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MEDIEVALISM AND METAL MUSIC STUDIES: THROWING DOWN THE GAUNTLET

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For Sophie, Nora, and Graham

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Contents

List of Figures	<i>ix</i>
List of Tables	<i>xi</i>
List of Musical Examples	<i>xiii</i>
List of Contributors	<i>xv</i>
Foreword: Good Music Bad History <i>Scott G. Bruce</i>	<i>xvii</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>xxi</i>
Introduction <i>Ruth Barratt-Peacock and Ross Hagen</i>	<i>1</i>
Part I: Metal's Medieval Frames	
Chapter 1 The Trans-medial Fight for Glory <i>Johannes Hellrich, Christoph Rzymiski, and Vitus Vestergaard</i>	<i>13</i>
Chapter 2 Medieval Media Transformations and Metal Album Covers <i>Vitus Vestergaard</i>	<i>21</i>
Chapter 3 Getting Medieval: Signifiers of the Middle-Ages in Black Metal Aesthetics <i>Eric Smialek</i>	<i>35</i>
Chapter 4 Computational Detection of Medieval References in Metal <i>Johannes Hellrich and Christoph Rzymiski</i>	<i>57</i>

Part II: Nationalism and Identity in Metal Medievalism

- Chapter 5 The Politics and Poetics of Metal's Medieval Pasts**
Shamma Boyarin, Annika Christensen, Amaranta Saguar García, and Dean Swinford 71
- Chapter 6 The New Metal Medievalism: Alexander the Great, Islamic Historiography and Nile's 'Iskander Dhul Kharnon'**
Shamma Boyarin 81
- Chapter 7 The Return of El Cid: The Topicality of Rodrigo Díaz in Spanish Heavy Metal**
Amaranta Saguar García 93
- Chapter 8 Making Heritage Metal: Faroese *Kvæði* and Viking Metal**
Annika Christensen 107
- Chapter 9 Black Metal's Medieval King: The Apotheosis of Euronymous Through Album Dedications**
Dean Swinford 121

Part III: Historical Source Materials in Metal Musics

- Chapter 10 Finding the Past in the Present and the Present in the Past**
Ruth Barratt-Peacock, Ross Hagen, and Brenda S. Gardenour Walter 137
- Chapter 11 Obsequiae: Reconciling 'Authentic' Medieval Musical Styles with Metal**
Ross Hagen 145
- Chapter 12 The Villon that Never Was**
Ruth Barratt-Peacock 157
- Chapter 13 Satanic Bowels: Medieval Inversion and the Black Metal Grotesque**
Brenda S. Gardenour Walter 171
- Index 181

List of Figures

Chapter 1

- Fig 1. Stylometric Analysis of Ancient Rites' Albums (Character 4-Grams). 17

Chapter 3

- Fig 1. Appearances of the Word 'Medieval' in *Encyclopaedia Metallum*. 37
- Fig 2. Three Woodcut Engravings Frequently Used as Black Metal Album Art. Michael Furter, Demon Carrying Off a Child Promised to the Devil (1493), Unknown, Vlad Tepes Old Newspaper Cutting (1499), and Francesco Maria Guazzo, Witch Giving the Ritual Kiss to Satan (1626). 38
- Fig 3. Frequency of Lyrical Themes Used in the Albums in Table 1. 42
- Fig 4. Common Descriptors in Online Fan Reviews of Black Metal with Medieval Imagery, Grouped into Themes. 43

Chapter 4

- Fig 1. Dendrogram Describing the Similarity of Twelve In Flames Albums with Each Other. 64
- Fig 2. Dendrogram Describing the Similarity of Albums by In Flames and Schandmaul. 65
- Fig 3. Dendrogram Describing the Similarity of Albums by Several German Bands With and Without Medieval References. 66
- Fig 4. Three-dimensional Visualisation of German Bands. 66

Chapter 11

- Fig 1. Opening of 'Altars of Moss.' 154

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List of Tables

Chapter 3

Table 1.	Woodcut Artwork Used for Album Covers.	40
Table 2.	Number of Bands that Appear in an <i>Encyclopaedia Metallum</i> Advanced Search by Genre and Lyrical Themes.	42

Chapter 4

Table 1.	Topics Discovered by Our Automatic Approach and Words They Contain.	60
Table 2.	Topics Discovered by Our Automatic Approach and Most Specific Bands.	62
Table 3.	Medieval Influenced Bands and Their Top Topic(s) in Order of Importance.	63

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List of Musical Examples

Chapter 3

Example 1.	Haggard's 'Chapter II: The Origin of a Crystal Soul', First Verse Excerpt (0:53).	46
Example 2.	Haggard's 'Chapter II: The Origin of a Crystal Soul', Instrumental Interlude Excerpt (2:26).	46
Example 3.	Satyricon's 'Dark Medieval Times', Flute Outro Excerpt (7:17).	46

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Foreword: Good Music | Bad History

Scott G. Bruce

The period of western European history known as the Middle Ages (c. 400–1400 CE) has exerted a formative influence on the imagery of heavy metal lyrics and the tone of heavy metal music since the genre began in the late 1960s (Cope, 2010). Pounding drum beats, thundering bass-lines and crushing guitar chords demand subject matter that evokes power and darkness. Popular notions of medieval Europe oblige. Whether drawing influence from the mysteries of a pre-Christian world of Nordic paganism, the triumphant exploits of Christian warriors in an age of embattled faith, or simply the grim and unsparing realities of human life in a society before the advent of advanced medicine and modern technologies, modern metal bands turn again and again to the European Middle Ages as a reservoir for the words and images that give life to their music.

The discovery and reuse of the premodern European past in metal music is not a straightforward process, however. As many of the chapters in this volume make clear, metal musicians evoke the medieval period primarily as an ahistorical aesthetic and only rarely as an historical point of reference. With few exceptions (see the chapters by Amaranta Saguar García and Shamma Boyarin, in this volume), metal lyricists find inspiration not directly from medieval texts, but rather from a host of intermediary media produced between the eighteenth century and the present, like popular works of history, fantasy literature with historical inflections, and more recently, entertainment media like movies and video games. While these kinds of works are important because they attract the attention of the public to the distant past, they do not purport to be accurate works of history. As a result, the European Middle Ages that inspires the metal community typically has less to do with the premodern past, as historians understand it, than with a fount of images and ideas – some plausibly medieval, some completely ahistorical – from which metal musicians draw inspiration with little concern that these materials have been unmoored from the historical contexts that do so much to inform their meaning. But even in ahistorical usage, these materials can be instrumentalised into micropolitical and cultural reactions to the forces of modernity, capitalism, and Christianity within the discourses of metal scenes.

Medievalism and Metal Music Studies: Throwing Down the Gauntlet

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Media transferences from medieval sources to metal song lyrics can follow any number of meandering channels, but they are almost never direct, the reason being that metal artists lack the proficiency in Latin and other languages necessary to access premodern documents firsthand. Instead, these artists draw inspiration for their songs from images and impressions of the Middle Ages mediated most often through modern history books and fictional stories set in medieval societies. For example, ‘Into the Crypts of Rays’, the opening song on Celtic Frost’s debut album *Morbid Tales* (1984), tells the story of Gilles de Rais, a self-confessed murderer of children who fought alongside the saintly Joan of Arc during the Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453 CE). Gruesome and ironic, the tale of Gilles was ideal material for a heavy metal song, but Celtic Frost lyricist Tom Warrior recently recalled the challenge of researching premodern historical figures in the 1980s before the advent of the internet: ‘[Y]ou had to raid libraries and go to secondhand bookstores’ (Mudrian, 2009, p. 39). Popular historical studies, like Frances Winwar’s *The Saint and the Devil, Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais: A Biographical Study in Good and Evil* (1948), would have been instrumental in mediating information about famous premodern individuals like Gilles de Rais to metal songsmiths like Tom Warrior.

In recent years, fantasy films set in mythical premodern locales have played an important role as well. ‘To Cross the Bridge’, a track on High on Fire’s *Blessed Black Wings* (2005), narrates the woes of a ‘wandering warrior’, who shared ‘tales of horror’ about his harsh captivity, the burdens of which granted him tremendous strength. Lyricist Matt Pike’s indirect inspiration for this story was not a medieval tale, but a series of modern short stories by Robert E. Howard (1906–1936) about his fictional character Conan, a barbarian adventurer whose exploits appeared in the early 1930s in the pages of the monthly pulp magazine *Weird Tales* and were later popularised through adaptations in paperback novels, comic books and films. Motifs from the work of Howard and other *Weird Tales* contributors like H. P. Lovecraft and Robert Bloch appear frequently on High on Fire albums, especially *De Vermis Mysteriis* (2012). While Conan is without doubt the ‘wandering warrior’ of ‘To Cross the Bridge’, Pike gives away the source for the song with the lines about a fallen victim who gains strength through a ‘wheel of pain’. The torment of the warrior on a ‘wheel of pain’ finds no precedent in Howard’s original Conan stories. Instead, it was a conceit of the 1982 film *Conan the Barbarian* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger to explain the hero’s unrivalled physical strength. Thus, in this case, a metal artist drew on a modern film adaptation of early twentieth-century short stories about a fictional medieval warrior to frame his song. The role of the historical Middle Ages in this process of transference is distant at best.

The inspiration of medieval Europe for metal song-writers shows no sign of waning, for two clear reasons. First, popular conceptions of the prevailing mood of the Middle Ages – dark, gloomy, superstitious and fraught with fear – fit the tenor of metal songs, irrespective of the fact that medieval historians long ago dismissed the notion of the Dark Ages in European history (Wood, 2018). Second, medieval Europe was the historical setting of the triumph of Christianity over ancient paganism and its repeated conflicts with non-Christians, like Muslims and

Jews, especially in the context of the crusades (1095–1291 CE). Metal artists with ideological agendas, whether the restoration of pagan religious experience from the pre-Christian past or the valourisation of Christian warriors in their battle against infidels, continue to find fertile ground in medieval Europe for their anthems to lost homelands and white supremacist values. Irrespective of their specific agendas, these artists cultivate their authority with a mirage of a Middle Ages shaped by their nostalgia and their bigotry. Like modern politicians who evoke the return of the Dark Ages in their speeches to suggest that Islamist militants and other so-called ‘enemies of western civilisation’ are themselves uncivilised and thus do not merit the treatment accorded to members of modern nation states, metal song-writers who portray the European past as a safe haven from their religious or racist ideologies are practicing bad history (Wollenberg, 2018). In a similar but opposing vein, leftist neopagan and Viking groups instrumentalise the same nostalgia into a critique of capitalism instead of focussing on racial and ethnic identities.

The reality of medieval Europe, as it turns out, is much more complicated than metal song-writers often portray it. Historical research reinforces the fact that western Europe was not a beleaguered society of homogenous, white, Christian, hetero-normative people, but rather a rich and diverse collection of communities entangled in commerce, engaged in conversation and living in messy co-existence with their many non-Christian residents and neighbours (Heng, 2018; *The Medieval Globe*, 2014–present). Moreover, it is important to stress that the modern redeployment of medieval imagery for the purpose of identity formation through music and other media almost always overlooks the fact that medieval people, from the waning days of the Roman Empire to the eve of the Protestant Reformation, were themselves involved in the ongoing negotiation of their collective identity vis-à-vis their inherited past. In the same way that modern people look back to distant ages for ideas and images to inform their sense of who they are, European Christians of the Middle Ages were not exclusively ‘presentist’ in the act of identity formation. Unlike modern western cultures, medieval traditions valued authority derived from antiquity and treated novelty with suspicion. As a result, we find premodern Christian authors borrowing the political, religious and cultural raiment of even older cultures, most notably the Trojans, the Israelites and the Romans, to weave their own identities (as shown in Brenda Walter’s chapter). The distant past lent legitimacy to the living present of medieval experience for over a millennium, authenticating the founding legends explaining the origins of peoples and countries, providing the rituals of anointing that sanctified kings and preserving the Latin language and literature esteemed by Christian monks despite its pagan content. Like the modern era, the Middle Ages was not a period characterised by a homogenised western culture, but rather a bricolage of old and new images and ideas, as medieval Christians wrought their own sense of themselves from the borrowed and reused remains of even older civilisations.

The Middle Ages of most metal music is not founded in any historical reality; it is impressionistic and mythical. The overwhelming majority of metal song-writers make no claims about the accuracy of their depiction of the medieval past. Nor should they. As modern artists, they are free to redeploy any words or images

suggestive of premodern Europe in their songs, even if they are anachronistic or inaccurate, because historical accuracy is not their goal. Metal musicians are story-tellers, whose songs echo with the resonances of ancient stories, as in Celtic Frost's 1985 song 'Circle of Tyrants', which makes reference to ballads of battle and mysterious tales. Like medieval story-tellers, the value of the stories woven by metal artists is their evocative and emotional power; the enduring joy of their listeners is the most important measure of their success. It is only when these artists misrepresent historical knowledge about the Middle Ages to serve their modern ideological agendas that critics can (and should) level the charge that they are misusing the past to serve the present. Bad history does not make for good music.

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This book is part of the series *Metal Music and Culture* and would not have been possible without the work of series editors Rosemary Hill and Keith Kahn-Harris, as well as the support of the International Society of Metal Music Studies. There has always been such a strong presence of medievalism and neomedievalism from the very beginnings of metal and rock that a book on the connection between metal music and medievalism is long overdue. In working on this project however, there was also a sense of *déjà-vu*. Metal music studies is a young area of study which is inherently multi-disciplinary, and vitally connected to the here and now. Over the course of this project, we have found there to be much common ground with medievalism as a discipline. In this book, we have brought together scholars from metal studies and medievalism, but also other disciplines such as history, musicology, media studies, computer linguistics, literary studies, and Jewish and Arab studies. We would like to thank all these scholars, not just for their individual insights, but for the conversations and discussions we able to have in working together on what is an incredibly knotty, but also fascinating topic: metal music and the medieval.

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Introduction

Ruth Barratt-Peacock and Ross Hagen

Metal music has had a long fascination with the Middle Ages, and many metal songs and genres play upon the images of the medieval in the modern imagination. Listening to metal is often an act of medievalism: feet planted firmly in the demonic abyss of the Christian cosmos, Vikings to the right, knights to the left, a shimmer of the Holy Grail just out of reach, all delivered through modern instrumental and recording technology. The medieval in metal is so ubiquitous that a book which brings together medieval studies and metal music studies is long overdue. In this collection, we have brought together scholars from very different academic and cultural backgrounds to try and get behind the complexities of metal and medievalism.

History is a trove of images and desires, stories and song: the materials of nations, beliefs, and other things that have been devised by the human imagination. Ultimately, history is not as concerned with the past as it is with today's conflicts and dreams. Nowhere can this be more clearly seen than in modernity's love affair with the Middle Ages. Yet this fascination has refashioned the Middle Ages as a fantastic land of diametrically opposing desires. The Middle Ages represent a time when violence was noble and princesses were happy to be rescued; when dangers were real, and war meant looking your enemy in the eyes, not launching missiles from airborne drones piloted from halfway around the world. Simultaneously, for many the Middle Ages also represent a simpler time of cultural and religious unity and comfortable social hierarchy. To speak of the Middle Ages, is to then open up the possibility of taking up multiple, at times contradictory, positions at the same time (Groebner, 2008). The 'Middle Ages' which the West has inherited from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is our roots; it is a cipher of difference (archaic, pure and grotesque), something authentic, something forever lost, and also as a challenge to be realised in the future (Groebner, 2008).

There are, however, differences in how the presence of aspects of the Middle Ages can be framed, particularly in media products of our time. Throughout this book the term 'medieval' occurs in several permutations. Two terms in the field of medieval studies, however, pose particular potential for confusion: neomedievalism and medievalism. These terms have been the subject of extensive debate among medievalists, particularly after the debate was re-sparked following Amy S. Kaufman's 2010 article 'Medieval Unmoored' in which she argues strongly for

a differentiation between medievalism and neomedievalism. Although medievalism encompasses all aspects of later interactions with the Middle Ages, there is a specificity to the term neomedievalism (developed out of the various attempts to differentiate it from medievalism) which can help sharpen our thinking around the complex and often foggy relationships between the metal music and the Middle Ages explored in this book. A complete overview of the debate surrounding these two terms lies outside the scope of this introduction, however, it is worth taking a brief look at the main ways in which the term neomedievalism is characterised, working on the basis that it is to be understood as ‘a functional subset’ of medievalism (Kaufman, 2010, p. 2).

The two clearest ways of differentiating neomedievalism from medievalism do so on the grounds of how history is approached (Kaufman, 2010) and the presence self-reflectiveness in engagement with the medieval (Clements & Robinson, 2009). There is always a connection between the past and the present formed in medievalism. However, in neomedievalism the focus shifts significantly towards the contemporary end of the scale and away from the historical Middle Ages. In a bizarre way, its distance from the historical period creates an ahistoricity in which everything collides at once in a way that is contingent on the postmodern condition (Kaufman, 2010, p. 2). Although the Middle Ages remain a point of reference, it is a reference point entirely uprooted from history and brought into the present so radically that the subject of enquiry becomes the postmodern condition itself. This shift in focus implies a qualitative shift from the tracing of phenomena of the Middle Age’s afterlife towards their conscious use as a critical tool. For Robinson and Clements the shift to self-consciousness is both progressive and playful (cf. Clements & Robinson, 2009, pp. 55–75). This kind of self-conscious playfulness may not be the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about metal music for those who don’t listen to much metal, but it certainly plays no small role in metal music’s engagement with the Middle Ages and general medievalness. This is the kind of refraction of the medieval through many previous medievalist iterations, a commodification of the medieval as it were (Brown, 2011, p. 1).

What is of greater interest in this more critical context, is the consequence that the Middle Ages can be reimagined in ways which, though sometimes more homogenising than anything else, can also ‘gesture of multicultural awareness’ (Brown, 2016). This potential exists despite Kaufman’s (2010) assessment that ‘neomedievalism sees the possibility of the Middle Ages as a cycle, an ahistorical state to which it is possible to return’ because in order to close the temporal distance to the historical Middle Ages, neomedievalism must ‘also erase difference’ (p. 6 and 8). Each of the contributors to this volume has engaged with the differences between neomedievalism and medieval in their own way. However, it is the potential of neomedievalism to rethink the postmodern by rethinking the Middle Ages, as well as the limitations of this potential, which have proven to be of greatest interest to the overarching conclusion we have come to in this project, namely, that metal medievalism functions as a critical lens.

In many ways, metal music reflects a fascination with the Middle Ages which began already in the eighteenth century, for instance with the appropriation of

specific medieval liturgies and the strict following of the sixteenth-century tradition discussed by Nils Holger Petersen (2009) in his essay ‘Medievalism and Medieval Reception: A Terminological Question’. Of course, the naming of this period itself is in many ways an act of medievalism. It is a creation after the fact, as all historical periods are. The Middle Ages are the *medias res*, the time in the middle, a kind of non-time between the golden days of antiquity and the shining beacon of the Enlightenment. This sense of being in the middle, of being nothing at all, has allowed the Middle Ages to become a symbol of absolute alterity – a time so different to ours that it is truly unreachable. It is a time both forever lost, and a promise to be fulfilled. It is also a void; a vortex into which the failings of modernity are thrown, and whispers of what might have been echoed back to us from its depths. What we bring from the present to this abyss; what fragments from the past we gather in return: this is the work of medievalism.

The realm of the medievalist is where the present and past illuminate each other in diaphanous webs of mediation. However, in heavy metal medievalism both form and function might have less to do with echoes or distortions of the past, than with entrenchment in current cultural discourse; not simply as an ideal against which modernity is measured, or a compensatory imaginary for a perceived lack (Kaufman, 2010), but as an arsenal of potential heuristics applied to current issues. In neomedievalism there is the sense that the Middle Ages become ‘emptied of any contingent historical meaning, the medieval becomes more easily traded, more receptive to the projection of the user’s own identity’ (Brown, 2011). Detangling the relationships of bagpipes, Bagginses, horns, helmets, song, rhyme, God and the Devil, lovers, lust, corsets, golems, gargoyles, profane images, and sacred script is an endless but fruitful task. It tells something of history and a lot about ourselves. When the Middle Ages are removed from their original national, cultural and historical contexts and, in a way, are democratised, they become a free-for all fantasy of everything missing from modern life. This fantasy of the Middle Ages is free for negotiation and in the following chapters our authors will trace some of the ways it is being negotiated and adapted.

Many metal genres also specifically seem to align their adaptations with the conception of the medieval period as a ‘Dark Age’, although their ideals often consider this supposed ‘darkness’ as a positive attribute. This ideal opposes the Renaissance and Enlightenment humanists who intended the era’s ‘darkness’ to refer to the period’s supposed lack of rationality and secular achievement, occasionally overlaid with explicitly anti-religious or anti-Catholic sentiments. In that context, it reflects a positive bias towards the advances of the early modern period and the works of classical antiquity, framing the medieval period as a temporary lapse in a teleology otherwise marked by scientific advancement. However, metal’s reassessment of this historical image of medieval ‘darkness’, with its notions of superstition, anti-intellectualism, and brutality, remains at heart a child of the Romantics’ rehabilitation of the medieval period as part of their reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. Even those genres of metal that are marked by antipathy towards religion can find themselves inspired by this image of pre-Enlightenment esoteric spirituality. Ideas of darkness and of a ‘Dark Age’ in metal are not simply in Romantic portrayals of the Middle Ages. The philosophy of early

German Romanticism also delivered concepts now reflected in black metal, such as the sublime, a postulated Absolute beyond language, and the relationship between the abyss and God in Schelling's writings (cf. Masciandaro, 2010).

The particular medievalisms of metal music, on the other hand, were also determined by the historical moment of the genre's birth in the late 1960s, and especially its development alongside other medievalist media products. Although this volume does not deal specifically with the worlds of medievalist fantasy, it is undeniable that fantasy and science fiction literature had a profound effect on the trajectories of heavy metal. In particular, the books of J. R. R. Tolkien fired the imaginations of many burgeoning metalheads, inspiring everything from Black Sabbath's 'The Wizard' to black metal bands like Gorgoroth, Burzum, and many others around the world (Spracklen, 2018).

It is no coincidence that the Norwegian translation of *The Lord of the Rings* came out in the 1970s, around the same time that the musicians who would go on to create Norwegian black metal were being born (Von Helden, 2017, p. 40). Through the decades, other sword-and-sorcery books, comics and films like the *Conan the Barbarian* franchise, *Legend* (1985), and role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons* constructed medievalist worlds full of monsters, dwarves, muscled warriors, magic spells, and thrilling adventure. Video games continued mining this creative ground in older titles like *Gauntlet* along with more recent games like *World of Warcraft* and *Elder Scrolls* that allow the player to explore an immersive medievalist environment. With this in mind, it seems appropriate to consider many of metal's medievalisms as existing within this wider generation-spanning multimedia phenomenon, particularly given the significant overlaps in fandom. Metal's connections to these other creative endeavours also help to account for the anachronistic and magical elements in the music and lyrics that have little relation to the Middle Ages themselves or to nineteenth-century medievalism.

It is worth noting, however, that the worlds of the medieval are but one of the recurring fantasies of metal music's imagination, which frequently seek to transcend the mundanities of everyday life and transport the listener 'elsewhere'. Indeed, metal music is brimming with elsewheres, ranging from mid-twentieth century American motorcycle culture, to supernatural gothic horror, to futuristic science fiction, and many other points besides. It is this fantastical aspect of metal that often underpins the sense that metal has had a limited social or political consciousness, especially when compared to more overtly politicised genres like punk and hip-hop (Brown, 2018; Phillipov, 2012). Similar accusations have been levelled against progressive rock, another genre prone to extended flights of lyrical and musical fantasy. But these imaginative aspects are not mere escapism, as any fan or scholar of science fiction would attest. Such convoluted and esoteric lyrical concepts often serve as metaphorical critiques of society, often involving anti-war statements or utopian visions (Holm-Hudson, 2003; Keister & Smith, 2008). Metal's fascination with the medieval makes this point clearly, especially as the Middle Ages come laden with potential political baggage.

Chief among these is a tendency to frame the medieval period (and the past more generally) as a prelapsarian paradise providing the kind of connected community and shared sense of heritage supposedly missing in twenty-first-century

Western societies. Such feelings of disenchantment have long led utopian experiments and religious movements to dream of creating a peaceful and stable society at some point in the future. However, medieval utopianism would probably be best characterised as a form of ‘retrotopia’, a term coined by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2017) to describe this kind of backward-looking longing. Bauman argues that this view of the past underpins current social trends towards tribalism, uncompromising individualism, and a lack of trust in existing social and political structures. While other metal fantasies might be similarly nostalgic and politicised in some aspects, medievalist metal concocts a uniquely potent brew in this context.

What is at stake is not simply a fantasy of knights versus elves, but a powerful narrative that has been constructed around the Middle Ages and its supposed cultural, religious, and ethnic homogeneity. The symbols of the Middle Ages have been increasingly adopted by radical nationalists and white supremacists across Europe and the United States, often mixing together Crusade imagery, Norse runes, and symbols of the Confederacy. The Crusades especially carry significant symbolic weight among those who opposed the resettlement of massive waves of Middle Eastern refugees arriving in Europe since 2014. ‘Retrotopian’ visions of the medieval period are almost invariably visions of white supremacy and exclusivity, and although these medieval utopias may favour either Christianity or European paganism, Islam and Judaism are generally unwelcome. These conceptions of the medieval period are also often explicitly masculinist in their desire to reassert heteronormative male dominance in society, relegating women to ‘traditional’ roles and providing no place for queer identities.

The debate over this exclusionary vision of the Middle Ages is also not solely populated by reactionary political agitators outside of academia. Medieval studies have recently had to reckon with these attitudes within its own disciplinary field, particularly following the revelations of misogynistic blog posts by the lauded medievalist Allen J. Frantzen. Following the 2017 International Medieval Congress in Leeds focussed on ‘Otherness’, in which nearly all of the presenters were white men, some medievalists began explicitly interrogating the field’s openness to diversities in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. The organisation Medievalists of Colour in particular is actively providing a platform for such discussions. The rhetorical usage of the Middle Ages by white supremacists, and the alt-right’s engagement with the language of academic discourse, has made this endeavour all the more pressing lest the field of medieval studies itself fall victim to this chauvinistic vision of the past.

The fact that white supremacists and radical nationalists also have a long history of utilising metal music and working within metal scenes makes the terrain of this book doubly fraught. Where medieval studies has to deal with the institutional inertia of long histories of Eurocentric and Christian scholarship (never mind the lack of diversity within universities themselves), metal studies also has to contend with metal musicians’ and fans’ own predilections for performative transgression and chauvinistic provocation. Like medieval studies, metal scenes and participants have recently begun to reckon with this history and its impact on the experiences of metal musicians and fans of diverse backgrounds and identities

(Dawes, 2012). As would be expected, these progressive endeavours incited some backlash and intense discussion within both academic fields and metal scenes themselves. As Andy Brown (2018) recently argued in *Metal Music Studies*, the relationship between metal academics and the multifarious fan cultures and practices around metal is riven with potential for misunderstanding and misrepresentation, not least of which is the temptation to focus on those parts of the scene that reproduce common academic norms and political stances. Although we can personally disavow the racist and nationalist aspects of medievalist metal scenes, we cannot presume to write on behalf of metal musicians or their fans or pretend that our academic understanding of this music and its subculture mirrors that of scene participants. For some musicians and fans, expressions of nationalism and ethnocentrism undoubtedly form an important part of their medieval metal experience, and while we don't share their worldviews and political goals we also cannot ignore them. Doing so risks complicity by silence. Perhaps the best we can do is to be clear in our advocacy for more inclusive understandings of both the Middle Ages and metal scenes.

In this vein, it is unfortunate that this volume turned out to largely replicate the Eurocentric view of the Middle Ages that has dominated medieval studies for generations. We had hoped for more contributions that engaged with the medieval period in the Americas, Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, and other places beyond the regular European haunts of the medieval, but there were few forthcoming. In particular, it would be interesting to see if metal scenes in other parts of the world might have received some of their ideas about the medieval period from metal itself, much in the way that earlier fantasy books and films provided models for Anglophone metal bands. It is our hope that this book does indeed throw down a gauntlet for scholars whose investigations engage with those regions where the medieval (and metal) is often thought absent, and we hope to read their research in the near future.

Structure of the Volume

This volume is structured into three larger parts, with the first focussing on questions of methodology, the second on issues of identity, and a final part exploring the (re)use of historical material explicitly dating from the Middle Ages. Each part is preceded by a short introductory discussion in which the part's authors explore further issues that their chapters raise as a group. These discussions suggest further avenues of inquiry and provide opportunities for these diverse groups of scholars to comment and build upon each other's work. We are all part of the academy in some sense, but are also involved in different cultural practices and national discourses. The contributors in this volume reflect this with expertise ranging from medieval history, musicology, media studies and literature, through to computer linguistics, and professional musicianship.

The opening chapters on methodology are vital in a situation where multiple media, cultures, and theoretical frameworks open up many possible approaches, each with their own advantages and pitfalls. Indeed, methodological and disciplinary diversity is a hallmark of metal studies itself, as would be expected

given the makeup of the field. This is where we begin with the book, and Part I in this volume examines how the medieval in metal is represented in different media. These authors also explore how different methodological approaches when looking at one media or another can be effectively combined; moving forward from big data into a space that requires qualitative analysis. There is a methodological focus in this part. It is here that some of the key concerns which have emerged in looking at medievalism and metal over the course of collaborating for this book start to emerge. These are how metal's fantasies of the Middle Ages relate to the historical period they evoke through the adaptation of medieval artefacts like texts, woodcutting, and paintings at one end, and on the other end, how the constructions of the medieval in metal relate to current and past constructions of identity, race, and nationalism. These are the 'whats' and the 'whys' of metal and the Middle Ages, and they are slippery subjects because the 'what' isn't just about which medieval materials occur in metal music, but also what these materials signify.

Nowhere can this process of signification be more clearly seen than in the cross-currents between metal and markers of identity in national contexts. The discussion chapter in Part II explores the white-washing of the Middle Ages drawing on the other case studies. The different cases examined in Part II dive into this topic from different angles, combining historical figures with the national narratives surrounding metal practices. Amaranta Sagar García's examination of the figure of El Cid in Spanish metal shows how the tension and the possibilities for subversion in the use of a figure which has been glorified by fascist nationalism. She examines how this figure is being reclaimed and complicated by metal bands today. Shamma Boyarin's chapter uses the figure of Alexander the Great as portrayed by the band Nile in order to examine how metal interacts with medieval materials from the Islamic tradition, using this to look at metal's engagement with Islam.

The multiplicity of images the medieval period has to offer becomes particularly evident in the Gothic fiction of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the operas of Richard Wagner and the popularity of pseudo-medieval architecture. In those instances, the references to the medieval period imbued these nineteenth-century works with a sense of uncanniness and sublimity, exploring and pushing the boundaries of alterity. What most easily springs to mind though is a kind of medievalness which is often viewed a synonymous with 'romantic'. The waters get very muddy here and research is desperately needed to untangle the threads of the historical Romantic period's medievalism. What is, however, expressed in the joining of these two terms lies somewhere between the appropriation of neo-Romanticism by National Socialism, most famously in Germany and the work of well-known figures such as the brothers Grimm: a sentimental mish-mash of fantasy with an unhealthy dose of nationalism. Initially though, early German Romanticism established the medieval period as a metaphor for cultural and spiritual unity destroyed by the advent of modernity. Thus the image of the medieval period as a lost golden age and the metaphorical blueprint for a better age to come was established at the birth of modernity. Not the literal Middle Ages, not even in all cases feudalism, Paganism, or any specific cultural aspect of

the time, but the longing for a society functioning under one coherent meaningful narrative as expressed in Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799).

Dean Swinford and Annika Christensen consider metal and part of imagined communities in two cases which show traces of this Romantic reception. Christensen explores how the interpretation of several *kvæði* by Faroese Viking metal band Týr presents them in a new form and ensures their circulation and repetition through the globalised medium of metal and its relationship to contemporary socio-cultural imaginings of Faroese identity. Dean Swinford's chapter draws on neomedievalism to look at another kind of imagined community in his examination of medieval para-dystopia in second-wave black metal. In this para-dystopia, negative characteristics are not viewed as negative, using the medieval in ways which differ from their original meaning. It positions the Dark Age to come as a transformation into the medieval which disavows modernity by reestablishing and then inverting the medieval. In all cases, the Middle Ages stand as cipher for all those who wish to critique modernity. They are, however, more than an ideal against which modernity is measured: the Middle Ages are also its shadow. The critique of modernity is familiar ground in metal music, how it achieves this in its utilisation of medieval art, texts, music, and figures is the question this book addresses.

The final part on historical materials focusses on the use and appropriation of medieval melodies, musical qualities and philosophy by metal bands. Ross Hagen's examination of how *Obsequiae* medievalise their music looks beyond medieval window-dressing to show that their music recontextualises medieval musical idioms, avoiding normative metal forms in favour of medieval aesthetics that likely escape the attention of listeners. While the German *mittelalter* metal discussed by Ruth Barratt-Peacock places their use of medieval source material at the forefront of the genre, the aspects of the Middle Ages considered central to this specific musical culture have less to do with the use of source material than with the creative practices of the musicians. These cases highlight how the 'why' of medievalism in metal is always the most elusive and inconclusive because it has to do with the relationships and interactions between cultures today. Brenda Walter's chapter probes the deep structures of medieval medical texts, rooted in Aristotelian natural philosophy, and their appropriation by in the inverted, necrotic, and ruptured bodily construction of black metal. She argues that black metal uses a medieval model of the body and the cosmos, but instead of rejecting the nether regions, it revels in their unfettered primal desires to bring the listener 'to the abject experience of their own soil and waste, their rootedness to the earth, even as they are transported to the intellectual abyss' (Walter, this volume).

Simmons (2009) writes that the English language uniquely uses the plural for this period: the Middle Ages, not the Middle Age. This has to do with the country's own way of viewing English history; nevertheless, this plural form is fitting for what the modern imagination has made them: a manifold contained in one. We argue that metal's fascination with the medieval period continues these threads of using the medieval period as a source for creative mythmaking and critiquing one's contemporary era. Metal medievalism also spins new threads connecting

the medieval with metal's fixations on brutality, evil, and darkness, although we ultimately also interrogate possible reasons for these connections. A potential effect of metal's creative reuse of medieval cultural artefacts, philosophies, and narratives is that the medieval period itself becomes 'metallised' in process. This dynamic is important for black metal in particular because its subversion of this structure is reliant on an understanding of its form and existence. Ultimately, the use of historical material from the Middle Ages is not simply a matter of the relationship of the past to the present. It isn't even a matter of medievalism revealing the relationship of the present to itself, but of different presents to each other.

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