.

Working with the notion of the scene also allows for the study of interconnections of local music scenes with their global counterparts (Kahn-Harris 2007: 97–121). Czech listeners of modern Pagan music listen to a multitude of foreign bands thanks to the Internet (see graph no. 1). Local music groups, in turn, respond in various ways to global trends in the genre and aim to break through abroad, making for the possibility of earning a living from music alone. Scenes are heterogeneous places defined by permanent change and struggles for prestige. This also applies to the understanding of Paganism within it as its various forms are negotiated. The notion of scene allows the researcher to do work that is empirically anchored in specific contexts, but still open to other dimensions of research and its language (Kahn-Harris 2007: 21).

Aké zahraničné pohanské kapely počúvate?



Graph no. 1. What foreign Pagan bands (all genres) do you listen to regularly?

Czech pagan black metal – *Inferno*



Image no. 1. Cover of Inferno's debut album *Duch Slovanské síly* [*Spirit of Slavic Power*] (2001). Note the interplay of the dark black metal aesthetic with the folk-romantic motif (discogs.com).

Probably the most important force in the first generation of Czech pagan black metal is the band Inferno from Karviná in the northeast part of the Czech Republic. Active since 1996, in its early days Inferno mainly released demos that sounded like bands from the Scandinavian black metal scene (Votruba 2016: 56–58). Inferno is importantly associated with the second wave of black metal broadly characterized by a distinctive DIY aesthetic that came about in response to the producer-dominated hair metal of the 1980s. Black metal bands of this period deliberately recorded their work with low sound quality and disseminated it via cassette tapes (Kahn-Harris 2007). Vocals are harsh and non-melodic. Guitars are buzzy, create a wall of sound, and feature only sparse solos. Drums are intense and monotonous. Songs are usually quite long, around six or seven minutes, with a strong emphasis on creating what music critics describe as “a dark atmosphere of ancient times”. The first demos featured anti-Christian and nihilist themes, which were further developed in anti-Christian, Pagan lyrics on the albums *Duch slovanské síly* (2001), *V návratu pohanství* (2003), and *Nikdy nepokřtěni* (2006). Such an aesthetic intentionally contrasts with the classic flashy heavy metal sound with intense vocals and virtuoso guitar solos.

Let's strike again and fast
 The murderers of our people
 The fate of this nation
 It will be guided by the fire of our ancestors
 We are the eternal light
 And the future of this country
 Our strength

Is rooted in Czechia
 Today sun and light
 Lives in our hearts
 Today we still have
 The history of this country
 Pagan swords and Slavic spirit
 Mightily and with honor they raised the throne
 Just as once upon a time
 My King of Bohemia
 (Inferno, "Pohanské meče", *Duch slovanské síly*, Eclipse Productions 2001)

The lyrics of this song are consciously transgressive, openly criticizing Christianity, threatening to destroy it, and extolling the ideal of a pre-Christian European culture as strong and fearless in contrast to the powerless Christian present. At the same time, the song features stark nationalistic overtones. Inferno's leader Adramelech assesses the band's Pagan period in a 2022 interview for *Czech Metal Studies*.

How do you feel about your Slavic period? In your opinion, is it still as important to proclaim a national pride to the world?

I still feel very connected to the home ground I walk on, to the land that will be my grave, and to the wisdom and traditions of my ancestors. All of this shapes my worldview and is something I pass on to my children. But I don't feel like Inferno and I ever preached anything at all – especially in the days when the lyrics had spirit of ancient times. It's just that our early albums dealt partly with Pagan themes and 19th-century romanticism, studying concepts like *blood and soil* and mixing it all with anti-Christian lyricism. That's what black metal has always been about. Satanism or Satanists often resonated with energies that are perceived as Pagan. [...] Today, however, I strongly feel that the necessary healthy balance of things is irretrievably gone, and the freedom we were given has taken a bad hold, and we are heading towards insane excesses (Mokrý, Stašová 2022).

Adramelech mentions that he perceives a strong connection between patriotism, nationalism, romanticism, Paganism, and black metal. He thus suggests that the Czech Republic is a suitable breeding ground for the development of pagan metal and its acculturation to local cultural, historical, and social traditions. Like Norwegian black metal bands, Inferno interprets Paganism from an ethnic perspective as the religion of the Slavic ancestors of today's inhabitants of the Czech Republic. Kennet Granholm considers Paganism and Satanism as appropriate religious philosophies for the sounds of black metal music (Granholm 2011: 534–538). Granholm notes and Adramelech confirms this for the Czech context. For Inferno at least, such religious practices fit with the rebellious nature of metal in that Christian discourse has shunned Paganism as an erroneous worldview since the Middle Ages. The concept of the Pagan warrior, in turn, finds support in the strong historicism of the Czech national revival (Hroch 1999: 216–221) that situates the Czech medieval state as the foundation of modern Czech ethnicity. Through such a process, for example, the medieval Hussite warlord Jan Žižka (1360–1424) has been historicized into a fighter for the rights of the Czech nation. Incidentally, as early as the first half

of the nineteenth century, intellectuals have been fascinated with the Pagan history of Bohemia (see Linda, Sabina, Kolár, Hesová, Říha, Vaněk 2011; Hněvkovský, Strejček 1905). As such, fervor over Paganism in Czechia seems to return cyclically throughout the country's history.

The critique of Christianity has been ever-present in Czech history regardless of the political regime. Pagan metal can be used as a platform for free criticism of Christianity. The latter has a long tradition in Czech history, with roots going back to the second half of the nineteenth century (Václavík 2010: 52–74; Nešpor 2021: 51–62). During this time, the critique of Christianity was linked to the construction of Czech national identity in part as a reaction against Austro-Hungarian pressure to Germanize (Hroch 1999) as Catholicism became associated with the Germans, Austria-Hungary, and the clergy rejecting the establishment of Czechoslovakia (Nešpor 2010: 50–59). In response, Czech nationalists strongly promoted the notion that the Czechs were a Hussite nation (Václavík 2010: 58–66). The concept of historical injustice in the form of the replacement of Paganism by “foreign” Christianity also fits with the Czech historical experience. Czech tribes began to Christianize under Frankish and Moravian influence during the ninth and tenth centuries. During the Middle Ages, Paganism was pushed to the margins of society and transformed into folk superstitions (Váňa 1990: 29). Anti-clericalism had strong ethnic overtones in the past, a tradition further developed much more recently by Pagan black metalists.

Given the ethnonational undertones of black metal, some groups like Antifa have accused the black metal scene of having links to neo-Nazism (Antifa.cz 2008a, 2008b). Such accusations are not completely unfounded as it is well-known among metalheads that a small part of the black metal scene does indeed support neo-Nazi ideals (see Vrzal 2011: 67–72). This perhaps stems from and is in turn reinforced by the transgressive dimension of extreme metal in general. Given the fusion of metal's transgressive and Pagan nationalist discourse, it is not surprising that some pagan black metal bands espouse neo-Nazism. As an example, Adramelech and Azazel of Inferno have in the past quite openly declared their far-right, Pagan, racist, traditionalist, anti-capitalist and anti-globalist views:

People live a monotonous life, chasing after materialistic values, and do not perceive the invisible world around them, which is part of life. Things like Pride, Honor, Bravery, National feeling, Faith in one's country, ancestors, one's blood, gods, are slowly disappearing today due to Americanization and growing influence of Judaism, moralism with tolerance... Inferno is a proud member of the Slavic Empire, supporting the Pagan faith and pure White Europe!!! (Zdenda 2001).

They also name as their favorite bands those that are associated with the neo-Nazi scene (i.e., White Power: Honor, Konkwista, Iron Youth, Der Stürmer, Buldok, Bound for Glory, Skrewdriwer). And yet, Inferno refuses to be labeled as a neo-Nazi black metal band. Though it is probably unrealistic to expect that Inferno will again publicly declare such socially controversial views after the controversy caused by this 2001 interview. Labeling the controversial lyrics as “artistic statements” makes it difficult to clearly resolve the dilemma of the ideological background of a band.

Some of the controversy associated with the Pagan metal community was hinted at by one anonymous fan in the questionnaire:

Many people inside the Pagan metal scene are connected to various (neo)Nazi organizations. I have avoided the company of “metalheads” since 2000 and want nothing to do with them. I enjoy the music and lyrics of many bands, but the nihilism ad absurdum that exists in these people frustrates me. An example for all is the interview with František Štorm, who had to go to a priest to confess after the world tour of Master’s Hammer... (questionnaire response 2021).

Since 2008, Inferno has turned toward the occult (Vrzal 2020) with lyrics leaning towards themes of spiritual growth in the tradition of Western esoterism, which musically corresponds to a leaning towards transcending the experienced genre limits of black metal towards a transformative musical experience (Mokrý, Stašová 2022). As does a portion of the Pagan black metal scene, Adramelech also expresses sympathy towards Evola, although he considers anthropocentrism the main problem of contemporary civilization (Mokrý, Stašová 2022).

Popularity of Czech Black Metal Among Czech Fans

Black metal comprises a subculture within metal, which itself is already quite subcultural. How popular is black metal among Czech fans of Pagan music? Within the research sample, black metal was listened to by the largest number of people (190 out of 337) right after heavy metal. However, other information from the questionnaire suggests that this says more about the popularity of the genre than the massive popularity of local pagan black metal bands. Among foreign bands, the highest ranked are the classics of the genre including Bathory (90), followed by Enslaved (59), and Helheim (48). In comparison, the most listened to foreign Pagan band is Eluveitie with 233 fans. Of the Czech bands, Trollech (65) is the most popular. This is an interesting paradox, because is the least “Pagan” lyrically. Trollech fits the profile of the subgenre only in terms of sound and secondarily due to its fascination with nature on the edge of parody. Bands that are at least partially Pagan-oriented, including Panychida (40), Inferno (29), and Dark Seal (16), are on the periphery of the research sample. This is even more evident when compared to the number of fans of folk/folklore band Tomáš Kočko & Orchestr (125) or doom metal band Silent Stream of Godless Elegy (147). Given the results of the questionnaire, does the data truly suggest that fans of Pagan music in the Czech Republic are not so fond of Czech pagan black metal, even though a large part of them listen to black metal? There are several possible interpretations of the results. First, fans could distrust domestic bands or have a negative reaction to the quality of their music, all this exacerbated by the lack of accessible information about the Czech pagan black metal scene. Foreign bands often make a full-time living from music and have better quality studios, more money to operate, and more effective marketing. Czech bands operate on a semi-professional basis, record only with local producers, and have less media exposure except in webzines and the Czech music magazines *Spark* and *Pařát*. Another factor may be fans’ lack of interest in Pagan themes. Moreover, some

more orthodox black metal fans may associate these Pagan themes with poseur behavior. In his research on Satanism in black metal, Miroslav Vrzal encountered some interviewees who suggested as much:

I was never into Pagan black metal bands. I wasn't into them musically. I understood the evolution and at one point I appreciated it more than Satanic bands. So yes, if I want to fight Christianity, why acknowledge a sort of counterpoint invented by them. These bands in a lot of cases sort of go back before the rise of Christianity, to Pagan times. The catch is, for most of these people, I didn't believe it. Like, weekend Pagans, I'm going to be a Pagan if I go to a concert... I just didn't believe those people, and I still don't. With 90% of bands, I just don't believe it (Vrzal 2011: 62, note 143).

There are differences between Pagans. There is group of so called Pagans who listen to pagan metal in the warmth of their homes and think how Pagan they are. Paganism it's not about the music, it's about values. I am a Pagan also without it [music]. But Pagan music helped me to find my spirituality (Vrzal 2011: 65).

Further, the musical side of black metal may not be entirely attractive to fans of melodic genres. Black metal is a postmodern commentary on heavy metal. Without at least a framework knowledge of black metal, some may perceive it as nothing but transgressive noise. Also, the Satanic controversies associated with black metal may put off some Czech fans. Finally, the questionnaire data may have been influenced by the way it was collected. The questionnaire was distributed via the Internet due to Covid-19 restrictions that did not allow data collection at concerts in autumn of 2021. Therefore, it is possible that the questionnaire did not reach many Czech fans, even though it was shared in several places online, including on the Facebook page of *Spark* magazine. Also, the relatively small number of Czech black metal fans suggested by the questionnaire data may be related to their distrust of academia. Therefore, they did not indicate that they listen to controversial bands such as Inferno.

Pagan Doom Metal

Doom metal is a label for a subgenre of metal characterized by slow tempos, rolling hypnotic riffs, and bleak lyrics emphasizing variations on the theme of powerlessness (Piper 2013: 33–34). Many agree that Black Sabbath was the first doom metal band, judging by the musical characteristics of their 1970 debut album (Votruba 2017: 8–10). The 1990s saw a major boom in Anglo-American doom metal with bands such as My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost, Solitude Aeternus, Tiamat, Gathering, and Candlemass. While Black Sabbath mixed riff-driven metal with a horror aesthetic that eventually moved towards heavy and black metal, the second generation of doom bands took a different path. This new vanguard featured a greater emphasis on creating music that worked to augment melancholic lyrics that often center on depression and failure. A major genre innovation was the integration of keyboards, female vocals, strings, and flutes into the musical texture (Votruba 2017: 11).

At the time when these innovative doom metal bands released their most influential records, new musical trends were flowing into the Czech Republic, and as a result doom metal gained a substantial following in the country (Votruba 2017: 2–55). Bands such as Dissolving of Prodigy, R.E.T., Love History, Hypnotic Scenery, and Silent Stream of Godless Elegy (SSOGE) reached peak popularity in the second half of the 1990s. As metal was generally moving toward a more hardened sound and coarse lyrics, the approach of these doom metal group—that relied on a combination of intimate and introspective music, instrumental innovations, alternating female and male vocals (“beauty & the beast”), and melancholic-depressive lyrics—was refreshing at the time. This introspective and deeply emotional style appealed to teenagers in particular. This is confirmed by an R1 interviewee from North Moravia and the recollection of one member of the scene:

R1: SSOGE became my entry into doom metal actually. And it was such a nice transition. It was still a lot of melodic music that was a little bit closer to the symphonic metal I was listening to before. Actually, for a long time I only knew the doom part of it and the “Relic Dances” album, where it had some of those Pagan elements, but they weren’t that prominent yet, and for me at the time, what was important there, like with the song “Lonely” or “Osamělí” afterwards in the Czech version about being sad. That was resonating with teenage me, listening to sad music was my rebellion against the mainstream society that was always happy (interview with R1 2021).

Michal Datel Rak (Et Moriemur, Self-Hatred): At the end of the nineties, doom was at the peak of popularity in our country and doom bands played in the main times in front of screaming halls. It was mainly in the north of Moravia, but I remember for example a Dissolving of Prodigy concert somewhere near Kutná Hora, where the girls in the front row were really crying under the stage. Probably a preparation for Him (Votruba 2017: 33).

The doom metal scene was concentrated primarily in Ostrava, a city in the northeast region on the periphery of the Czech Republic. Why? It may be a coincidence. Patterns from abroad attracted young musicians, and they influenced and inspired each other because the metal community (particularly the musicians) was small and most of the people involved knew each other (Votruba 2017: 16–17). Perhaps, it’s also possible that doom metal was simply fitting the character of Ostrava, a grim city of factory chimneys, smog, spoiled nature, and poverty in the nineties. The traditionally industrial and mining region at that time suffered under the transition to a capitalist economic model. Industry was adjusting to new market conditions, struggling with competition from the West, and struggling with the absence of an experienced managerial layer. As in Birmingham, the industrial center of the British Midlands, metal in Ostrava became a way of venting the emotions of living in an industrial region that offered a life of hard physical labor. Moreover, even during socialism, Ostrava had been one of the main centers of heavy metal’s popularity (Votruba 2018: 18–22). Radek Hajda and Hanka Hajdová, members of SSOGE, discuss the popularity of doom metal in the region along the same lines:

R: Twenty-five years ago, we were mostly into doom metal. The nineties was the era of My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost, Anathema, and Tiamat. My fascination with Amorphis crossed with doom, and from that Silent Stream of Godless Elegy was born. At that time, North Moravia was spoken of as the birthplace of doom metal, but why this region became such a little Scandinavia and spawned so many genre related bands, I have no idea.

H: I'm not surprised. Look how it looks in North Moravia. Industrial Ostrava, inversions, constant fog, chimneys. Logically, doom became popular here! (interview Radek Hajda and Hanka Hajdová 2020).



Image no. 2. The cover album *Smutnice* (2018).

SSOGE is not only one of the longest-running Czech doom metal bands, but also the only doom metal band to adopt a Pagan theme, describing their current genre as ethno-doom. It is also the most popular Czech Pagan band in my research sample (147 votes). Silent Stream of Godless Elegy formed in 1995 and originally mixed doom with death metal. During the first decade of the 21st century, after the departure of original vocalist Petr Staněk, the band gradually made a sonic turn to doom influenced by folk metal (primarily Amorphis) and folk music on the album *Relic Dances* (2004). This change was also marked by a shift to singing in Czech and an expansion of modern Pagan themes in the group's lyrics. The band also incorporated traditional Moravian folk instruments such as violin, cello, flute, and cimbalom into the established foundation of the band's metal sound. SSOGE's understanding of Paganism differs from the black metal concept. Theirs is closely linked to the traditional doom metal theme of powerlessness (see Piper 2013) and represents its

natural evolution. The band drew a good deal of inspiration from Moravian folklore traditions. The new singer Hanka Nogolová (now Hajdová) incorporated elements of Moravian folk love songs and inspirations from Czech romantic poetry (most notably *Kytice* by Karel Erben) into the band's lyrics. As mentioned previously, Czech 19th century intellectuals, including scientists, writers, and poets, turned their attention to folk culture, which they understood as an expression of pure national culture. Folk magic and superstitions were seen as leftovers from authentic pre-Christian Czech Pagan religion. From there it was only a short step to the integration of Slavic Paganism into SSOGE's lyrics, inspired by historical studies of pre-Christian Paganism (about the Czech context see Váňa 1990 or Téra 2017) in a similar fashion as Czech Romanticism and the national revival of the nineteenth century (Zíbrt 1995 [1895]).

I rise from the earth
and tree roots
are my roots.
My hair is rain,
my forehead is a cloud,
my palms are yours.

(Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, "Mokoš", *Návaz*, Season of Mist 2011)

I swear.
When the sky darkens.
That I have faith.
Chors, she knows.

(Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, "Přísahám", *Návaz*, Season of Mist 2011)

The old sun is finishing.
And new ones are born again.
Solstice Tributes.
Let it ripen in the fields
full of class.
Let Vesna come back.

(Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, "Slava", *Návaz*, Season of Mist 2011)

Oh, Morana, Morana,
you first woman, the last,
Look into my eyes
and you'll see nothing but wind.

(Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, "Bezbřeží", *Smutnice*, Redblack Production 2018)

Silent Stream of Godless Elegy reconstructs Paganism in a very similar style to other Slavic folklore-tinged, ethnically-oriented modern Paganisms that sacralize folk superstitious customs and traditions and reconstructs Paganism based on information from secondary literature about gods such as Chors, Mokoš, Vesna, and Morana and other lesser beings, superstitious customs, and rituals (the wedding vow in "Přísahám") (Simpson 2012: 11–37). Also, for the leaders of SSOGE,

Paganism is not simply a “sauce” that goes well with the music. Rather, it is a matter of personal faith. In my interview (2020) with bandleader Radek Hajda and singer Hana Hajdová, they claimed to be personally interested in contemporary Paganism and in its Slavic version, which has been gaining popularity in the Czech Republic since late 90s (for more, see Dostálová 2013: 164–182). Thus, in the case of SSOGE, Paganism is a common ground for local patriotic, spiritual, and historical themes that fits the doom metal sound. The sense of powerlessness that is at the core of doom metal is expressed in slow tempos, heavy riffs, female singing, and the use of folk instruments.

Czech folk metal – Žrec



Image no. 3. Logo of the band Žrec.

One of the first Czech folk metal bands was the Moravian band Žrec. The band was founded in 2004 and released its first demo in 2006. Subsequently, they released their debut album *Žertva* (2008), which was followed by the band’s second album *Paměti* (2012). Žrec then went through a process of personnel changes and released the EP *Klíč k pokladům* in 2017, only to break up for good in 2018. But they are still relevant to fans interested in Czech pagan metal, as they received 43 votes in my questionnaire.

In their early days, Žrec was primarily inspired by the work of Russian folk metal bands such as Arkona and Alkonost and Ukrainian blackers Nokturnal Mortum (Misterfolk 2018), which had been very popular in the Czech Republic in the mid-2000s (Tesař 2009a: 76–77). The Czech folk-metalists combined folklore-inspired melodies played with folk instruments on top of a melodic death-metal base, growls alternating to a lesser extent with pure vocals. The Pagan nature of the debut *Žertva* is accentuated by its title, a term for sacrifice in Slavic Pagan tradition. The band also borrowed its name from the world of pre-Christian Slavic spirituality: a “žrec” was the Slavic equivalent of a priest, a ritualist (Váňa 1990: 191–199). Various Slavic gods such as Perun, Mokoš, and Svarog are invoked in Žrec’s songs. The lyrics, rendered in romantic poetic language, reflects the Pagan beliefs of the

band members, casts nostalgia for the golden age of Paganism, and idealizes the ruins associated with the pre-Christian period (“Kamenný kult”). We encounter the concept of a Pagan warrior inspired by heavy metal’s Conan the Barbarian meets Manowar and black metal’s anti-Christian aesthetic (“Křev předků”). The band also comes up with its own romantic vision of the Pagan future of the world, which takes the form of a utopian return to the golden age of the past (“Nový věk pohanský”), not dissimilar to that of the Slovak Pagan musician and spiritual leader Žiarislav (Pániková 2004: 50–63; Puchovský 2018: 41–43).

Quick, brothers, draw the swords
I want to hear the screams and the moans
The enemy is bearing down on us
So, defend our land!
Let’s raise our weapons
Made of fire
And we will face death
Last one to the march.
Hey, praise the gods!

Golden Sunshine
For our steps
Dažbog, son of Svarog
Don’t let your grandchildren perish!
With the god of war at his back
Our soldiers will run
Hey, Perun Almighty
Give us courage!
Hey, praise the gods!

Brothers quickly into the woods
There we will find peace
We’ll be back
We will not betray our people
Between the branches of the trees
Let’s recharge our batteries
And with the seven-headed god
I will conquer my goal!
Hey, praise the gods!

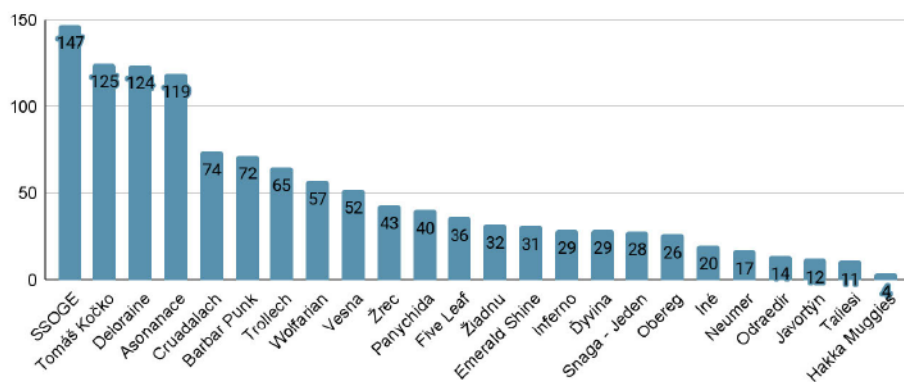
With a heartbreaking roar
Let’s run forward
Boldly and bravely
We will win!
When all the weapons fall silent
And with them the roar
This is how proudly will win
our Slavic blood!
Slavic blood!

(Žrec, “Křev předků”, *Žertva*, Murderous Music Production 2008)

The music of Žrec softens as time goes on. On *Paměti* (2012), growling vocals appear less and less, while heavy metal elements are strengthened, thus approaching the Alkonost sound. The lyrics too evolve, and on the last EP *Klíč k pokladům* (2017), lyrics have been practically completely transformed. The main lyrical themes become nature (the instrumental “River of Home” is dedicated to the Oslava River, which flows through the guitarist Torham’s home region; “Vozka” is also inspired by the eponymous hill in Jeseníky), magic (“Klíč k pokladům”), and mythology (“Vozka” is an initiation story about union with the sun god) (Misterfolk 2018). Žrec ceased to be as ostentatiously Slavic-Pagan as on their debut. Instead, they opted for a subtler atmospheric approach, to which they adapted more universal Indo-European lyrics (Misterfolk 2018).

Žrec represents an eclectic example of working with Paganism. Like Arkona (Tesař 2009b: 76–77), Žrec was initially inspired mostly by the neo-Pagan, scientific, and black metal discourse on Paganism. Musical evolution gradually led the band away from some typically Pagan themes (such as anti-Christianity) and sounds more commonly associated with folk-metal (e.g., the growl, see Heesch 2010: 71–81). Conversely, Žrec has embraced Paganism more broadly as part of a more comprehensive Indo-European religious tradition (but still grounded in local identity), to which they have adapted more universal lyrics about nature and mythologies.

Aké české pohanské kapely počívate?



Graph No. 2. Results of the survey question “What Czech Pagan bands (all genres) do you listen to?”

The Popularity of Local Folk Metal Bands Among the Czech Population

First, it should be clear that fans actually do listen to local folk metal bands. On the other hand, as with black metal bands, their popularity fails to reach the level of foreign bands. For example, compare the popularity of Cruadalach (74), the most popular local folk-metal band of the questionnaire sample, with the Swiss band Eluveitie (233). In a sample of 337 respondents, the Cruadalach is listened to by twenty-two percent and Eluveitie by sixty-nine percent. As with black metal, the lower popularity could be explained by a combination of distrust in the work of local

bands, poor promotion, and a preference for foreign bands as more original and authentic. Nevertheless, most of the respondents with whom I conducted semi-structured interviews actively seek out Czech and Moravian Pagan music, as it resonates with their local and spiritual identity. Only one respondent questions not only the quality of local folk-metal bands but also Czech metal in general as unoriginal and dumb. The graph no. 2 plots data regarding the popularity of Czech pagan bands in the Czech Republic.

Compared to pagan black metal, Czech folk-metal bands are today more popular and more active on the scene. Fifty-seven fans listen to Wolfarian from Brno in the South Moravia region, forty-three listen to Žrec, thirty-one to Emerald Shine from Nový Jičín in the Ostrava region, and twenty-six listen to Obereg from Pohořelice in the South Moravia region. Apart from the now-inactive Cruadalach and Žrec, these are all relatively young bands still at the beginning of their careers from Moravia and Silesia, respectively, with each having released one or two albums. The local Moravian scene was vital during the period of my field research between 2018–2022. Especially around Brno, various larger club events such as Heathen Assault Over Brno, Lughnasad, Mokoš Fest, and Folk Metal Fest have been organized on a regular basis over the last decade (except for the coronavirus period from 2020 to 2021). These Brno-centered events have also regularly hosted local Moravian folk metal bands, helping to maintain the popularity of the pagan subgenre of metal. I have also noted the strong presence of local Pagans in concerts of local Pagan bands. Going out to a concert of a Pagan band is not only a matter of musical taste, but according to previous research and my own observations, an expression of religious affiliation and of possible ways to “live” their Pagan identity as well as an opportunity to meet like-minded people (see Ezzy 2014; Puchovský 2018).

Summary: Czech Pagan Metal and the Construction of Paganism in Popular Music

Over the last twenty years, Pagan themes have been successfully incorporated into Czech metal, building on the previous history of metal in the former Czechoslovakia and inspirations from abroad. The lyrics are a crucial indicator of Paganism in Czech metal music. With few exceptions, bands sing in the Czech language, thus accentuating the ethnic and national dimension of the music. The Pagan sound is constructed in accordance with inspirations from abroad: heavy metal style electric guitar plus strings, brass, and acoustic instruments. Thematically appropriate Czech Pagan lyrics are mapped onto this musical texture. Pagan black metal was the first to establish itself in the Czech region. Paganism as performed by bands like Inferno featured a strong anti-Christian bent, was mostly Slavic-oriented, and borderline nationalistic. Black metal’s Pagan discourse in the Czech context followed a long tradition of anticlericalism, the origins of which can be traced back to the last third of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Trollech’s work is closer to parody and brings wit to its interpretation of “Paganism in black”. Pagan doom metal in the Czech Republic may not be extremely widespread, but its main representative, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, is one of the most popular Czech metal bands ever. SSOGE

belongs to the broader stream of Czech doom metal bands of the 1990s, from which they draw sonically, including the involvement of brass and strings to evoke a gloomy atmosphere. In the case of SSOGE, the Czech romantic perspectives on Paganism intersected with the neo-Pagan Slavic one, which found fertile ground in doom metal discourse with its emphasis on the theme of powerlessness. Czech folk metal found its inspiration in the Vikings and Slavs and in spiritual and “party” currents of the subgenre. Paganism is also constructed according to scholarly research on the history of pre-Christian religions in Europe, complemented by the romantic stylization of Pagans as noble warriors and spiritually advanced ancestors with a well-developed culture. There is also a strong infiltration of neo-Pagan discourse (as some musicians from metal bands claim to be Pagans themselves), primarily in the form of references to ancestral beliefs and faith in Paganism’s resurgence in the face of a supposed crisis of the Central European model of capitalism in a globalized age.

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Žrec, *Klíč k pokladům*, Independent 2017.

Abstract

This article offers a short introduction to Czech pagan metal. I offer a brief summary of the main trends within the local scene and analyze how Paganism is discursively constructed in the music and lyrics of three bands representing different metal sub-genres: Inferno, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy, and Žrec. I seek answers for some important questions. How do Czech bands approach Paganism? In what ways, if any, is Czech pagan metal unique? Or do Czech pagan metal bands simply copy global trends? How important is spiritual identity in the personal lives of Pagan metal band members? The main theoretical inspirations for the article are Robert Walser's discursive study of heavy metal and Keith Kahn-Harris's concept of scene. The analysis of lyrics and music is enhanced by data from ethnological and quantitative research among listeners of Czech Pagan metal music.

Czeski pagan metal: krótkie wprowadzenie do głównych trendów lokalnych

Streszczenie

Opracowanie prezentuje wprowadzenie do czeskiego pagan metalu. Jego głównym celem jest nie tylko przedstawienie syntetycznego podsumowania głównych trendów na lokalnej scenie, ale także przeanalizowanie, w jaki sposób pogaństwo jest dyskursywnie konstruowane w muzyce i tekstach trzech wybranych zespołów z różnych podgatunków metalu – Inferno, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy i Žrec. Autor poszukuje odpowiedzi na pytania: jak czeskie zespoły podchodzą do pogaństwa? Czy istnieje jakiś unikalny wymiar czeskiego pagan metalu, czy czeskie zespoły tylko kopią światowe trendy? Jak ważna jest tożsamość duchowa w życiu osobistym członków zespołu pagan-metalowego? Głównymi inspiracjami teoretycznymi wykorzystanymi w artykule są dyskursywne studia heavy metalu Roberta Walsera oraz koncept sceny w ujęciu Keitha Kahna-Harrisa. Analiza tekstów i muzyki wzbogacona została o dane pochodzące z przeprowadzonych przez autora badań etnologicznych i ilościowych wśród słuchaczy czeskiej muzyki pogańskiej.

Keywords: contemporary Paganism, metal studies, pagan metal, Czech pagan music scene

Słowa kluczowe: współczesne pogaństwo, metal studies, pagan metal, czeska scena muzyki pogańskiej

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Counter...what? Metal Music and Its Culture in the 21st Century

Introduction

The term “counterculture” is one of the key concepts that emerged from the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s. At the time, it was positioned as a frame encompassing an era of hippies, psychedelia, rock music, the sexual revolution, protesting the war in Vietnam, and a vision of peace and love. Later generations have largely encountered the counterculture movement as it has been evoked in film, literature, and other media that draw on iconic countercultural slogans, ideas, characters, practices, and values. This vision of the counterculture is characterized by a sentimental sense of nostalgia. However, despite these idyllic depictions of the counterculture, the movement was rooted in change-making efforts and sometimes violently suppressed by authorities. This overtly subversive aspect of the counterculture frequently escapes idealized remembrances of the period. In this article, I explore a central question: Given metal music’s rootedness in subversion, what relevance does the concept of counterculture have for researching metal culture? While some have addressed this question to an extent, the application of countercultural analysis to metal music and culture has been largely overlooked. This article, based on my research on inside metal culture, uses an approach that frames metal through the lens of counterculture.

Heavy Metal World

Heavy metal musicians on stages across the world are rebels who symbolize revolution, in nearly every sense of the word. The music is accompanied by elements of decadence and discord; leather, latex, and provocation arouse discontent among teenagers’ parents who find their children seemingly worshiping idols emerging from a rebellious and dark world. Heavy metal rejects dominant trends, with its subversive sound and image manifest in stage performances, album covers, and music videos.

Heavy metal: pimply, prole, putrid, unchic, unsophisticated, anti-intellectual (but impossibly pretentious), dismal, abysmal, terrible, horrible, and stupid music, barely music at

all; death music, dead music, the beaten boogie, the dance of defeat and decay; the huh? sound, the duh sound, ...music made by slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, bulbous-inseamed imbeciles in jackboots and leather and chrome for slack-jawed, alpaca-haired, downy-mustachioed imbeciles in cheap, too-large T-shirts with pictures of comic-book Armageddon ironed on the front (Duncan 1984: 36–37).

Deena Weinstein begins her book *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (1991) with this very suggestive description by Robert Duncan in the early 1980s. Though research on metal music was significantly progressed in the years since its publication, Weinstein's work is recognized as one of the most important books in metal studies. The author analyzed metal culture by considering it as a counterculture situated as the evolution of music and youth culture of the 1960s, particularly in translating certain attitudes, values, and practices characteristic of the hippie counterculture. Still in favor were denim pants and long hair as well as ideological issues, such as distrust of social and political authorities. Artist authenticity was one of the most important qualities of the metal scene. Though, of course, there were many values of the 1960s counterculture movement that were left behind by metal culture, including notions related to love, rainbows, and soft fabrics. These were instead replaced by their opposites: evil, black, and leather. The idea of community with the connotation of religiosity faded. In its place, the metal scene emerged as a distinct social group, latching on to new elements of identity whose aesthetics differed significantly from what was seen in mainstream fashion, music, interests, or lifestyles.

In 2011, Titus Hjelm, Keith Kahn-Harris, and Mark LeVine wrote the article "Heavy Metal as Controversy and Counterculture" which was later published in an edited volume book by the same title (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine 2013: 1–14). Their argument in this article provides closely parallels the theoretical basis for the current study, although it is open to polemics. Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and LeVine put forward the notion that "controversy" is an integral aspect of creating metal "countercultures". This means that the transgressive aspects of metal make it antagonistic in various social contexts and the metal scene is in turn shaped by these controversies. Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and LeVine's definition of controversy is "the activities of individuals or groups making public claims about conditions that are perceived as a threat to certain cherished values and/or material and status interests" (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine 2013: 2). They also point out that controversy is material (caused by people, not ideas), public (present in the public discourse), discursive-symbolic (evidenced by the symbolic way of articulating specific statements made in the process of shaping and raising social awareness), and subjective (there may be a lack of evidence of an event that the public considers to be worrying, inappropriate, undesirable, or inappropriate) (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine 2013: 2–3).

There have been many controversies throughout the history of metal that fit this definition, from the origins of Black Sabbath to the musicians' reactions against the activities of Parents Music Resource Center to the burnings of Norwegian churches. These events strained boundaries and caused extreme social reactions, especially moral panic. They are also acts of resistance, elements of contestation that situate metal as a counterculture. However, at this point, I do not want to repeat the same

stories about the subversive nature of metal. Among the countercultural elements of metal, Kahn-Harris and Hjelm also include areas of interest that are present in metal culture: its antagonistic aspect, relentless exploration of the dark side of human nature, mysticism, and subjects such as Satan, death, and Hell that conservative groups often find provocative. Kahn-Harris and Hjelm suggest that regardless of the motives given by the participants of the metal scene, the music and culture will always be positioned as a counterculture by virtue of their very existence. In these terms, acts such as the attacks on Christianity (for example, public desecration of the Bible, trampling on the portrait of the Virgin Mary, and turning crosses upside down) are transformative and symbolic acts that irrevocably link metal countercultural sentiments. LeVine, who researches the presence of metal music in Islamic countries, gives numerous examples of the countercultural nature of the genre that include playing metal music despite its censorship, political repression, and social stigmatization. Public institutions and religious organizations in the Middle East and North Africa see extreme metal music as associated with the penetration of foreign cultures, especially Western civilization. Finding metal music a danger to society, the authorities of Islamic countries are convinced of the presence of Satanism in Western music and culture, which is perceived as harmful to Islam (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine 2013: 1–14). LeVine's work is relevant for the study of metal music in Poland in that it is the context that underlines and testifies to counterculture as a movement of radical opposition to a specific order. This means that metal music and culture, through their innate transgressiveness, locate them as antagonistic in many social contexts. Controversy shapes the metal scene and allows it to be understood as a counterculture.

Researching the Metal Music Scene in Poland

Between January 2019 and October 2020, I conducted research that included 26 structured interviews with fans of metal music who also declared participation in metal culture in Poland. The interviews included questions about the role of metal music in participants' lives, their worldviews, motivations, values, and activities as members of the metal music scene. My research questions were meant to illuminate what makes metal music a counterculture and in what aspects the interviewees see metal music as transgressive (if at all). All the interviews took place in Poland and included people aged 18–51, half of who were women and the other half men, selected from different social groups and a range of large and small cities.

When I raised the issue of the counterculture of metal music, some interviewees were unfamiliar with the term “counterculture”, which is perhaps an indication of the term's obscurity in metal discourse in Poland. On the other hand, interviewees often discussed issues of the confrontational aspects of metal using words like “rebellion,” or less often “resistance”, though these terms were used without much reflection, and their placement in context often seemed random. The most fruitful way to generate discussion about counterculture was by talking about the topic of controversy in metal music which usually led interviewees to discuss issues surrounding counterculture. A lot of discussions encompass critiques of and attacks

on Christianity, the dominant religion in Poland that has played a significant role in shaping Polish history and culture. However, my particular attention was focused on the controversies that arise within metal culture, namely what outrages participants in metal culture. Talking through these issues allowed me to think about the evolution of the concept of the counterculture as it relates to present social situations.

Do Not Fake It

While discussing controversies in metal music, 24 out of 26 respondents referred to the commercial success of the Polish metal band Behemoth, particularly how the band's leader Nergal has cultivated his image on social media. In the early stages of his musical career (in the 1990s), Nergal was part of the extreme metal scene. In the mid-2000s, he became a celebrity (respondents mentioned his relationship with Polish pop singer Doda, participation in a televised talent show, and presence in tabloids) and a hero of capitalism. Similar situations are common in metal music: bands that were once considered "underground" later become media superstars and play for the masses at major music festivals. These groups' commercial success means that they become *mainstream*, and, in the eyes of some fans, they shed some element of controversy. According to my interviewees, controversy disappears with increasing success. Moreover, my interviewees also suggested there is a concomitant loss of authenticity as artists' celebrity increases. In this way, for many fans, controversy is linked with authenticity. As an artist's controversy (and therefore authenticity) diminishes, some fans are not able to maintain interest. They also draw attention to the way famous metal artists use signs, styles, and gestures associated with the metal scene, suggesting that such usage constitutes a kind of commercialization of metal.

I categorize 15 of my interviewees as "metal defenders", fans who defended metal music's values, authenticity, and honesty. In this group were people who accused Nergal of caring more about money and public acclaim than the art of metal. These metal defenders often referred to ideological issues and the truth that metal music should provide. They saw metal music as the voice of their community; therefore, they demand that the music and the musicians be authentic. In doing so, they criticize the commodification of the metal style, which has been dispersed to a wide, perhaps new, audience. The metal defenders also lamented that the previously internal and independent ideas and values of metal should remain unpolluted rather than be commodified within the public sphere. Their dissatisfaction reflects what Dick Hebdige called "defusion of the subcultural style" (Hebdige 1979: 93) in which the subversive potential of a subculture's signifiers loses its meaning through the processes of commercialization. James Clarke and Thomas Jefferson echo Hebdige as they suggest that "the element of commercial reaction which attempts to universalize, at a purely stylistic and consumption level, the innovations made by distinctive youth cultures, while simultaneously defusing the oppositional potential of the exclusive lifestyles" (quoted in Muggleton 2000: 132). The tension caused by commercialization of metal is also evident in relations between fans of so-called "old" Behemoth and "new" Behemoth (the demarcation between the two incarnations is

alternately claimed to be either the album *Zos Kia Cultus* or *Evangelion*). Fans of the early recordings of Behemoth accuse others of a lack of appropriate musical sensitivity. In their perception, the music of an artist who has achieved commercial success is less valuable based solely on the artist's status. My respondents expressed this view as "selling oneself", "being ruled by money", or "choosing the easiest way".

A similar example of selling out and losing authenticity is the successful Polish black metal band Batushka. In this case, the conflict between fans is related to the split within the band itself: one of the band's founders wanted Batushka to continue being an underground project, while the other wanted to follow a path leading to acclaim and popularity. In the opinion of metal defenders, the first remained authentic and the second sold out. However, those interlocutors who stood up for authentic metal, when asked to name concerts they had recently attended, listed mostly groups like Kiss, Slayer, Anthrax, Europe, Morbid Angel, and Helloween – bands that rose to worldwide stardom and commercial success.

Own Way

For those I interviewed, it is clear that they love participating in metal culture. Moreover, they feel safe in their community with those who espouse similar views, interests, and goals. There is a common pattern in all the respondents' narratives: even though not everyone considers themselves particularly drawn to active resistance to authority, interviewees still deny mainstream affiliations, which (in their words) tend toward trendiness, artificiality, insincerity, lack of self-expression, boredom, repetitiveness, and superficiality. Metal music and culture stand in stark opposition to these characteristics, and choosing to eschew the mainstream for the metal scene is indeed a conscious choice. A scholar of gothic subculture, Paul Hodkinson found that subcultures represent a postmodern aesthetic play rather than a representation of resistance to any kind of oppression (Hodkinson 2002). Metalheads are often motivated to participate in metal culture through desires to express their individuality and difference from the mainstream, though not necessarily by some fundamental sense of rebellion. They are aware that when they interact with others, they distinguish for themselves what is important, thus proving their authenticity. The ethos of a favorite band's music is seen as part of an individual's identity. David Muggleton suggests that subcultures express individualism rather than resistance, this extended from his theoretical position that postmodern consumer culture and subcultures are an extension of romanticism (Muggleton 2000: 50). However, after many hours of conversations with metal music fans, I find Muggleton's assertion incomplete. After all, manifestations of individualism and resistance are not mutually exclusive. Yet, consumer culture is related to counterculture through romantic idealism, which evokes the need to search for oneself, one's ideals, distinguishes the aesthetics of freedom, and celebrates authenticity, individuality, and resistance to social restrictions. Participants in metal culture are aware that there are many available choices regarding forms of entertainment. Yet, they seem to be most concerned about those choices that fulfill their specific needs.

It is hard not to notice that the majority confirm the defiant nature of metal culture. However, from the sociological point of view, participants in metal culture frequently imagine the structure of the counterculture in rather different ways. The aversion to the mainstream and to individuality, or “differentiated identity” (to quote David Muggleton), emerge in the foreground in most interviews. In this way, metalheads form a rather closed, hermetic group focused on their own social needs rather than a specific ideology apart from claims to a vague sense of “nonconformity” and a greater or lesser denial of religion. They emphasize the differences between their group and culture and the majority mainly by marking their individuality against a background of the undefined masses characterized by otherness, ordinariness, and conformism. The features of the mainstream and the masses are mentioned subjectively, depending on what the respondent emphasizes in their understanding of being part of the counterculture.¹

The One to Admire

As previously discussed, some metal fans admire Behemoth (and other bands that have achieved commercial success). While these fans are certainly aware of the controversy surrounding the band “selling out”, they disagree with accusations, which they see as emerging as a sign of jealousy. More importantly, supporters of Behemoth characterize the band’s success as an artistic achievement since the group’s music is now positioned to reach a wider, international audience. As I have established, one of the key tenets of metal culture is nonconformity. Despite disparaging accusations being lobbed at Behemoth, or perhaps because of it, fans of the band situate their support of the group as an act of nonconformity that runs contrary to the attitudes of a large swath of the metal scene.

I find nonconformity a particularly interesting issue. Several respondents spoke negatively about Nergal’s appearance, lifestyle, and social media activity (mostly in terms of sharing videos and photos from his routine yoga sessions or beauty treatments), such comments strengthening respondents’ conviction about Behemoth’s loss of authenticity, a loss perceived at least in part in terms of gender. Weinstein’s remarks regarding the relationship between metal and gender identity are illuminating on this point.

The metal audience is more than just male; it is masculinist. That is, the heavy metal subculture, as a community with shared values, norms, and behaviors, highly esteems masculinity. Whereas other youth cultures and audiences... countenanced play with gender, heavy metal fans are deadly earnest about the value of male identity. Masculinity is understood in the metal subculture to be the binary opposite of femininity... The metal subculture holds that gender differences are rooted in the order of things: it is perilous even to question, let alone play with or breach, the boundaries (Weinstein 1991: 104).

These words were written more than thirty years ago. While some ideas about the intersections of metal and gender are no longer relevant, the masculinity of metal

¹ This is not the first time that the notion of “the masses” has been a theoretical concept (for example see Jean Baudrillard’s *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*).

that Weinstein describes remains one of the hallmarks of metal culture. Nergal's yoga practice and beauty treatments came up often in the interviews I conducted, generally expressing a negative view of the way Nergal follows trends in fashion and beauty. In perception of many metal fans, Nergal goes beyond the patterns of masculinity and countercultural nonconformity outlined in the unwritten rules of metal culture generations ago. For some, Nergal's penchant for trendiness marks him as a poseur, a pretender who does not truly share the metal worldview.

It is important to note that hostility toward conformism is rarely raised in the metal literature. Extreme metal has always been at some distance from mainstream music, likely because general audiences find the music's sound and subject matter difficult to comprehend. Moreover, the airtight metal music fan community tends to separate everyday lifestyle issues from the music and its culture. Hence, it is rare to find lifestyle statements in the foundations of extreme metal music. Many studies of metal have described the scene's rejection of prohibitions prescribed by organized religion, Christianity in particular. In such contexts, metal culture advocates for individual freedom of behavior and self-expression. As such, the criticism of Nergal's lifestyle seems antithetical to such values. However, such critique simultaneously upholds metal culture's longstanding disapproval of "selling out". In the case of Nergal, the frontman of one of the most iconic Polish metal bands, there are even higher stakes involved since his detractors see him as ready to make compromises that could shake the very framework of black metal music. Such attitudes reflect the subversiveness of the hippie tradition, one characterized by ardent nonconformism and mistrust of mainstream regimes.

Although I do not intend to focus on the issue of resistance to religion. However, a thread appeared in my research that requires some attention because it helps locate the issue of controversy within the metal culture. Many times, respondents mentioned that honesty and authenticity are of utmost importance in metal music and culture. For example, several respondents suggested that Nergal's profaning of religious symbols is insincere, but rather is done simply to attract attention. Profanation becomes a tool, a stylistic means, not an expression of one's authentic perspective. Three respondents agreed that if they did not follow Nergal's antics, they would have no contact with any religious practice. This situation is rather paradoxical: it is Nergal's extreme critique of religion that triggers a discourse on religion among metal fans that would otherwise have no occasion to encounter religion. Through the artist's attempt to make his actions radical, he finds a way to challenge society. One can ask here if this challenge is indeed a motivating force? Does the desire for social change still define the concept of counterculture? For that matter, what does it mean to belong to the counterculture? To answer these questions, I interpret metal culture as counterculture.

To Be or Not To Be?

For several years now, the study of countercultures has been – to put it bluntly – trendy. Progressive and radical changes in social and cultural structures have had an important impact in this regard as they replace styles and practices

that were formerly considered features of working-class subcultures. Individuals' choices about cultural participation reflect the postmodern emphasis on individuality, consumption, and cultural fluidity. With this in mind, if the concept of counterculture is to remain relevant, it must be redefined, detached from its historical context, and reassembled according to the patterns and inspirations appropriate for the present. In other words, the concept of counterculture can only be useful as both a force for making change and a discursive frame if it's germane to critiques of the current dominant culture. Therefore, in my opinion, the ideas of the Birmingham and Chicago schools should be combined with contemporary approaches such as social constructivism. Moreover, in theoretical terms, culture is not the determining structure it once was. Indeed, we must recognize that individuals and groups are those who create culture. To be able to speak about countercultures, we need to view subcultures as deliberate formations created by people, not rooted in class, ethnicity, or age. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we much change the way we view participation in subcultures. In the past, academics suggested that marginalization was a key factor in individual orientations toward subcultures. However, I suggest that participation in subcultures centers around non-normativity. Such a frame allows for emphasis on inclusivity rather than exclusivity, and positivity rather than negativity.

Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, and LeVine see the possibility of using the term *counterculture* through transgression, antagonism, shock, and provocation (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine 2013: 1–14). They argue that there are situations in which “metal shocks just by its presence”. In my opinion, transgression and provocation are not enough to engender metal culture as counterculture. However, as my research suggests, there are other elements that enrich the metal discourse and direct it toward becoming countercultural. To be more specific: participants of metal culture perceive themselves as more critically aware of what is happening in the world around them than the average person, and they tend to choose a lifestyle that closely reflects their beliefs. They trust that they are acting in accord with this critical awareness in their thoughts, words, and deeds and want to cut themselves off from anything that might be involuntary or unconscious commitment to mainstream culture by refusing to uncritically adhere to social mores. Their belonging to metal counterculture provides the guidelines necessary for individuals to strive for freedom from the various forms of perceived oppression in daily life. Furthermore, opposition and resistance are key variables in metal culture and its articulation as a counterculture; this helps explain why members of metal culture break with the mainstream. I also think that in redefining counterculture, it is worth considering the categories of behavior that go beyond the mainstream of sensitivity, which is visible in metal culture.

Metal culture is not uniform in structure; individual expressions are common and, as highlighted by my analysis, disagreements within the culture often arise. However, this inconsistency is not a novelty here. A similar phenomenon was observed by Mirosław Pęczak in his study of Polish subcultures in the 1980s. He notes that such an “inconsistency results from the fact that the dominant pattern was characterized by incoherence and variability reflecting changes in social consciousness, determined in turn by unstable economic and political conditions”

(Pęczak 2013: 134). This holds true today. The framework of the dominant culture is difficult to define but most relevant for the present study, mainstream culture is generally characterized by cultural traditions based on religiosity, consumerism, and trends dictated by the media. Any effort aimed at questioning the dominant culture is met with obstacles in the form of mixing styles, a sign of postmodernity. My respondents, however, manage to emphasize their distinctiveness from the mainstream and their belonging to the circle (as one of them said) of metalheads. In distinguishing themselves from the dominant culture, my respondents used terms like “the majority,” “others,” “they”, etc. Metal culture’s distinctiveness applies to both style and musical choices. Muggleton’s notion of “differentiated identity” (2000: 96) is relevant in this regard as it describes ways in which an individual clearly marks the difference that separates them from the collective, which in each case constitutes a reference group.

Continued research on metal culture as counterculture has great potential as it helps describe a variety of issues. First, it clarifies ways in which metal opposes prevailing standards. Second, such a perspective productively highlights similar understandings of the collective lifestyle and a collective understanding of resistance and social change. Third, approaching metal from the perspective of counterculture helps us better understand the workings of experimentation in individual expression, musical expression, and other areas. By viewing metal through a countercultural lens, we are better able to determine why and how some activities are controversial and antagonistic to the mainstream, while others are not. In any case, metal as counterculture promotes a lifestyle that, through minor everyday actions, causes a bottom-up reaction to dominant social, lifestyle, and political practices.

By transforming the conventional connotations of what we mean by “counterculture”—by stripping away the ethos, high ideas, and communal values that once defined the concept in the 1960s—what remains is the profoundly fundamental notion of speaking against the dominant culture. Metal culture will find a home here without any problem, even while maintaining its resistance to new ideas. A little more work awaits the majority, which is also becoming more and more diverse, overburdened by a wealth of choices that tend toward fragmentation. For metal culture, however, the majority is still the majority, different and unfamiliar. If it remains so, which is very likely, this “pimply, prole, putrid, unchic, unsophisticated, anti-intellectual (but impossibly pretentious), dismal, abysmal, terrible, horrible, and stupid music, barely music at all” will successfully defend itself as a counterculture, even against the backdrop of the comic book Armageddon.

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Abstract

The author of this article seeks to verify the thesis that proclaims that metal culture can be classified as counterculture. The author supported her arguments with research she conducted in Poland in 2018–2020. The main research questions concerned controversy in metal music and manifestations of social discord, as well as other issues that might constitute the recognition of metal culture as a counterculture. Based on the research, a redefinition of the term was proposed to make it more useful today.

Kontr...co? Muzyka metalowa i jej kultura w XXI wieku

Streszczenie

Autorka artykułu stara się zweryfikować tezę głoszącą, że kulturę metalową można zaliczyć do kontrkultury. Autorka poparła swoje argumenty badaniami, które prowadziła w Polsce w latach 2018–2020. Główne pytania badawcze dotyczyły kontrowersji w muzyce metalowej i przejawów niezgody społecznej, a także innych zagadnień, które klasyfikują kulturę metalową w obrębie kontrkultury. Opierając się na przeprowadzonych badaniach zaproponowano redefinicję tego pojęcia tak, aby było ono bardziej użyteczne w dzisiejszych czasach.

Keywords: heavy metal, metal culture, counterculture, commercial culture, commodification, subculture

Słowa kluczowe: heavy metal, kultura metalowa, kontrkultura, kultura komercyjna, komodyfikacja, subkultura

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A Man Behind Everything? Motivational Sources of Metal Listening Among Female Audiences

Introduction

This article is a reworked version of Gabriela Stašová's paper *Za vším hledej muže? Motivační zdroje poslechu metalu u ženského publika (A man behind everything? Motivational sources of metal listening among female audiences)* presented at the 5th Czech Conference about Metal (Brno, 2021) on the theme scenes, gender, identities. Due to its topic, the conference (with Stašová's contribution in particular) received a broad response from the public and aroused controversy within a sector of Czech metal subculture.¹ The controversy centered on the perception that the study of gender problematics (gender studies) and metal studies – as well as the social sciences and humanities in general – are useless pursuits (see Miroslav Vrzal's article in this issue).

Metal studies has become more significant among Czech academics only in recent years, following the establishment of the Czech Metal Studies (CMS) association in 2017. Since its beginnings, CMS has organized Czech academic conferences under the Department for the Study of Religion at Masaryk University in Brno (where CMS originated). From the primary focus on metal and religion, CMS has recently opened to other areas of interest (especially gender studies in metal over the past two years)

¹ Although many authors reject the term subculture and instead use the term scene (see Kahn-Harris 2007), for the purpose of this paper, we will keep using the term "subculture". In contrast to the scene (more fluid and often tied to specific metal subgenres; see Kahn-Harris 2007), we understand subculture as emphasizing a particular collective identity with common elements of metal on the one hand, and the differences and boundaries between various subcultures and towards what is perceived by them as mainstream on the other (Vrzal, Řezníček 2017; see also Kolářová 2011: 14–18). Importantly, notwithstanding the prefix "sub-", subculture does *not* imply here something culturally inferior or deviant.

and pushed for greater multidisciplinary, this following the international boom in metal studies and the lack of interest in metal problematics in Czech subcultural studies, social sciences, and humanities in general. The thematic interest in gender and metal at the last CMS conference represents the current multidisciplinary direction that CMS is aiming for (see article “Czech Metal Studies: 5 Years of the Study of Metal [and Religion]” in this issue).

In the study of musical subcultures, metal was long treated as a marginal topic. However, in recent years, has come to be regarded (at least partially) as a legitimate part of global culture that is respected within various subcultures (Holland, Spracklen 2018). In the last decade, metal studies grew into a broad multidisciplinary field that includes history, sociology, and cultural and subcultural studies together with political science, musicology, and gender studies (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, Scott 2016). Metal and gender now stand as one of the most important topics in the field, alongside other critical issues, including metal and globalization, modernity, politics, and metal infrastructures and industries (Wallach, Berger, Greene 2011). The importance of the topic “metal and gender” is highlighted, for example, by the comprehensive book *Heavy Metal, Gender and Sexuality: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Heesch, Scott 2016).

There has been interest in metal and gender from the early days of metal studies, a field that began to coalesce in the 1990s. Deena Weinstein discussed metal as a realm of masculinity as early as 1991. Yet the implications of gender in metal were addressed more fully in Robert Walser’s prescient book *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993). Here Walser describes metal – specifically heavy metal, for he is not interested in its extreme subgenres – as a distinctly masculine environment and an arena of male power (Walser 1993). Many authors still follow a masculine-centered perspective on metal subculture, some even describing metal as *hypermasculine* (see Rogers, Deflem 2022). Subsequently, several studies demonstrate how masculinity manifests in specific aspects of metal: e.g., Karl Spracklen (2020) examines how the pagan past, race, and identity in national-warrior myths appearing in metal are constructed via the concept of masculinity.

As with other music subcultures – for example, punk, skinheads, hip-hop, and techno (see Kolářová 2011; Kolářová, Oravcová 2018) – fewer women participate in metal subculture compared to men. In the United States, the metal audience is 65–70% male (Purcell 2003: 100), in the UK 70–75% (Gruzelier 2007: 62), and in Germany 85% (Chaker 2013).² This disproportion is evident also in the number of female metal musicians. According to data from Pauwke Berkers and Julian Schaap, in only ten countries women account for more than 10% of all metal musicians, and women are responsible only for 3% of all global metal music production (Berkers, Schaap 2018).

² Sarah Chaker also surveyed German black and death metal scenes. According to the results in 2007, the proportion of male black metal fans was 83.4%. Only 16.6% of the participants were female. Regarding death metal fans, there were 86.2% males and only 13.8% females. “Thus, both the German black and death metal scenes are clearly male-dominated.” (Chaker 2016: 150).

While the percentage of women is quite low, they indeed are present and participate as active members of the global metal subculture (and in metal studies, see Hickam, Wallach 2011).³ Despite some previous characterizations of women in metal (e.g., in Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies; Smolík 2017: 87; see also Kolářová 2011: 31), women are certainly not just passive accompaniments to men nor simply sex symbols consuming the subcultural fashions. According to Rosemary Hill, the wider problem of subcultural theory, more generally, is that it does not provide adequate space for female actors. Part of the problem is that women often engage in musical subcultures in different ways that have been marginalized in the metal studies literature that itself is largely produced by male academics (Hill 2014). Moreover, while metal remains male-dominated, the number of women in the metal subculture continues to increase longitudinally (Rogers, Deflem 2022: 11; Purcell 2003). As Deena Weinstein describes, women have begun to participate in all metal genres and the number of female fans has risen exponentially in the second decade of the twenty-first century (Weinstein 2016: 22). It is therefore probable that women in metal will play an increasingly important role.

Although most authors studying gender in metal focus on masculinity, there are also some who center on femininity and the roles of women (see for example selected chapters in Heesch, Scott 2016). Some studies on gender and metal (also conducted from a feminist perspective) focus directly on gender inequality (see Berkers, Schaap 2018) and sexism in metal. There are also qualitative interviews with female metal participants (similar to our study). For example, Sonia Vasan (2011) studied the death metal scene and argued that interviews with female death metal fans reveal sexist practices and a willingness to tolerate them. Chaker, based on her qualitative observation and interview material gathered in the German black and death metal scenes between 2005 and 2008 writes:

Black and death metal are mostly produced by men and quite clearly address other men. Correspondingly, the rules in the music and the scene are made by men; women initially have to accept these if the recognisability of the symbolic system of heavy metal is not to be endangered or thrown into disorder. Men as gatekeepers watch over the adherence to these rules. Thus, women – unlike men – often can only prove their scene credibility by showing their knowledge of the scene or proving that they possess skills and power positions that are relevant to the scene (Chaker 2016: 159).

Keith Kahn-Harris (2007) similarly suggests that the personal experience of extreme metal and its norms is different for women compared to men: “Women who wish to become involved in the scene are more limited than men in how they are able to define themselves” (Kahn-Harris 2007: 74). Hill elaborates that Kahn-Harris’s explanations regarding the marginalization of women in extreme metal is caused by

³ For example, Miroslav Vrzal, during his participant observation in one of the Czech metal pubs (Paterlord pub situated in Brno, the second biggest city in the Czech Republic), made several sums of men and women, with the proportion of women sometimes reaching up to 40% (see Vrzal 2018: 89). Moreover, the pub itself was owned by a metal fan woman who ran the place together with her husband. The metal pub Paterlord was in 2006–2014 one of the main metal subculture’s infrastructural centers in Brno.

“few role models, exclusion by male fans, pornographic images, lyrics of sexual violence and sexism from other scene members” that “creates a sense of the extreme metal scene as hostile to women, which goes some way to explaining why women are not involved in the scene in greater numbers” (Hill 2014: 178). Hill evokes the notion of an ‘imaginary community’ which supposedly “enables the consideration of how women fans imagine themselves as part of a community without eliding the difficulties imposed by structural sexism and brings the focus back to the pleasure in the music” (Hill 2014: 174). However, from our perspective, understanding metal as an essentially “hostile environment for women” is a stereotype that requires further study. The validity of such a perspective is further problematized by the increasing number of women in metal, including extreme metal subgenres.

Our study⁴ is based on the field research of Gabriela Stašová, carried out from May 2021 to the present, that deals with women metal fans in Czechia. Within the framework of this research, seventeen qualitative interviews with female metalheads were conducted, of which two participants were active metal musicians.

The Position of Women in Czech Musical Subcultures

Although local music subcultures are part of a broader international context, they are also “glocalized” and shaped by the post-socialist environment (Kolářová 2011: 237–242; Daniel 2016). Music subcultures in Czechia and many post-communist countries feature idiosyncrasies and developmental trajectories divergent from subcultures in, for example, Western Europe. The local situation stems from the experience of the communist regime⁵ and the “golden era” of the 1990s after the “Velvet revolution”, when various subcultures such as metal, skinhead, or punk (later also techno and hip-hop) underwent a considerable boom during the transformation from communism to democracy.⁶

Women in Czech musical subcultures were partially documented and described by a research team led by Marta Kolářová (2011) that conducted field research in punk, hip-hop, techno, and skinhead subcultures. The role of women in Czech punk and hip-hop, specifically, was studied by Kolářová and Anna Oravcová (2018). Based on their general subcultural research, Kolářová (2011) describes the internal distinction between “girl and boy” subcultural styles. The male style typically defines the subculture, while the female style is derived from it. However, the specifics of these stylistic forms always depend on the boundaries and permeability between male and female roles. In general, girls’ subcultural style differs from the

⁴ Miroslav Vrzal is the primary author of the article’s introductory section. Gabriela Stašová undertook the research, analysis, and writing of the main body of the text. Jana Nenadalová worked to bring these parts together and completed the overall form and style of the article.

⁵ For example, Vrzal (2022; 2017: 27) showed that members of the metal subculture still refer to censorship in the communist era when they face the cancellation of black metal concerts.

⁶ For more about the problem of Czech subcultures in the period of socialism and post-socialism, especially in connection to violence, see Ondřej Daniel (2016).

style of “mainstream” girls, and their unusual appearance transgresses the boundaries of mainstream femininity and disrupts the normative gender order. Therefore, subcultural girls are often attracted by the potential for challenging mainstream femininity.

According to the testimonies of Kolářová’s research participants (2011: 223–227; see also Kolářová, Oravcová 2018), “softer” substyles are usually labeled more feminine than the “harder” ones. Kolářová’s team (2011) and Kolářová and Oravcová (2018) also found that supposed subcultural gender equality was often verbalized in a rather illusory way (especially by men). The typical narrative suggests that nothing should stop women from participating in the subculture. However, subcultural insiders explain away the lower number of female participants by suggesting that women generally tend to be more mainstream, are devoted primarily to appearance, and sometimes violent subcultural behaviors are not appealing to them. For example, girls are described as physically weaker in aggressive dance forms such as the “pogo” and as such prefer to remain on the sidelines instead of taking part in the “moshpit”. Furthermore, even if men regard female bands as talented and impactful, women performers are still often judged mainly by their appearance. Subcultural men question women’s ability to perform at the same skill level as is expected from men alongside women’s sole ability to understand the subculture “as men do”. Men within the subculture may treat women with disrespect, perceive them as inferior, or regard them as mere sexual objects. As Kolářová and Oravcová describe, the need to actively balance femininity and masculinity then leads women to choose one of two basic roles (not only inside subcultures, but also in related social movements): a female warrior who comes close to adopting the masculine role; or, a princess, one who embraces femininity and sexuality at least in part as an affirmation of subcultural gender expectations (Kolářová 2006; Kolářová, Oravcová 2018). This primary difference in women’s subcultural roles is also evident in our research.

This article thus further works to fill a gap in subcultural research by examining women’s roles in Czech metal. In general, metal has mostly been ignored in the Czech study of musical subcultures⁷. In the last seven years, the publication of articles and book chapters on Czech metal significantly increased⁸, partially due to activities of the CMS group. Masculinity in metal (specifically Czech brutal death metal) was also examined by Hradecká (2019) in her fieldwork-based thesis, later presented at the 5th Czech conference about metal. However, our study is the first on women in Czech metal one solely based on the analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews with women involved in the subculture.

Stašová was partially involved in the metal subculture since she was young and personally knows a lot of metalhead women. Thanks to this, she overcame the initial distrust of her participants and managed to illicit richly open responses from interviewees. Simultaneously, she is aware of the possible risk of conflicting interests

⁷ With some exceptions, such as Mareš 2003; Vrzal 2009; Vaněk J. 2010; Vaněk M. 2010; Smolík 2010; 2012.

⁸ See for example Daniel 2016; 2018; 2019; Mokřý 2016; Vrzal 2015; 2017; 2020; 2022; Vrzal, Řezníček 2017; Lantorová 2017; Karcár 2018; Daniel, Almer 2018; Nenadalová 2019; Puchovský 2020.

due to her position as an insider. However, she wants to clearly state that her aim was to document the thoughts, interests, and motivations of metalhead women and contribute to the current debate concerning subcultures, gender, and metal music. In 2020, she joined the CMS research group and started working on a research outline about women in metal. Stašová has long considered research on contemporary female metal audiences to be important yet underappreciated work. She studied sociology and musicology at Palacký University in Olomouc where she began applying a combination of qualitative and quantitative research already in her master thesis *Sociologie metalové hudby: Metalový posluchač v kontextu subkultury a vkusu* (*Sociology of metal music: Metal fan in the context of subculture and taste*) (2017). The thesis comprises a profile of a metal fan and his fundamental preferences. Stašová showed that metal fan is influenced by many factors within the subculture, which he/she understood as a unified whole. This includes, for example, style of dress and adherence to certain values implicit and explicit in the music itself.

The Research Aims and Methodology

Stašová used a qualitative approach that enabled her to garner a more in-depth understanding than a quantitative approach (see Hendl 2005). Qualitative research generally allows for a certain flexibility, allowing for potential shifts in one's research direction. The study was based on qualitative interviews⁹, with the research design including the following areas of interest:

- Current position of women in the metal subculture
- The visual style of female metalheads and their personal expression through image
- The perceived attitudes of metalhead men toward metalhead women
- The influence of mass media and sex symbols on the perception of women in the metal subculture
- Personal motivations for listening to metal

From March to May 2021, Stašová interviewed seventeen participants (metalhead women recruited via personal and mediated contacts) using the online platform Zoom. The age of the research sample ranged from 19 to 41 years old. Before each interview, participants were given a pilot questionnaire asking about their age, education, profession, place of residence, when and how they got into metal, what attracts them most about the music, and their favorite metal subgenres. The subsequent interview was structured according to interviewees' responses to the pilot questionnaire, although there was flexibility to pursue other areas of interest. Interviews then covered the main topics listed below, e.g., the attitudes of male metalheads towards the women audience members or inspirations for listening to metal. All data from the interviews was divided into segments based on the most frequent thematic correlations using axial coding, which, according to grounded theory, reveals themes related to the research question (Kolářová, Oravcová 2018: 312; see also Strauss, Corbin 1998; Kaufmann 2010). However, the goal of this work

⁹ All interviews were conducted in Czech language and then translated to English.

was only to establish hypotheses about the role and status of women in the Czech metal subculture.

Research participants formed a diverse sample but shared several commonalities. Most women were studying at or had already graduated from a university (including PhD students and researchers) and tended to lean towards extreme metal subgenres such as death and black metal (equally distributed). Two participants specifically favored grindcore, and some listened to a combination of these genres. Visual style, fashion, and image were essential topics for most interviewees, including both personal (what the participants themselves preferred) and global (participants' perceptions of mainstream metal style, including the style of other female insiders) perspectives. Furthermore, participants often spontaneously mentioned the problem of female sex symbols and "metal beauty prototypes".

Czech Women and Metal: Interview Analysis

Musical subcultures create communities and collective identities that are partially based on a declared separateness from society or mainstream culture (see Kolářová 2011: 17). As some responses show, this distinction can stem from a feeling of personal weirdness or being a social outsider. Identification with the metal subculture works to overcome this feeling of isolation by creating a shared subcultural identity. For example, in the interview with participant 17, metal was portrayed as a welcoming space; even though you are not accepted anywhere else, the metal subculture will welcome you with open arms. "You're weird too, come on in!". In addition to being a space of community for those who feel they do not fit into mainstream society, metal brings together highly self-aware people too.

The view of metal as a space of acceptance is connected to the question of acceptance of women: do they feel accepted in the metal subculture? As the response from participant shows, this problem is further linked to ways women are portrayed in metal related to a specific form of subcultural capital (subcultural knowledge and commodities, Thornton 1997), which, if achieved, brings acceptance or respect. From the perspective of participant 4, acceptance and respect are not reliant on being sexually objectified but are concomitant with assimilating the values expounded in the music (and the scene more generally).

P: I'm still thinking about how the woman is portrayed in metal, and I wouldn't say she's portrayed as a sex object. Again, compared to what we see in pop music videos, the explicit sexual content is not represented in metal. It's possible that the aforementioned restraint could also be due to how we are presented in metal. Going back to it a bit more generally, like I said, they respect you as well, so I would say that if we have something in common, they automatically respect you more. You're not just a woman anymore, an object, sex... But yes, you have similar views, you like the same music, you have insight, great. So, when you show you're a valid part of that community, your status goes up (Participant 4, 30 year old, university degree in psychology, product manager in IT).

The position and roles of women in the metal subculture are constructed alongside and in counterpoint to the construction of masculinity. This characteristic metal masculinity was described by one participant as follows:

P: The subculture is fantastically confident. What I've noticed is that metal really works with such a masculine confidence, such a decisiveness, it's really those archetypes of the man, like: I know what I'm doing, I know why I'm doing it, I stand by it, I'm not ashamed of it, I'm joking, it's me. And I think those insecure individuals can really draw stability there (Participant 15, 40 year old, high school teacher).

Such comments point to the idea of drawing power from male energy, which is especially significant at metal concerts (see Walser 1993). However, the participant also demonstrates the need to know who one (a woman) "really is" and to stand for it, while defining one possible reason for identifying with the style: "I think it's a wonderful opportunity for a woman to dress in that style. To identify with that for that moment. Just to be in the spotlight of these guys who are cool as men now, who can act... and just be there to be the queen of the evening. It really is an opportunity" (Participant 15, 40 year old, high school teacher).

However, women in the metal occupy ambivalent positions. There are two basic modes of femininity, like the roles of female warrior (more masculine) and princess (highlighting femininity and sexuality) described by Kolářová and Oravcová (Kolářová 2006; Kolářová, Oravcová 2018). This basic dichotomy is illustrated in the following excerpt:

P: When I was just in that teenage high school thing, I remember there were like two basic archetypes of a metalhead. One was like the dude, like the singer from Arch Enemy...
G. S.: Angela Gossow?

P: That's right. She's the guy who gets drunk and wears pants and is just so manly. And then there was the other style, the goth, corseted, graceful girls who listened to symphonic metal.

[...]

... I'm realizing that the pattern is there – certain more ethereal women. That actually that Angela was one of the few ones that brought a male element to it, otherwise the women were more like those princesses on a cloud. Even though the cloud was black (Participant 16, 28 year old, PhD student/researcher in religious studies).

P: Sometimes I even brag that I listen to metal, I enjoy the expressions of people when I'm somewhere in a dress, white, and when I say I listen to death metal they look at me like I'm crazy. I love the way people are surprised (Participant 6, 28 year old, online marketer).

Participant 4 views mainstream society as condemning difference more than understanding it, or even acknowledging difference but with ostentatious incomprehension. Echoing this sentiment, many participants discussed outsiders' latent prejudice toward metal fans.

P: What's worse with girls than society in general is that they take more liberties with you. Or they are more taught to comment and judge you. On top of them judging you

as an object, you suddenly have weird clothes on. I can be quite eccentric, dye my hair blue, etc. And since I was 15, I've learned to walk non-stop with headphones on and play music when I go out. Because I have absolutely no interest in listening to all the bullshit around me. And there's a lot of it. Now, I don't wear a long goth coat and I don't wear black lipstick, but I still wear weird stuff, so it's still worth it to go with the headphones. Anyway, there are a lot of comments and it also depends on how much you acknowledge your surroundings, how your family interferes and stuff. The family is actually a big factor too and they might worry more about you because "they're just weird people, you're going over there, in that corset, what are they going to think etc." (Participant 4, 30 year old, university degree in psychology, product manager in IT).

As with other interviewees, for participant 8, image became an option for self-expression. Our interview touched on the division of the metal community into two parts, one that represents a positive metal image to society and another whose subcultural image is perceived more negatively. She admits that a more distinctive image can influence other people's prejudices.

G. S.: Didn't you experience prejudice from your fellow students at university, as far as metal style can still be seen in you?

P: Not at all, not at all! The university environment, or at least the Faculty of Arts, is one of the freest environments when it comes to self-expression. It was a bit worse at work because unfortunately I had bosses who even invited me to uncomfortable personal speaking when I got a new tattoo – that if I got another tattoo, just unfortunately. But then again, I had a supervisor who was cool.

G. S.: So there's still some sort of conservative setup in certain spheres?

P: Yes, definitely, and after that experience, the tattoo also became for me a symbol of some kind of defiance against that conservatism. I have more of them, not a lot, but it's visible, and now I also wear my hair so that one half is reddish and it's colored purple-blue-turquoise (Participant 8, 30 year old, PhD student in Literature Theory, teacher in Czech Literature and History for secondary schools).

Exclusivity and Elitism as a Refuge

The following section details the most frequently cited motivational resources for metal listening among the interviewees. Questions surrounding notions of exclusivity and elitism were included in the study to gauge the ways young people fit into the subculture and express their complex personalities in the formative years outside of mainstream society. This aspect emerged from analysis of the pilot questionnaire, with participants often citing the exclusivity and otherness of music as a source of metal's appeal. The interviews confirmed that many participants saw metal as a kind of 'positive outsiderism', where one is proud of being different, for example doing something different, looking different, etc. Participants mentioned this need is very strong; the metal community provided refuge for young people who refused to go along with the majority that did not match their behavior, thinking, or outward appearance.

Participant 7 admits in her interview that she sympathizes with metal not only because of the possibility of 'breaking into intelligent society', but also because of the otherness she faces and her experience caring for her sick son:

P: I have no need to be included in the stream of so-called ordinary people. It's confirmed in most research that someone who listens to metal has a higher IQ than, say, a rocker. So I rely on talking to intelligent people. I think we really hear and perceive a lot more in the music than most people who just hear that so-called vomit and incredible guitars. I think we just hear something more there (Participant 7, 41 year old, caring for a disabled son in stage 4 care dependency).

Is exclusivity an integral value of the metal community? Or is it important only for a few, like participant 7? Does this elitism have similar sociological patterns as in other subcultures, and if so, why are metal's reputation and image different from, for example, punk? Or is it perceived as elite only by interested insiders defending their territory? These questions emerged during the interview process and from the ideas of Dick Hebdige (2012) and Marta Kolářová (2011).

P: I think you're bound to find a lot of people out there who are a little bit different in some ways than other mainstream society, but on the other hand I think I'm able to find that in any other sample of people. But it's true that I have a slightly different opinion of people who are members of that subculture. That I think they think a little differently than people who turn on the radio at home and don't know anything else. We also look for completely different topics that I wouldn't look for with the mainstream population (Participant 4, 30 year old, university degree in psychology, product manager in IT).

There is a certain consensus about men and women roles concerning young metalheads within the millennial generation who experienced several booms of commercially successful music (Klusák 2018). Such opinions correlate with the interviewees' age. Perhaps the most pronounced congruence was expressed by participants 2 and 3, who mentioned differentiation and separation from their peers mainly due to listening to completely different music. Both also mentioned how their peers follow pop-music idols. One participant is humble and conciliatory towards this behavior, while the other attaches great importance to her rejection of relatively mainstream music choices.

G. S.: And when you were at that primary school, were some of the girls also in that subculture or were you more of a minority?

P: I was, but I still hang out with them to this day, even though they listen to something completely different. It's usually Harry Styles or something like that. They're completely different. It wasn't until later that I found out that there were two classmates who listened to the same music, or similar music (Participant 3, 20 year old, university student studying Czech language).

G. S.: You mention as one of the reasons for listening to metal a kind of otherness and different taste from your peers when you were growing up. Did that otherness play a big role in it? For example, did you have any feeling of separation from society or something like that?

P: I guess so, because I noticed that when I was in elementary school, for example, the girls that were there with me, they would just... One Direction, you know. A group of five guys who were just nice, and they didn't care how they sang, but they were nice, so they'd look at them... (Participant 2, 19 year old, university student).

Precisely because female metal participants often felt differently at a certain formative age, metal became a universal refuge for them. Thus, when Stašová asked if the participants felt alienated from mainstream society when they joined the so-called "counterculture" (as metal can be also understood; see Hjelm, Kahn-Harris, LeVine 2013), the answer was clear: they not only felt comfortable in metal culture, but some of them were even proud of it or felt relieved.

P: For one thing, I didn't see it as somehow joining the anti-culture, I just listen to the music I want to listen to, and it's totally everybody's business, right... And the second thing – I felt that some kind of damage to my reputation in quotes couldn't go on anymore, because I've always been not very accepted by my surroundings and, for example, by my classmates at primary school. I've always been considered a bit of a weirdo, so it didn't even cross my mind. Then, of course, I perceived it when I fit into the metal more, but then again I perceived that very positively and I always felt very comfortable in that environment because it was like I had finally found something where I fit in at least a little bit (Participant 17, 37 year old, elementary school music and language teacher, music media editor).

The Pose: Is "Being a Metalhead" Attractive?

Many insiders have a negative orientation toward "poserism" in metal. A poser is one who claims to be a metalhead but has little understanding of the music or its culture (Kolářová 2011). A poser may dress in band t-shirts or otherwise style themselves in a way that references a subgenre, all while having little knowledge of the repertoire of a band they are rocking out to at a metal show. Women in particular are often seen as posers (whether they perceive themselves this way or not) when they are new to the metal subculture. A greater inclination towards either subcultural mainstream or its underground is, of course, typical for many subcultures. Interviewees often compared the metal subculture to other subcultures like skinheads or, to some degree punk, both of which are perceived as being even more "underground" than metal (Kolářová 2011).

G. S.: Now you mentioned the pose. Do you think some of these girls are in this subculture just because of a pose?

P: Yeah yeah, I'd say definitely. Actually, I was pretty much like that at first. That I knew three songs and I immediately went to that show because it was just black metal and it's cool and badass and...yeah, I was definitely like that myself (Participant 10, 21 year old, student at the Faculty of Law, working in an investment bank team).

Another issue that arose during the interview process is whether the pose is related to a particular topic of personal defiance. Participant 14, for example, admits

that the motive in her case was in part based on defiance against her family's religious foundation.

Well, I was going to church at the time and I was kind of very into it, all the fundraisers and stuff... so there was maybe a little bit of a problem and conflict there, that "devil" and just these things. Like why a person from a Catholic family. But I liked it, it appealed to me, I got excited about it, I kind of found myself in it, and plus, I was a teenager, so of course I felt the need to rebel as well (Participant 14, 27 year old, singer, disabled pensioner and peer consultant).

Should one show her metal attitude even in situations in which it can be considered problematic? Two participants, who both happen to be schoolteachers, answered yes. Their metal identities extended in this way to a broader social dimension: moral, educational, and liberal. An outsider may be challenged by questions such as: Should teachers make their personal hobbies and interests known to their students?

G. S.: Do you dress according to the metal subculture? Alternatively, how often – in plain clothes, at concerts?

P: Definitely at concert, because I want to enjoy it, but sometimes I really enjoy dressing like that for work if I'm going to a gig in the evening. I dressed like that once for a class reunion. They laughed at me. But, like, my boss really admires me for it, and the students like it too. Like, I like to dress like that sometimes in civilian life, but I'm not made up. But like yeah, when the mood is right, I like it that way because the built up wardrobe here for the metal, it's just nice (Participant 15, 40 year old, high school art teacher).

G. S.: Do you think a metal girl is willing to do whatever it takes to fit into the subculture she wants to be in? Alternatively, does age and any other factors play a role in this?

P: It seems like probably a lot, though I don't know about guys, maybe too. And as you get older, it seems to me that the willingness is greater – to do anything to fit in. For one thing, I think at that young age, you're more malleable and you try harder to fit in, whatever it is. And conversely, at a later age, one is less willing to change one's habits, I think that's a general thing.

[...]

So there are some things I wouldn't do. But on the other hand, I don't have a problem with... well, fashion, I've been looking like that since about high school, like a lot of black, and I've definitely been and am willing to do more of that, and I enjoy it and I like it – I like to dress metal for events and I like to dress metallic for civilian. I wear some metallic civvies to school when I feel like it. So there's a lot of things I'm capable of in terms of stepping out of my comfort zone. And I know they'll help me fit in better (Participant 17, 37 year old, elementary school music and language teacher, music media editor).

As Julian Schaap and Pauwke Berkers (2014) suggest, metal is also about a supposed inclination towards "negative" social phenomena, which may include Satanism, even if only as a kind of pose. Therefore, in metal, pose can also have a religious meaning, given the motifs of contemporary global brands devoted to alternative, rock, goth, and metal fashion (for example, the Killstar brand, which focuses

mainly on occult themes). However, female metalheads' interest in this subject is not necessarily shallow and superficial.

G. S.: If you had to choose one single symbol of metal, what would it be?

P: Satanism comes to mind. But it wouldn't be metal, it would be the old black. For me it would be Satanism, because not that I believe in it, but I'm pretty loaded. And I'm interested. But I'm interested in religion in general.

G. S.: Religious stuff?

P: Yeah, I've got, like, the Bible here, and I've got the Satanic Bible next to that, and I've got Norse mythology next to that. I'm into that, and I'm kind of anti-Christian too, because in my extended family in Moravia we have... I think they're Adventists. And we, when we used to go to them, I was all "Jesus Christ" etc. And then reactions like, "You're not allowed to say that." That was strange, and I had built up such a distaste for Christianity and faith from a young age that I started to get interested in things that were a little bit against it. I think an awful lot of people take Satanism as something bad, a bloody orgy and defilement by the devil... (Participant 2, 19 year old, university student).

Visual Style and Subculture – an Expanded Dimension of Music

For the interviewees in the study, music, subculture, and visual style are given nearly equal importance. Almost all participants breached the topic of appearance and its evaluation (towards themselves and others) spontaneously. Although questions about the image of metalheads were part of the research plan, more specific discussion about appearance developed in unexpected dimensions.

The term "visual style" refers to a visual identification with the subculture and its image. In purposes of this study, it also refers to the tendency to prototype the appearance of female metalheads, idealizing their beauty in reference to media and subcultural sex symbols (for example, famous metal icons, especially female vocalists of more commercial metal bands). Visual style is important for metal subculture in relation to individuals' self-identification and self-awareness.

P: But it's just that even the way singers look – like Simone from Epica or the way Tarja looked, not so much now, of course she's getting older, although she's still a beautiful woman. It's just that those singers set the tone. That's quite interesting when I think about it – that basically the ideal of beauty for a female metalhead is what some metal singers look like (Participant 8, 30 year old, PhD student in Literature Theory, teacher in Czech Literature and History for secondary schools).

P: With Alissa White-Gluz, I feel like when she shows up somewhere, she's just kind of the prototype of what metalheads want everyone to look like (Participant 3, 20 year old, university student studying Czech language).

P: Often in the metal world they are portrayed as typical of all those models and singers in black sexy clothes, redheads and so on, but they don't all look like that, they look different. You can't generalize it (Participant 1, 24 year old, Information Technology student, librarian).

The fact that the visual aspect is inseparable from metal culture was expressed by participant 5, who wears metal style even in everyday situations.

G. S.: Did you mention the variability of the genre as one of your preferences, as well as the community around it and the visual style? Which of these wins for you?

P: It's about fifty-fifty music and visuals. Because a lot of people, just by looking at me, they can see that I live it. That it's not just some "I'm gonna paint myself for a gig, I'm gonna go crazy and be a metalhead". But I try to look like that all the time because it makes me feel good. But at the same time, I couldn't do it without the music. I couldn't look like that without liking the music and listening to it.

G. S.: So does your image and the music go hand in hand?

P: Exactly (Participant 5, 24 year old, accountant, singer/growler in a metal band).

Love of Music – “Girls Listen to Nightwish”

The band Nightwish was often mentioned as one of the primary reasons for participating in metal culture. Interviewees reflected on their revelatory inclination for Nightwish, both admired and reviled among metalheads for their pompous style. Participants described how Nightwish's music combines subtlety and harshness, which drew some participants away from their former musical interests.

P: I was attracted to the music because I listened to a lot of classical music and stuff, so I was just attracted to Nightwish because they combined that hard music with that nice singing. I was most interested in that combination of the hard gritty music and the nice operatic singing that I liked before (Participant 14, 27 year old, singer, disabled pensioner and peer consultant).

P: For me it was the combination of the hard music and the opera singing. That was something new for me and it was interesting (Participant 5, 24 year old, accountant, singer/growler in a metal band).

P: Nightwish is such a girl band. I think most girls came to metal through Nightwish. I honestly don't really understand what I liked about it now. But I guess it was the fact that Tarja was singing there, back when I was a kid. She was so beautiful, she was beautiful in the videos. But it was a long time ago (Participant 11, 28 year old, IT worker).

Partner as the Greatest Motivation

When asked whether they thought that female metalheads would find “their” music on their own, most participants answered that although these cases exist, they are rare. Thus, the most frequent cause and motivation to become involved in metal was the influence of a partner, idol, and/or husband. In this regard, Stašová divided female metalheads into two groups: “Pre-metal Impulse” and “Partner Influence”.

Some of the participants who sought a partner based on the same musical tastes already had some experience with metal in their family. For example, participant 5 grew up in a metal environment. However, the participants admitted that experiences in their formative years, including parental influence, also played a role in the development of their own musical tastes.

P: I think when your parents lead you to music, whatever it is, you don't define that genre until you start to define yourself in some way. Which can be, I don't know, when you're, like, ten, twelve? When a person has more sense and already has that MP3 player and puts the music he wants in there. So if your parents lead you to music in general, you'll find your genre. But I was definitely influenced by my parents listening to AC/DC, Ozzy Osbourne and my dad listening to Iron Maiden. However, I have a wide range, I went straight from Brutal Assault to a Robbie Williams concert (Participant 6, 28 year old, online marketer).

While in the first group, women already listened to metal and chose their partner based on their own musical style and the respective subculture, participants in the second group started listening to metal only because of a relationship with a male metalhead. Most of the participants mentioned that this second category of women usually does not last long in the subculture, because it may be just a phase, a momentary fascination, or a byproduct of affection for a male metalhead. This is in contrast to the first group, where common interests, including metal music and visual style, were at the core of the partnership.

G. S.: Do you prefer a metalhead as a partner? I don't know if you have someone or not, but do you search within that circle?

P: I've been thinking about it and actually all but one of them belonged there and the current one does too. But it's not my goal. It just kind of always happens (Participant 3, 20 year old, university student studying Czech language).

G. S.: Did you prefer a metalhead as a partner?

P: Definitely, definitely. That's just, like I said, I was the radical one, so yeah.

G. S.: And was it possible to find someone who met the criteria that you had at that time?

P: Yeah, definitely, I did. But then it just seemed to me that amongst the metalheads in our town, as I knew most of them by then, a lot of them seemed to be not for me, a bit demented... So I was kind of unhappy about it after that. And then I stopped worrying about it, because I realized that it was stupid to be oriented by that. But for a long time, I had it that way, and I still like guys with beards and long hair and six feet (Participant 16, 28 year old, PhD student, researcher).

The women in the first group ultimately concluded that it is impossible to establish meaningful partnerships purely based on shared musical interests. Participant 4 went so far as to say that she would never want another metalhead as a partner.

Participants also commented on women who only started listening to metal due to the influence of their partner:

P: I feel that the women are into metal, so this is related to the first question that was asked here, that they often maybe succumb to the influence of their partner. I feel that they succumb to what the boyfriend is listening to and then maybe they go to festivals with him, even if they don't really feel it honestly, the relationship with the music. That maybe the environment drives them a little bit" (Participant 10, 21 year old, university student, worker in the investment team of a bank).

G. S.: I mean the question is if it was through a boyfriend, a partner, or some girls who mention that they were in love with a guy with long hair...

P: No, no, definitely not. There was an era, but I was just getting into metal. Then I got a little bit harder, but that's just evolution.

G. S.: And do you feel that more girls get into metal through your own life, or do most of them get into this subculture because of the influence of a boyfriend, partner etc.?

P: That's a good question too, and I think a lot of girls will get into it that way, but I don't think it's going to keep them" (Participant 2, 19 year old, university student).

P: So basically all the ones I know got through someone, which was usually just a relationship with a man. Then there's the fact that not everyone sticks with it. The girl gets tired of it, or she gets tired of the guy. Or the community was just a match for her, and she didn't even bother with the music. So the ones that have stayed within the community, even for the music, are really small. It's bad, and I don't like to say it, but for a lot of people it's just a phase and the music was more of a side factor (Participant 4, 30 year old, psychologist, product manager in IT).

Conclusion: A Man Behind Everything?

In terms of the issues outlined in other literature, as Arnett (1996) argues, metal is fraught with feelings of disconnection and demarcation from mainstream society. Participants referred to this using varied but similar terms (outsiderhood, weirdness, otherness, intelligence, etc.). Women's roles in the metal subculture are often marginalized as "more girly" and therefore have little relevance to the overall masculine-centered concept of the metal subculture. The women in this study were themselves critical of other women in the subculture, for example, condemning their "trashy" appearance and the fact that they only took part in metal because of men. A common entryway into metal for many women is the band Nightwish, a group regarded as "feminine" or even "effeminate".

Prototypes that balance masculine and feminine appearance and behavior (Kolářová 2006; Kolářová, Oravcová 2018) have also been mentioned. Here, participants directly divided female metalheads into "masculine", for example, compared to former Arch Enemy singer Angela Gossow, and "feminine", exemplified by soft and ethereal characteristics of so-called "goth girls". The balance between these two types that alternately complement and misunderstand each other is a key component of women's experiences in metal. It was thus the concept of masculinity that emerged as intersecting most of the themes in the study: the man as a source of an image, male energy from which to draw confidence and inspiration, and the man as a ticket into the metal subculture.

The women declared that they play an equal role to men, but there are also things they cannot control, such as the extent to which they will be treated as sexual objects or whether they will be respected at all in the subculture. Even when they are welcomed into the subculture, women still face difficulties because of their gender as many reported that men are prejudiced against women's musical sensibilities or how "cool" a woman is in general.

Female metalheads often choose their partners according to their musical tastes. There are also instances where men bring women to the metal world, yet only in a few cases do these women continue listening to metal when the relationship ends.

To summarize analysis conclusions:

- Female participants perceive women's place in the metal subculture as improving – the number of insider women grows higher, their position is more egalitarian, and male metalheads generally tolerate them more than in the past.
- Participants also feel that outsiders are more accepting of their lifestyle – only two decades ago, female metalheads felt a latent prejudice against them from mainstream society.
- Male metalheads still occasionally distrust the musical sensibilities of female insiders.
- Despite the growing female metal community within the metal subculture, many participants view metal as masculine, and some are fascinated by this masculinity.
- Participants referred mainstream society is perceiving woman in metal via one simple stereotype, whereas insider women are recognizing internal style variability and individual differences in woman metal style. Despite that, we can surely find insider sex symbols and trend-setting visual patterns.
- Metalheads are often attracted by the subculture because of the laid-back atmosphere and the fluidity of a place where everyone can be themselves.
- Female participants do not feel as much sexism inside the subculture as they might in other environments.

In general, female metalheads approach their appearance in terms of the opportunity to look confident, distinctive, and original. The image goes hand in hand with music, which is especially evident at metal events, concerts, and festivals. The masculine-driven element of the metal image is attractive to some female metalheads. However, many also find the opposite – a very feminine and delicate image – equally attractive.

Although society is tolerant towards female metalheads, it still perceives them as “outcasts”, especially in judgments of their appearance. However, this issue needs to be further addressed. Such marginalization is not fully apparent among metalheads, and participants were much more concerned with other topics.

Despite increasing academic attention to the topic of women in metal (see for example Heesch, Scott 2016 or Berkers, Shaap 2018), the study of women in metal culture awaits in-depth interdisciplinary work (Kosek 2021: 45). The exploration of women in Czech metal is only now beginning. Stašová's work has revealed how neglected and complex the topic is and has broached new questions with great research potential that will be further explored as part of her future research. In the end, the role of women in metal deserves a place within (not only Czech) academic research.

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Abstract

The term "female metalhead" may sound rather abstract. What does she look like and what does she think? Is there a typical female metalhead? This article summarizes qualitative research on woman's motivational resources for participation in the contemporary Czech metal subculture. It discusses factors related to why women listen to metal and the role of men in this process. The research is based on seventeen semi-structured interviews with women in Czech metal. Respective research questions focus on female metalheads' understanding of their position inside the subculture, their visual appearance, reasons for inclination to metal (e.g., partner's influence or an attraction to the metal community), the issue of sex symbols in the metal industry, and issues of elitism and exclusivity. Results show that women within the metal subculture strike a balance between masculinity and femininity and often judge their surroundings from the perspective on these two poles. However, the primary inspiration still drives from the male perspective with its typical visual and musical characteristics.

Mężczyzna za wszystkim? Motywacyjne źródła słuchania muzyki metalowej wśród kobiet

Termin „kobieta metalowiec”/„metalówa” (ang. „female metalhead”) może brzmieć jako dość abstrakcyjne pojęcie. Jak właściwie miałyby ona wyglądać i co myśleć? Czy istnieje jej „prototyp”? W artykule przedstawiono badania jakościowe źródeł motywacji kobiet do uczestnictwa we współczesnej czeskiej subkulturze metalowej. Omówiono poszczególne czynniki (dlaczego kobiety słuchają metalu) i rolę czynnika męskiego w tym procesie. Badania opierają się na siedemnastu półstrukturalnych wywiadach z uczestniczkami – członkiniami czeskiej subkultury metalowej. Poszczególne pytania badawcze koncentrują się na zrozumie-

niu pozycji kobiety jako fanki metalu wewnątrz subkultury, jej wyglądu zewnętrznego, przyczyn skłonności do metalu (np. wpływ partnera lub zainteresowanie społecznością metalową), kwestii symboliki płci w przemyśle muzyki metalowej czy rodzaju elitarności i ekskluzywności. Wyniki pokazały, że kobiety w obrębie subkultury metalowej balansują pomiędzy męskością a kobiecością i często oceniają swoje otoczenie w oparciu o te dwa bieguny. Jednak główna inspiracja wciąż płynie z męskiej perspektywy z jej typowymi cechami wizualnymi i muzycznymi.

Keywords: female metalhead, metal music, woman, subculture, femininity, masculinity

Słowa kluczowe: fanka metalu, muzyka metalowa, kobieta, subkultura, kobiecość, męskość

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Eso-kitsch in Czech Folk Metal: A Case Study of the Band Odraedir

*Let it decay and crumble into clay
human culture every act.
I am a barbarian from the deepest shadow,
who towers over everything.*

(R. E. Howard, taken from Ivan Adamovič:
Robert E. Howard – The Last Cimmerian)

Introduction – Theoretical Background and Objectives

Popular music researchers often discuss the commercial dimension of music, namely the ways that an artist is marketed within mainstream musical trends. This is, of course, true for metal music (e.g., Ježura 2012; H. 2012). Both cultural studies (Gunster 2004; Osborne, Laing 2021) and popular music studies (Frith 1996; Moore 2002) have established that cultural and artistic artifacts can be treated just like any other type of commodity intended for profit-making. However, a closer analysis reveals that the term “commercial” has another meaning in the context of popular music. In the traditional sense of the word, the work of amateur artists who earn their living in other ways and make music in their spare time can hardly be considered commercial music. Our hypothesis, which we elaborate on in this study, is based on the conviction that the use of the adjective “commercial” is, at least in some cases, an aesthetic judgment that we believe cannot be examined solely through a sociological, musicological or ethnographic perspective. We present arguments that show that aesthetic theories dealing with the work of art and aesthetic judgments can be profitably used for a deeper understanding of “Pagan aesthetics”. These arguments are based on Tomáš Kulka’s thinking about the concept of kitsch as strictly analytical term, lacking the dimension of values or judgments.

Our hypothesis is based on the following premises: 1) Listeners identify as commercial those works (albums or songs) that they consider to be less valuable. 2) In this case, they understand this quality (or value) in terms of aesthetics and artistic

value (despite other possible types of value: social, political, economic, religious, etc.), even if they do not articulate it. 3) The concept of profundity is an important component of aesthetic value (Kivy 2004). 4) In agreement with Tomáš Kulka's theory of kitsch, we are convinced that certain types of folk metal music can be thought of as esoteric¹ kitsch, which we call *eso-kitsch*. In the following pages we explain these premises in more detail and answer two questions: 1) Does the analytical-aesthetic concept of kitsch, which Kulka formulates especially for visual art, also work outside the area of visual culture, in our case within the subgenre of metal music? 2). Can we use Kulka's concept of kitsch as a more analytically precise tool within the theory of art criticism?

We examine our hypothesis on a subgenre of metal inspired by Paganism called folk metal which is part of broader stream of popular music inspired by Paganism. In the context of this study, we use "folk metal" to refer to a branch of death and heavy metal with Pagan lyrics, and we use "pagan metal" to refer to black metal with Pagan lyrics. Folk metal is a subgenre of metal music where the spiritual identity of the individual plays a very important role (Strmiska 2005: 39–58; Strmiska 2012: 349–398; Weston, Bennet: 2014; Vrzal 2017: 173–204; Weston 2018: 184–198). The study focuses on the work of the Czech band Odraedir from the period of their demo album *Pagan Forest* (2011).² The band represents a good example of folk metal, especially since Paganism figures prominently in their lyrics, music, and overall stylization. Moreover, they explicitly describe themselves as a folk metal band. In the past, music reviewers heavily criticized Odraedir, accusing them of blindly following the folk metal trend in the period of 2008–2012 and the band's lackluster songwriting skills and production quality (Ježura 2012). Our analysis is based on the study of Odraedir's music, lyrics, and aesthetics in light of interviews with the band and reviews of their music.

What is Kitsch?

Contrary to common understanding of kitsch as cheap, spectacular eye-rolling form of art aesthetic and philosophic thinking about kitsch is more complex and elaborated. Kitsch has been an important concept for aesthetics since the 1930s,

¹ The word esoteric is used in the popular meaning as a surrogate word for "religion", which accentuates its subjective element which is focused on inner experience. Our study is centered primary on current "popular" esoterism using also kitschy aesthetics which is part of the alternative spiritual/New Age milieu. We are not interested in esoterism in the sense of secret and intellectual orders. For more discussion on the history of the concept of esoterism see Hanegraaff (1996: 384–410). We were inspired to use the prefix *eso-* by the article "Eso-Bitches" on the server Prigl.cz, in which its authors comment on the rise of seekers of spiritual happiness at any price in the words of a song by the singer Hana Zagorová: "It is absolutely important that I be happy." Prigl.cz: Ezopiče, <http://prigl.cz/brnaci/ezopice/> (access: 30.10.2022).

² The band's profile is available on bandzone.cz with the following information about its lyrical orientation: "The band Odraedir was founded in 2009. The lyrics deal with nature, battles, Nordic deities and heroic deeds". Odraedir: About the band, <https://bandzone.cz/odraedir?at=info> (access: 17.05.2019).

when several studies on the harmfulness or immorality of kitsch were published (Greenberg 1986; Calinescu 1987; Broch 2002; Adorno, Horkheimer 2009). Kulka refuses to deal with the motivation of the author of the artifact, about which we know nothing (Broch 2002), and he also considers the contextual definition of kitsch to be insufficient (the properties of an image remain the same no matter where it hangs, he suggests, contrary to Calinescu 1987). Kulka's (1994) primary focus is on artifacts and their properties. He formulates three necessary conditions sufficient to identify kitsch (and thus define a class of works able to be categorized as kitsch).

According to Kulka, the first condition relates to the subject of the work: "Kitsch depicts themes that are generally considered beautiful or have a strong emotional charge" (Kulka 1994: 41). This typically includes nature, the elements, wild untamed animals, children, and so on. The second condition relates to the form and the way the work is executed: "The theme depicted by kitsch must be immediately identifiable" (Kulka 1994: 47). In other words, for kitsch, too much complexity, including complicated metaphors, is harmful. Finally, the third condition: "Kitsch does not substantively enrich the associations connected with the subject" (Kulka 1994: 52). In other words, kitsch has no profundity, no deeper meaning hidden behind what we see.

The fundamental problem with kitsch is its lack of complexity or depth, or better yet, profundity. A kitschy work is shallow; what you see, hear, or experience is all you get and there is nothing more hidden deep inside. In this context, Roger Scruton suggests the concept of "non-consumability" to describe a kitschy work of art: the artifact does not lose its attractiveness and ability to offer new impulses even through repeated consumption (Scruton 2000: 117–119). Kulka echoes this sentiment:

Kitsch is essentially parasitic... it does not create beauty as such. Its appeal is not due to its aesthetic qualities, but to its emotional or sentimental intrusiveness. 'True' artists today generally avoid emotionally charged subjects, and if they do choose them, they treat them in such a way that the effect of their work is not entirely dependent on them. A true artist is not interested in a guaranteed effect (Kulka 1994: 56–57).

What is Eso-kitsch?

Even though Kulka's analysis is intended as a critique of visual art, it remains a useful frame for exploring issues of authentic vs. commercial in other areas including literature, music, religious art, etc. We rethink Kulka's characterization of kitsch by replacing "beauty" with the aesthetics of popular esoterism which is observable in popular culture and its communication channels such as visual art, television, magazines, social networks, and so on.³ The prefix *eso* refers to the religious

³ For example, Odraedir does not have its own website and is only active on bandzone.cz, Youtube and Facebook.

function of a given work, which according to Mukařovský, is superior to work's other functions, even while the entire work is commodified.⁴

In our understanding, eso-kitsch refers to a class of works of popular culture whose primary aim is to evoke esoteric emotion by aesthetic means. In this context, one may recall Kivy's understanding of the depth of music as a treatise on serious moral and philosophical themes (Kivy 2004: 463–469); that is, questions related to traditional religious discourse on the meaning of existence, moral life, death, and the afterlife. The answers to these questions are presented in an instant, easy-to-read form that offers one and only one correct interpretation. Moreover, it is handled with a certain inadequacy in the relationship between the subject and the manner of execution. Eso-kitsch can therefore be identified in three components of the artifact:

1. Through themes: the work has a strong emotional-esoteric charge, possibly using established religious iconography, whether linguistic, visual, or acoustic.
2. The means of representation: the artist works with stereotypes to express a theme that the consumer can quickly identify and understand with a minimum of interpretative effort.
3. The subjective "profound" associations that the work evokes and presents to the audience as the only possible interpretation; as suggested by Umberto Eco, a pre-made feeling that is ready for immediate consumption (Eco 2006: 76).⁵

In a similar way, eso-kitsch can refer to flattening of religious life. This is similar to David Lyon's concept of Disneyfication, which is the metaphor for how Disney parks commodify Disney cartoons through thematization, the leveling of consumption, advertising images, and the work with feelings. Similarly, religion can be subject of commodification. (Lyon 2002) It can be argued that eso-kitsch, as a product of pop culture can be understood as part of an indistinguishable stream of entertainment. To say it another way, the profane and esoteric layers of culture coalesce in eso-kitsch as an indivisible unity.

Christopher Partridge observes the emergence of a new, non-Christian cultural milieu, which he calls the "occulture" that consists of a reservoir of thoughts, ideas, practices, and symbols that flow in and out of Western pop culture, transformed into references to other works in animated series or as music stripped of its original context (Partridge 2004: 62–86). Partridge understands popular music (including Pagan music) as one of the main vehicles for the resacralization of the modern world, helping to spread the ideas of alternative spiritualities on a global scale. This process perhaps also encourages deeper involvement in the activities of modern Pagan groups.

⁴ Jan Mukařovský argued that each artefact can have several different functions, but only one is dominant in each moment and context. The aesthetic function dominates in works of art, but not necessarily in works of popular culture (Mukařovský 1936).

⁵ Roger Scruton comments: "Music feigns emotion in a way it could never express on its own" (2000: 119).

Folk Metal and Eso-kitsch

According to Kulka, the first necessary condition of kitsch is the immediate identifiability of the subject matter. What, then, are the basic characteristics of folk metal that listeners immediately associate with this kind of music? We suggest two separate but related possibilities here: a) the origins of folk metal in metal discourse, and b) contemporary Paganism.

From the perspective of metal discourse, folk metal carries the tendency towards transgressivity, which we understand as a conscious transgression of the socially constructed boundaries of the society with which it functions in a symbiotic relationship (Foucault 2016: 7–34). For example, the transgressive nature of death metal is expressed in conscious denial of the established rules of metal music of the 1980s (the absence of guitar solos, the unmelodic nature of singing), while the lyrical component often flirts with shocking themes such as violence, death, and disgust (Kahn-Harris 2007: 5). Folk metal emerges also from death metal, placing more emphasis on the melody. It features folk instruments to a greater extent, such as wind (flutes, bagpipes) and string instruments (violins, cellos) that complement typical metal instrumentation: electric guitars, bass guitars, and drums. The vocals mix death metal growls with pure male or female vocals.

Popular Pagan folk metal bands can be divided into two groups – religious and dionysian. The first category understands music as a vehicle for expression of their Pagan faith and interest in pre-Christian European religion and mythologies. This leads to lyrics inspired by values important for modern Paganism (environmentalism, praise of nature, return to the values of Pagan ancestors, critique of consumerism, and institutionalized religions) or by pre-Christian European mythology. The most popular examples of bands in the first category are Eluveitie and Amon Amarth (Pospíšil 2018; Mařanová 2019). The second category of folk metal bands are searching inspiration in pre-Christian European religion and mythologies as well, but adds to this a dionysian dimension of enjoying oneself. Perhaps represented most quintessentially by the band Korpiklaani, this second category has roots in the “rock’n’roll lifestyle”, a concept characterized by lyrics and attitudes emerging from hard rock and heavy metal centering on partying, having a good time with music, and getting laid (Weinstein 2000: 35–38). In the context of folk metal, this translates to songs connected to ideas about folk feasts and village parties, since folklore is the most important source of information about Pagan religious practices of times past (Simpson 2012: 1137). Folk metal bands incorporate elements of folk music in their sound and lyrics. Moreover, folk metal conceptualizes the drinking of mead and other traditional alcoholic beverages as an appropriate folkloric socializing activity adapted to make sense in the context of rock and metal discourse.

Contemporary Pagan discourse about Paganism has greatly enriched the themes of folk metal, as many musicians (but not all) are interested not only in mythologies but also in modern Paganism (Mařaňová 2019; Pospíšil 2018, 2019). Graham Harvey, one of the best-known scholars in the field of Pagan studies, suggests that modern Paganism is a representation of an ecological, polytheistic, and sexually relaxed spirituality that sees itself as something innate, natural, and indigenous

in contrast to the consumerism of contemporary society (Harvey 2013). Nature is a key concept for the understanding of modern Paganism. Nature is seen as sacred, divine, alive, and beautiful (Sage 2009), and is often personalized as “Mother Earth” or “Gaia”. Contemporary Paganism is strongly connected to pre-Christian European religions, which have been attracting more and more adherents in modern society. According to Michael Strmiska, we can distinguish two big subgroups of contemporary Pagans (Strmiska 2005). The first is referred to as reconstructionists, and their goal is to revive and recreate Paganism as close as possible to pre-Christian Paganism as gleaned from primary sources. The second group is more eclectic in its approach, deliberately combining elements from different Pagan traditions and contemporary alternative spiritualities, occultism, and magic. In both cases, they share positive perceptions of pre-Christian European religion and value the spirits of their ancestors. Contemporary Pagans generally follow the Wheel of the Year celebrations which they have revitalized from folk tradition. Pagan festivals are often wild, with lots of dancing and singing. There is also a strong anti-modern ethos in many streams of contemporary Paganism (but not in all of them). Such is evident in the rejection of Christianity as an unnatural hegemonic religion, the rejection of consumerism, or the return to a self-subsistent, ancestral lifestyle. Importantly, in comparison with “modern” living, there is a strong element of transgression embedded in the lived social norms of contemporary Paganism. This transgressiveness fits well with the rebellious nature of metal.

In summary, we can collate the elements above into the following “Pagan” thematic cluster:⁶

- a) a strong emotional charge or sense of beauty associated with nature;
- b) the clash of the “natural” (in the sense of original, primordial) order with the chaos of modernity;
- c) personification of nature as a living Mother Earth;
- d) a return to the faith of pre-Christian ancestors;
- e) celebration of the Dionysian way of life;
- f) deliberate transgression of social norms.

Sound: How Does Paganism Sound?

Inspired by Robert Walser’s (1993) discursive analysis of the sound of metal, in the following section, we describe how Odraedir constructs “Pagan” sounds on their demo album *Pagan Forest* (2011). We further discuss how and to what extent the album can be described as eso-kitsch. We draw inspiration from Mark Mynett’s study on how the authenticity of the sound of metal is constructed (Mynett 2020). Mynett suggests four necessary criteria of metal: clarity (intelligible production), heaviness (sounds evoking power, energy, intensity, aggression), sonic weight (use of heavy high or low-frequency sound), and performance precision (playing in rhythm, instrumental virtuosity). In case of folk metal we can add fifth criteria – evocation

⁶ See Berys Gaut’s cluster concept regarding the characteristics of a work of art. Elements within a cluster can be present in different combinations, in different numbers, and the list is of course not exhaustive (Gaut 2010: 377–402).

of “Pagan” feeling (use of folk instrument, inspiration in the music structure of folk music).

Pagan Forest (2011) features five songs (“Pagan Forest”, “Asterix and Obelix in Pagan Forest”, “The Dawn of Odin’s Horde in Pagan Forest”, “Fine Odraedir Mead” and “Occultism and Mystic Practices in Pagan Forest”), ranging in duration from four to almost six minutes. The instrumentation consists on guitars (solo and rhythm), singing, bass guitar and drums. Following Mynett (2020) criteria of authentic metal sound, Odraedir struggles with clarity on their self-produced demo. Most notably, growl vocals of singer Dub sound especially under-produced and together with his strong Czech accent it is very difficult to understand his lyrics (Odraedirofficial 2011). The heaviness of music is constructed by use of distorted guitars (and bass guitar) and in singer’s aggressive death metal-styled vocals, which are screamed. Sonic weight of Odraedir’s sound is created by frequent use of rhythm guitar riffs in every songs and low sound frequency sound of bass guitar, as can be seen in song “Pagan Forest” (Odraedirofficial 2011). Performance precision seems to be partially a problem for Odraedir on their demo. Several playing out of tune have been reported in music reviews (Ježura 2011). Paganism is embodied in the sound of *Pagan Forest* (2011) only in few places. Odraedir is following more the example of bands like Ensiferium, which are guitar-based and their Pagan layer is expressed in their lyrics. Nevertheless, folk instruments appear in the song “Fine Odraedir Mead”, where is the metal sound enriched by flute and drumble (jaw harp). The sound of folk metal is also associated with frequent use of distinctive melodies, what is also the case of Odraedir in songs line “Pagan Forest” or “The Dawn of Odin’s Horde in Pagan Forest”.

In summary, *Pagan Forest* features a sample of easily recognizable, folk-metal songs that are sonically anchored in the folk metal aesthetic, though with only minimal use of traditional folk instruments. In this way, Paganism is not immediately apparent in the sound of the music. Nevertheless, the frequent use of melodies inspired in tradition of folk music melodies, growling vocal style, and heavy guitar sound suggest a folk metal aesthetic. Reviews of the album were not kind, as can be seen in the following example:

The core of an Odraedir’s composition lies in the endless repetition of *kitschy* [authors’ emphasis] passages, which, when the composer gets tired of it are replaced by similarly awful ones. True, the utterly disparate mix of wannabe catchy song is enriched by a riff here and there, but in vast majority of the cases, it’s either similarly bad or stolen – whether consciously or unconsciously. There are no more than three, at most four at least somewhat interesting motifs to be found in the entire demo and even these are immediately stomped into the ground by misery. Besides, I have the impression that I registered several playing mistakes and at least once perhaps playing out of rhythm. (Ježura 2011).

Critical reviews claim the band’s biggest problem at this early stage was their failure to master the basic elements of folk metal, especially precision and clarity. They fail technically (rhythmic errors, players’ clumsiness), in amateurish vocal delivery (intonation issues and unintelligible vocals), and compositionally

(unoriginality, repetitiveness). The critic quoted above quickly identifies Odraedir's music as "kitschy" from aesthetics perspective, in reference to the music's uninventiveness and uncertain execution.

We suggest the sound of Odraedir's music can be identified as eso-kitschy as it was unoriginal and rather mimicked the bands that were Odraedir's primary inspirations. With little interpretive effort, listeners can easily identify some common tropes in the sound of folk metal music.

Lyrics: on the Waves of Pagan Metaphors

The most common themes associated with Paganism are usually found in the textual component of folk metal (Weinstein 2014: 65–67). Czech Pagan oriented metal bands approach lyrics in two ways: a) use of the native language, especially for Slavic themes (Obereg, Silent Stream of Godless Elegy); b) use of English, either to reach a broader audience (Cruadalach) or for greater authenticity related to the themes of the lyrics (the now-defunct Tears of Styrbjörn). Odraedir fits into the second category since their music has always featured English song texts.

The lyrics of folk metal bands often have an esoteric dimension. How does the band Odraedir describe their approach to lyrics? In a discussion forum on Bandzone.cz, Odraedir explained their way of understanding Paganism:

Walmen 22.4.2014 at 22:53

I guess we have a slightly different take on Pagan music. I don't think it's necessary to growl in the songs.

Odraedir 23.4.2014 at 14:57

Hi, well I'm not surprised that there are different people with different opinions. I looked at your profile and I understand your different view. Your music sounds to me like, shall we say, meditative. We are individuals who prefer music that is brisk, energetic, with many musical lines, where each one awakens the senses. Thematically, we focus on the Nordic themes of the so-called Viking period. If I had to give a demonstrative example, I would not be able to describe the plot of a battle or the saga of Beowulf accompanied by your calm tones... On the contrary, you can use calm music to evoke harmony with nature, in short, everyone wants their own thing.⁷

Based on the lyrical component only, Odraedir's style points to a folk metal aesthetic with a strong emphasis on Viking tales and mythology, following the example of the band Amon Amarth (Weinstein 2014: 61–64). In the case of Odraedir's *Pagan Forest*, the Viking theme is most apparent in the song "The Dawn of Odin's Horde in Pagan Forest", especially in the chorus that is full of references to Norse mythology. The song tells a story about a fight between Vikings and their foes in the forest. The Pagan faith of the Vikings gives them strength to fight since there is the promise of eternal life in Valhalla for the bravest warriors. The Romantic concept of the Vikings as true masculine warriors who fight without fear is one of the most common Pagan tropes in folk metal (Heesch 2010).

⁷ Odraedir, <https://bandzone.cz/odraedir?at=postList> (access: 26.11.2018).

The Dawn of Odin's Horde in Pagan Forest

As a thunder from clear sky,
 Came the war and some must die.
 Let's face the fate with haste,
 let's fury of the battle tase.

It is kill or to be killed.
 Take your axe and hallow the field.
 Bury it through, under the shield.
 Today more blood will be spilled.

Break through... Deep into enemy rows.
 Break through... Let them feel your steel.
 Break through... I hear the crack of bones.
 That makes the foolish bastard kneel.

Fallen... Now death in his eyes.
 Fallen... He squeaks like a goat.
 Fallen... How slowly he dies.
 So, finish him and go.

Endure... Another featherbrain's on.
 Endure... Odin blessed to kill.
 Endure... Soon the battle is won.
 Grab the axe and do at your will.

Odin chose which one win
 Chosen fallen will follow him.
 Regale in Valhalla is inevitable-
 Sæhrímn's bacon and Heiðrún's mead.

When the time of war arrive,
 The war between gods,
 Warriors set off as one,
 To fight for others that fall.

540 gates,
 Each unleash 800 men.
 There are enough chairs
 For those that have fallen.

As a thunder from clear sky,
 Came the war and some died.
 We faced the fate with haste,
 Tried the fury of the battle tase.

It was kill or to be killed.
 Pagan forest was battlefield.
 Let' s bury our friends, with sword and shield.
 Like brave warriors, who's live is sealed.⁸

⁸ Odraedir, *Pagan Forest*, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Odraedir/Pagan_Forest/341938 (access: 26.11.2018).

This example provides a good opportunity for discussing how the concept of eso-kitsch can provide a better understanding of artistic vs. commercial art. Eso-kitsch music does not add any new substantive association to the artifacts. Also simplifies the reading the lyrics to one preferred a decontextualized meaning. This can be manifested in the way musicians interpret motifs drawn from mythology. As in the case of Odraedir's *Pagan Forest*, there is a simplification, a flattening of interpretation, of the foundational themes of Pagan myths. In "The Dawn of Odin's Horde," for example, Vikings are reduced to brute warriors who "kill or are to be killed" and wait to ascend to Valhalla to sit with Odin at the same table.

Another example is "Fine Odraedir Mead", in which Odraedir explores how the mythological Odin's poetic talents are directly linked to mead and how the gift of mead to humanity, therefore, carries with it the gift of poetry. Mead is thus seen in mythology as a symbol of inspiration and creativity (Kozák 2017: 75–110). However, the complex mythological story of Odin's sacrifice is, in the song, reduced to a story about how it is right and proper to have a good time with alcohol. Mead relieves anxiety and fear. The ritualistic dimension of drinking alcohol disappears, and what remains is an appeal to enjoy the pleasures of life while having fun with like-minded individuals, which in the context of the song is emphasized in the chorus by the singer's repeated cries the word "Mead!"

Fine Odraedir Mead

He was hanging on a tree.
Wind was blowing, mastered branches
and dark clouds on the sky.
Brigit flashes raging.

For nine days and long nights,
he was speared and bleeding.
Suffering for better future.
His own victim, Oden.

For those days had no food
no beverage tested his lips.
Just staring into darkness
foggy depths down below.

Sacrifice fulfilled purpose,
when wise Odin behold ruins,
with effort released them.
And he was freed for way back home.

It is said that you have godlike powers
of rhyme and singing if drinking from Odraedir.
The more you drink the better you sing
So taste, this fine mead untakes your fear.

Odraedir, the mead vessel.
Kvasir's blood with honey.
Guarded by Bolthorn's son.
Two dwarfs mixed the potion.

Once Oden found the shelter.
As in haste drunk all mead,
a few drops fell to Midgard.
Poetism unleashed...

It is said that you have godlike powers
of rhyme and singing if drinking from Odraedir.
The more you drink the better you sing
So taste, this fine mead untakes your fear.⁹

We suggest that all three aspects of eso-kitch are apparent in Odraedir's lyrics. First, lyrical themes are easily recognizable for fans of folk metal and deal with genre clichés such as masculine Viking warriors. Second, they feature a strong emotional dimension complete with bloodthirsty Vikings as an example of how Odraedir works with established romantic notions of Pagan culture and mythology. Third, the lyrics' esoteric dimension is simplified and decontextualized inside metal discourse, where for example an old mythological story of the origin of mead serves as an encouragement to drink alcohol at metal concerts.

Image: We Look Like Folk Metalheads, We Are Folk Metalheads

Pagan aesthetics can also be observed in the visual style of Odraedir. The image of the band combines the classic metal "masculine" look (long hair, beards, leather accessories, black T-shirts) with "natural" Pagan elements (white blouses with embroidery made of linen or cotton, clothing made of fur, folkloric jewelry, and other ornaments) (Weinstein 2014: 68). An appropriate "Pagan" image is very important. Why? It increases a band's credibility with fans who actively profess Paganism, while for non-Pagan fans it makes it easier to categorize the group's visual and sonic aesthetic.

The promotional photograph of Odraedir included with *Pagan Forest* features a combination of referents to the aesthetics of folk metal discourses. The musicians are depicted with long flowing hair and wearing clothes of natural earthy colors. Here again, the motif of the forest appears, referring to the connection with nature and the values it represents. The musicians look like typical folk metal musicians with all clichés and stereotypes included.

Another important part of the visual identity of metal bands is the album's covers. How does the cover of *Pagan Forest* (Image no. 2) emphasize Pagan motives? On the cover we find a photograph of a mist-shrouded forest, evoking a sense of wilderness far from civilization, in which the printmaker has inserted the figure of a faceless grey pilgrim accompanied by a horse. Both these motifs – the forest and the pilgrim – are very common within folk metal discourse. In this context, the forest can be interpreted as an ideal place for man to live in harmony with nature, or even with a personalized goddess, Mother Earth (Sage 2009). The figure of the pilgrim refers to archetypes of the sorcerer, the druid, and the tarot card of the Hermit who is depicted in a dark cloak with a lantern.

⁹ Odraedir, *Pagan Forest*, https://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Odraedir/Pagan_Forest/341938 (access: 12.6.2019).



Image no. 1. CD Booklet by Odraedir: *Pagan Forest*. Prague – Beroun – Hořice: self-release, 2011.



Image no. 2. Cover of the album *Pagan Forrest* by Odraedir. Praha - Beroun – Hořice: self-release, 2011.

Images of forests are especially common on the covers of folk and black metal¹⁰ albums. The forest is seen as the epitome of nature, a place connected to pre-Christian Paganism and possessing the quality of wild beauty (Sage 2009). It is also a symbol of an idyllic peaceful place in contrast with the “loud” and “noisy” modern

¹⁰ Black metal is characterized by an increased level of misanthropy, individualism, and separation from the mainstream, all of which is embodied by the forest (Kahn-Harris 2007: 29–30).

city. In other words, the use of the forest motif on the cover of *Pagan Forest* represents Odraedir's explicit affiliation with the folk metal scene. It is also important that the word "forest" not only appears in the title of the album but also in the title and subject matter of four songs on the album.¹¹

The band's logo is also important for our analysis of the album cover. The logo is located directly above the figure of the pilgrim, and its stylization refers to the war theme of Odraedir's songs (two swords and two halberds). The weapons are intertwined with a floral element, which reminds us of folk metal's fascination with wild and untamed nature. Together these elements frame the band's name, which is rendered in an archaic-looking font suggesting a stylistic connection to ancient times. The sacralization of the ancient is considered one of the most widespread Pagan reconstruction strategies (Simpson 2012: 11–37). The gothic typeface is widespread in metal iconography (Rossolatos 2015: 633–655), including in the visual elements associated with the black metal band Bathory, often cited as one of the first Pagan metal bands who popularized Viking themes. Odraedir's chosen typographic treatment thus emphasizes the synthesis of modern Pagan and general metal aesthetics.

To summarize, we can observe the first two aspects of eso-kitch: the work centers on appropriate themes and Odraedir represents these themes using easily understandable motifs. Examples include the forest as a representation of untamed nature on the cover of the album and Odraedir's warrior logo as a representation of the Viking raiders cliché.

Discussion: Religious Versus Cultural Paganism

We suggest that eso-kitch is a useful concept for better understanding the construction of the difference in pagan and folk metal aesthetics. This is indeed a tricky task since it is difficult to know when a band is using folk metal tropes in meaningful ways and when a band uncritically evokes folk metal tropes because it is just the thing they do. We believe that the analytical concept of eso-kitch can at least partially help us identify folk metal music that relies on thematic clichés, strong emotional metaphors, and a flattened esoteric dimension.

We argue that eso-kitch in folk metal is part of the wider phenomena of the intertwining of religious and cultural notions within contemporary Paganism. Religious Paganism is essentially synonymous with contemporary Paganism, one stream within a set of new religious movements that focus on the reconstruction of ancient pre-Christian Pagan beliefs. On the other hand, cultural Paganism can be defined as a contemporary Pagan subculture made apparent in dress, music, movies, television, literature, and other media with a strong emphasis on deep ecology, love of nature, pre-Christian European mythologies, and European folk culture. What is important is that cultural Paganism does not require adherents to be Pagan in a religious sense. On top of that, cultural Paganism is a much older phenomenon than the current Pagan religious revival. Perhaps the most illustrious example is the growing interest in Celtic, Old Norse, and Slavic mythology that has been gaining popularity

¹¹ Another possible explanation is that the heavy use of the word "forest" is Odraedir's inside joke on overuse of nature motives in folk metal.

since the second half of the 18th century among British, German, and Slavic intellectuals and artists (Simpson 2000: 49–67; Horák 2018: 90–117). Through this interest, various elements from Paganism “penetrated” popular culture, namely literature (e.g., *Lord of The Rings*), movies (e.g., *Wicker Man*), comic books (e.g., Marvel’s *Thor*), and music (e.g., *Manowar*). In recent decades, music has become a popular medium for cultural Paganism. As Strmiska notes, a modern non-religious Pagan musical subculture coexists alongside modern ritual Pagan music made by contemporary Pagans in the Baltic region (Strmiska 2012). To put it simply, to enjoy the music of *Amon Amarth* you don’t have to be a member of the *Asatru* kindred. Similarly, you can be very deeply invested in contemporary Paganism and still enjoy *Odraedir’s Pagan Forest*.

We suggest that it is modern cultural Pagans together with the non-Pagan consumers of popular music inspired by Paganism in general who are the main composers and consumers (but not exclusively) of eso-kitch folk metal, in which Pagan motives are decontextualized, essentially reduced to ornamentation (Partridge 2004: 62–84). We argue in our analysis that *Pagan Forest* is an expression of cultural Paganism that betrays a certain (eso)kitschiness in the ways that *Odraedir* deploys references to Pagan iconography and myths in their sound, lyrics, and aesthetics. To be clear, the truth of Pagan music or religiosity is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, our research aims to suggest ways to deal with identifying and classifying different qualities of folk metal production.

The fundamental objection that our study must contend with is the validity of the concept of eso-kitch. Is it yet another construct in the tradition of defining “true” art against “pseudo-art”? Is it just another normative idea about the form and character of the artwork? We believe not. We present the category of eso-kitsch as an aesthetic term, one that makes no claims to a work’s value. From our perspective eso-kitsch denotes a specific type of artifact that lacks the quality of profundity, a specific context in which the artifact is located, and a specific way this artifact is used by its consumers.

A second objection may be directed towards the role of the fan of folk metal music and their perception (or use) of these works. While we have included some perspectives from fans and critics in our study, our focus was on analyzing *Pagan Forest* from the perspective of eso-kitsch. To investigate fans’ perceptions of *Odraedir’s* music would require a more sociological and ethnographic approach. Such is the work for future research.

The third objection, concerns with the choice of the material for our analysis namely *Odraedir*, a group that is neither well-known nor the most characteristic example of folk metal. We chose *Odraedir* because the band is, in a word, typical in terms of music, lyrics, and visuality. The focus on the early phase of their work is justified precisely because one possible way of looking at the esoteric is to understand it as a natural developmental stage of spiritual life within the field of Pagan oriented folk metal.

The fourth objection is that we have misread the band’s approach. *Odraedir* may be approaching Pagan clichés with irony, as is suggested in the title of their song “*Asterix and Obelix in Pagan Forest*” and, later in their career, in the music

video for “Back to the Void” from 2021. We believe that humor could have important in the music of Odraedir, but it is not tantamount to mockery or parody of metal in the style of Steel Panther, Spinal Tap, or Gloryhammer. Interviews with band members indeed suggest they are sincere, citing their main influences as Viking culture and love for heavy, melodic metal (Savapip 2017; 2020).

The fifth objection may be that we use Kulka’s theory of kitsch without critical reflection. We believe this Kulka work best describes kitsch as an aesthetic category (regardless of its sociological or ethical implications). As a philosopher connected with analytic philosophy and the aesthetic tradition, Kulka offers an analytical description of kitsch that intentionally ignores the question of value and value judgments. Our study then evaluates if Kulka’s concept, which is based on analysis of visual artifacts, can be used for analysis of music, especially folk metal music.

Conclusion

Our key argument is that the label “commercial”, which appears in listener evaluations of folk metal bands, can also be an aesthetic judgment (not an evaluative one), pointing to the absence of certain qualities; in our opinion, it is about depth. Eso-kitsch can be understood as an analytical tool for definition of a group of artistic artifacts with certain properties.

In the case of Odraedir’s *Pagan Forest*, we meet with a musical form that lacks originality, has poor production values, and displays lackluster performance skills. *Pagan Forest* also heavily relies on clichés connected with folk metal: a heavy guitar sound, growling vocals, lyrical overuse of the word “forest”, and a Viking theme in the band’s album cover and persona.

Eso-kitsch empties the esoteric aspects of an artifact and works with a standardized and simplified form of it. It is also characterized by over-reduction, and is often indulgent and entertaining, without magical or religious aspects. The Czech philosopher Petr Rezek adds: “The nature of kitsch is nonpragmatic. Every nonpragmatic attitude is not kitsch, but every kitsch attitude is nonpragmatic. By that I mean kitsch does not turn towards the thing to which the thought or feeling refers, towards which it is directed, but away from it” (Rezek 1990: 1). Rezek suggests that his domain is primarily emotions. Yet, in the case of the eso-kitsch, his domain is not religiosity nor the search for deep esoteric knowledge, but the emotion of being esoteric.

In interpreting kitsch, there is another important aspect that Kulka mentions: according to him, kitsch can also be understood as a natural developmental stage (Pachmanová, Dvořák 2000: 23–29). It can therefore be considered within pop culture as a kind of early form of esoterism, as in the sense of folk New Age religiosity. It is a kind of stage in an evolutionary process in which one reaches through esoterism to empty spiritual phrases in order to give them new content (Pachmanová, Kulka 2000). In this way, an interesting area for further research concerns the ways that music moves from kitschy cultural Paganism to “profound” Pagan religiosity.

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Discography

Odraedir, *Pagan Forest*, Independent 2011.

Odraedir, *Troll's Cave*, Independent 2013.

Odraedir, *Legends of the Dark Times*, Independent 2017.

Odraedir, *Treason*, Independent 2021.

Abstract

Some criticism Pagan oriented folk metal music as “commercial”, i.e., created primarily for profit. We are convinced that this distinction is worthless, unmeasurable, and unverifiable from an analytical point of view. However, within a given musical genre, music fans and critics still distinguish very different works in terms of quality. Therefore, we propose to replace the vague term “commercial production” with the term esoteric kitsch (eso-kitsch), which is based on Tomáš Kulka’s analytical-aesthetic theory of kitsch. Using examples from the Czechoslovak folk metal scene, we show that eso-kitsch is a suitable tool for identifying musical creations that are characterized not by economic, creative, or spiritual value but primarily by aesthetic value.

Ezo-kicz w czeskim folk metalu: studium przypadku zespołu Odraedir

Streszczenie

W niektórych mediach można spotkać się z zarzutem, że pogańska muzyka folk-metalowa jest „komercyjna”, tworzona przede wszystkim dla zysku. Jesteśmy przekonani, że takie rozróżnienie jest bezwartościowe, niemierzalne, nieweryfikowalne z analitycznego punktu widzenia. Jednak w obrębie danego gatunku muzycznego fani i krytycy muzycy nadal różnią się bardzo odmiennie pod względem jakości utworów. Dlatego proponujemy zastąpienie niejasnego terminu „produkcja komercyjna” terminem kicz ezoteryczny („ezo-kicz”), który opiera się na analityczno-estetycznej teorii kiczu Tomáša Kulki. Na przykładach z czeskoślowskiej sceny folk-metalowej postaramy się pokazać, że ezo-kicz jest odpowiednim narzędziem do identyfikacji utworów muzycznych, które charakteryzują się nie tyle wartością ekonomiczną, twórczą czy duchową, ile przede wszystkim estetyczną.

Keywords: contemporary Paganism, metal studies, folk metal, kitsch, Czech Pagan music scene

Słowa kluczowe: współczesne pogaństwo, studia nad metalem, folk metal, kicz, czeska scena muzyki pogańskiej

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REVIEWS, REPORTS, INTERVIEWS

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Report on the *Metal and Religion*: an International Academic Conference on the Religious Aspects of Metal, 7–8 September 2022, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

For the first time in its history, Czech Metal Studies (CMS) succeeded in organizing a global international conference. The event was held in hybrid form in Brno between 7–8 September 2022 at the Department for the Study of Religions (Masaryk University) and indisputably confirmed the position of Metal Studies in Central/Eastern Europe (MSCEE) – the official network of researchers established by CMS members last year – in the global field of international metal music studies. Following last year's MSCEE online workshop, Miroslav Vrzal, the head of CMS, managed to organize an event that took local metal studies to yet another level in terms of international networking and through the wide range of research perspectives applied on metal by respective speakers. To discuss the topic of *Metal and Religion*, conference participants came personally or connected online from various parts of the world (including North and South America, and different parts of Europe) and presented multiple ways through which religion and spirituality interact with metal music and culture.

Day I. Black Metal, Spirituality, and the Problem of “Religion” (7th September)

Morning panel

The conference was officially opened in the early morning by Miroslav Vrzal. He warmly welcomed all participants and briefly introduced the establishment of CMS with the recent development of the international MSCEE format, that CMS members initiated to join the forces with Polish and Magyar colleagues. By explaining that religion and spirituality are central to metal, Vrzal opened the floor for the first key speaker – Marcus Moberg, Professor in the Study of Religions at Åbo Akademi University in Turku, whose metal-related work inspired many of the CMS members.

Moberg began his talk *Metal and “Religion”: A View from the Discipline of the Study of Religion* by explaining that, more than being a metal music scholar, he is

sociologically interested in interactions between religion, mass media, and popular music (where metal belongs due to its large music industry). By understanding religion as a discursive formation, Moberg thinks we should pay much more attention to the only empirical data we have access to – texts, performances, and other ways by which religion in metal is communicated. In this sense, metal possesses a vast religious repertoire, mainly related to “darker” religious topics like biblical apocalypticism, left-hand path, esotericism, Satanism, Paganism, etc. Moberg argued that we should study religion and metal in connection to larger phenomena such as oculture and (dark) alternative spirituality and avoid detailed case studies and essentializing religion. By saying that, Moberg stressed the importance of critical awareness about problems related to the “religion” category and welcomed non-western and non-Christian contexts to the debate.

After a short coffee break, Reinhard Kopanski from the University of Siegen introduced us to his online talk *“Psalm of an Unborn” – Conservatism in Christian Metal*, to his ongoing project “Music, Religion and Politics”, focusing on how conservative Evangelical Christian values are negotiated via metal music. Using discursive analysis and close reading of available sources, he so far analyzed 60 bands that exist in somewhat dual tension: they are rejected by the metal scene for being openly Christian and by the evangelical community for playing the “devil’s music”. Christian metal bands try to overcome this tension by following metal conventions while embracing religious conservatism via their lyrics, often with an evangelizing “seed-planting” strategy. Since Kopanski’s project is only beginning, we look forward to further developments.

In the following talk, conference organizer Miroslav Vrzal switched from Christianity to *Czech black metal and Satanism in the late 80s and early 90s: Törr, Root and Master’s Hammer*, three iconic Czech black metal bands. In his analysis, Vrzal showed that western discourses on extreme metal and Satanism influenced Czech metal underground in the last two decades of the former century. However, even though the inspiration from the first wave of black metal (with a related interest in Satanism and Paganism) was strong, each band then developed their own ways of understanding Satanism. This was probably most visibly promoted by Root, whose frontman Jiří Big Boss Valter established The Czechoslovakian Church of Satan in 1991.

Anna-Katharina Hoepflinger from Ludwig Maximilian University closed the panel by dealing with the question *“Do They Really Mean It?”: Five Functions of the Reception of Religious Symbols in Black Metal*. Based on her ethnographic research inside the Swiss Black metal scene (where she even participated as a band player), Hoepflinger observed that such normative divisions between “seriousness” and “mere playfulness” are too rigid to be applied to black metal. Religion in black metal is not based on scriptures and dogmas but rather on performance, interaction with the audience, and – together with the re-usage of symbols from various religions – is constructing something new and serious: a “black metal reality”. After her talk, all participants went together for lunch, engaging in lively discussion.

Afternoon panel and social gathering

In the online contribution *Folk-metal Band "Shadow of the Sun": Music, Outlook, Action*, Oksana Smozhevska from the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv focused on how the subcultural discourse of the Ukrainian Neo-pagan community Native Faith is communicated via the production and artistic expression of Shadow of the Sun's music and related activities. The band members believe that language is a central component of Ukrainian identity and actively engage in the ongoing war with Russia by educating the army, organizing concerts for soldiers, and even through the active personal defense of the country. Unfortunately, the quality of her talk was affected by technical problems with broadcasting and sound.

The following contribution, *Hellenic Polytheism & Heavy Metal: From Classical Reception to Contemporary Ritual*, was given in a hybrid form by Jeremy Swist from Brandeis University and Aneurin Pendragon from the University of St Andrews (online). In the first part of their talk, Swist introduced how widely various metal bands use the Hellenic pantheon, ranging from lyrics and artworks to ideas. Metal bands often use polytheism to criticize Christianity or syncretize Hellenic mythological topics with motives from other religions (e.g., the figure of Prometheus with Satan). In the second part, Pendragon (being Hellenic polytheists themselves) joined us online. They introduced the current Hellenic revivalism and argued that metal – with its performative ritualistic aspect – can be seen as a religion. They further tracked the similarities between contemporary Hellenic worship and particular elements of lived metal culture.

Shamma Boyarin from the University of Victoria, in his contribution *Wordless Ecstasy: The Jewish Drone/Doom Mysticism of Dveyekus*, explored how Jewish (music) mysticism is expressed in the work of the doom/drone band Dveyekus. The band's name is derived from a Yiddish word that, in a mystical context, refers to a kind of religious ecstasy achievable through music. The similar idea is, according to Boyarin, embedded in Dveyekus' album *Pillar Without Mercy*. The band combines the traditional Hassidic wordless tunes *niggunim* with the mystical potential of drone metal, which he further explored through the example of musical, textual, and visual elements from their album.

After the coffee break, participants gathered for the last two papers of the afternoon panel. Both contributions dealt with the problematics of black metal, following the stable interest of researchers in studying this extreme metal subgenre. The first (online) paper, *"Burning the bridges": the pursuit of authenticity in Norwegian black metal*, was delivered by Stoyan Sgourev, visiting scholar at the New Bulgarian University and Ca' Foscari University in Venice. He explored the social dynamics of polarization and radicalization in the context of the second wave of black metal. Members of the early 1990s Norwegian scene become (in)famous for their criminal activities like church burnings or murder. Therefore, in his talk, Sgourev explored what motivated them to challenge social norms and "burn the bridges" to social acceptance and why it helped them achieve wider recognition than following the socially acceptable compromise.

Next, a member of CMS/MSCEE Matouš Mokry (Masaryk University), with a long-standing interest in connections between black metal and (dark) esoteric spirituality, presented the paper *Unholy Alliances: Preliminary Remarks on the Esoteric Interaction with Black Metal*. Using the example of three case studies from the cultural context of radical right-wing esotericism, he tried to demonstrate “evidence for ongoing esoteric reflection of black metal by non-metal occult actors and their active involvement with the scene for the sake of their esoteric interests”. Among these authors, he mentioned Slovak Sebastián Jahič describing black metal as the clearest embodiment of negative transcendence. Mokry’s enriching insight was nicely complemented by diagrams, punchy quotes, and graphic excerpts from old-school metal zines.

The conference program then continued by meeting an online host Bartłomiej Krysiuk, a musician from the Polish black metal band Batushka. Bartłomiej was interviewed by a member of MSCEE, Karolina Karbownik, discussing the band’s return on stage in the post-Covid period, their relationship to Orthodox religion, and Batushka’s specific stage performances. Funny moments appeared when Krysiuk called himself a “boomer” or during a misunderstanding of the word “pop”, which he did not mean as a music genre but as the Polish equivalent of the word “priest”. Krysiuk also mentioned that black metal in its current form often lacks the aspects he expects to be there, and that is why he prefers 90s music – Darkthrone, early Mayhem or Venom.

The first day ended with a short presentation of the *Ossarium project* by Yves Müller and Anna-Katharina Hoepflinger, mapping ossuaries across Europe with Müller’s compelling photographs capturing the bones and the dead. Many participants then gathered to enjoy casual fun and a concert by the young local band *Slaves of Passion* during the afterparty at the M13 Rock Hell club.

Day II. Controversies and Bones (8th September)

Morning panel

Niall Scott, a Reader in Philosophy and Popular Culture at the University of Central Lancashire and the principal editor of *Metal Music Studies* journal, opened the second conference day with his keynote lecture, *Apophatic transgressions and hymns to the void*. His talk was structured as a discussion partly moderated by CMS/MSCEE member Ondřej Daniel. In general, Scott addressed the problematic relationship between Christianity and metal. Christianity has negative publicity inside metal culture, ranging from existential hatred to the perception of Christian metal bands as somewhat peculiar. However, Scott argues that extreme metal owes a lot to Christian theology because (especially the negative theology) significantly influences its lyric content and the aesthetic of sound. Thus, the extreme metal tendency to make apophatic claims leads to a transgression of both metal and religion, where the negations of the divine can be either negative or positive.

Dawid Kaszuba, from Jagiellonian University, opened the morning panel by examining the *Embodied voice of the oppressed. The feminist exorcisms of Lingua Ignota*. Kaszuba explained that the feminist musician, who expands the boundaries of noise

and metal, describes her work as self-exorcism stemming from her experience with domestic violence and uses Christian and Biblical symbolism to create feminist “survivor’s anthems”. By examining her inspiration, ranging from the Christian mystic Hildegard of Bingen to “feminist” serial killer Aileen Wuornos, Kaszuba analyzed the feminist use of Christian rhetoric in Lingua Ignota’s lyrics and the use of her voice and body as a tool for the articulation of traumatic experience during transgressive performances “designed as explicit, cathartic rituals”.

The next speaker, Márk Nemes from the University of Szeged, presented a paper on *“The ones who called Satan” – an examination of a written manifestation of Christian moral panics regarding heavy metal*. He analyzed techniques used by Christian authors to spread moral panic around the metal subculture. On the primary example of Corradi Balducci’s book *Satanism and Rock* (published in 1991), he explained how informative books and pamphlets for “potentially concerned families of young metalheads” helped create the notion of amoral and dangerous metal, sometimes valid to this day. It was amusing to see how poorly understood or intentionally twisted metal terms and band names were presented as evidence of metal musicians’ hidden satanic or amoral intentions.

Finally, Jakub Jahl from Charles University closed the morning panel with a paper on *Marilyn Manson and the Antichrist of Modern Age*. He examined the concept of “antichrist” in the work of Marilyn Manson, its gradual changes during the past few decades, and how changes in the conceptualization of the antichrist reflected the shifts in a postmodern global society. According to Jahl, Marilyn Manson’s antichrist figure was influenced by the media picture he created about himself, which gradually pushed him to commit further extremities. Since Jahl’s presentation was full of appealing visuals containing explicit content, some online participants felt offended that he did not warn them about the explicit pictures’ presentation. It is surely a good incentive for conference organizers to prevent similar tensions next year.

Afternoon panel and closing MSCEE roundtable

Following the Ossarium project presentation from the previous day, participants, after lunch, visited the Brno ossuary in the city center under Saint Jacob’s Church. The afternoon panel was then opened by Marek Vodička from Charles University, bringing out the philosophical-aesthetic topic *Metal and the Sublime*, where the sublime is “an aesthetic experience described most famously by Burke and Kant as a mixture of awe, fear, and beauty”. According to Vodička, metal is not beautiful – frequently, it can even be ugly, but still, it somehow brings aesthetic pleasure. To find out how, Vodička identified the main philosophical concepts of sublime and then analyzed their presence in (mostly progressive and technical) metal – from romanticism-inspired album covers to musical experience of “heavenness”, that, according to him, might resemble or even imitate religious experience.

The standpoint of philosophy was once again discussed by the next speaker and a member of CMS/MSCEE, Vojtěch Volák (also from Charles University). In his talk *Immanent Lobster God: Creating the New within Metal Subgenres*, Volák used the concept of the Lobster God, which through a process of double articulation, layers

the intensities of individual subgenres of metal music into assemblages. Subgenres, through this view, have a constant tendency to stasis and to change simultaneously. In doing so, he has shown how subgenres can be viewed as temporal signifiers of these layered intensities, which gain meaning through the layers from which they emerge and give meaning to the other layer genres that emerge from them.

Because the first (online) speaker of the following panel, Anna Lénárd from the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts, unfortunately, could not join with their contribution *The visibility of religious Indonesian heavy metal bands in Europe*, the coffee break was unexpectedly prolonged. Pasqualina Eckerström from the University of Helsinki then (online) opened the panel with a somewhat sensitive topic: *The unintended consequences of state-enforced orthodoxy: "Blasphemous" metal music as secondary deviation in Iran*. She conducted a narrative analysis of 16 metal musicians' interviews from religiously conservative Iran, where metal is officially banned. Metal enthusiasts are thus forced to secretly keep and bring metal music and related items via smuggling, VPN changes, etc. According to Eckerström, there are two groups of metalheads (both coming mainly from the male middle-upper class and non-conservative families): the first is trying to find a compromise with a state oppressing metal for religious reasons and understanding it as deviant; and the second, more radical group, is strictly going against the authorities without asking for permission, where the religiously "deviant" attitude is taken as a sign of authenticity.

The last (online) conference speaker, Sergio Miranda-Bonilla from the University of Guanajuato, delivered a paper on *Theological language, postreligious paradigm, demythologisation and metal music cultures*. In his PhD thesis, Miranda-Bonilla started to use theological language as an instrumental metaphor for metal-related dogmas, mythologies, and morality. By using a view of culture as a palimpsest (a layer that is repeatedly overwritten by new meanings) and metal (and rock) fans as tribes, he argued that the horizon of meaning in metal overcomes the individual identities and forms "spiritualities". According to Miranda-Bonilla, metal creates a transcendental aesthetic experience: he believes that we can use the theological language to describe its effect on personal dimensions and life-meaning possibilities while studying metal as a sort of "belief system".

New Perspectives, Fruitful Ideas, and the Future of MSCEE and International Metal Studies

Before the conference ended, all participants gathered for an open round table discussion on *Metal Studies in Central and Eastern Europe: status, vision, perspectives*. Miroslav Vrzal reminded the audience of last year's online workshop, where the idea to connect metal studies from (in a way peripheralized) central and eastern Europe enabled the establishment of the MSCEE network. Vrzal stressed that central-eastern parts of Europe might enrich global metal studies with topics related to metal oppression by the communist regime or the current war's influence on Ukraine and Russian metal scenes. In the following discussion, participants proposed to study the cultural import of metal from East to West (so far rather overlooked), Slavic influences on metal subgenres and local eastern metal scenes or the general problematics

of nationalistic tendencies in central-eastern black metal. Importantly, Niall Scott took an online word to thank all conference contributors for the high quality of their papers and offered the possibility of publishing them in the *Metal Music Studies* journal. He also proposed a direct involvement of MSCEE in future conferences of The International Society for Metal Music Studies. MSCEE thus definitely made a further step in terms of international networking and possible cooperation. We are looking forward to its future international development!

*Jana Nenadalová
Gabriela Stašová*

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- „Studia de Cultura” 14.4 (2022): Edukacja medialna 4.0. Między technokulturą, cyberpsychologią a medialnym kulturoznawstwem i medialną pedagogiką. Strategie – praktyki – instytucje [Media Education 4.0. Between Technoculture, Cyberpsychology, Media Cultural Studies and Media Pedagogy. Strategies – Practices – Institutions].

