Mora-Rioja, Arturo. *Poetry in English and Metal Music: Adaptation and Appropriation across Media*. 2023. Palgrave Macmillan, 331 pages

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The strong relationship between music and poetry is a fruitful field of research which has been often commented upon from a scholarly viewpoint. From Classical Antiquity until our present day, many philosophers, musicians, writers, and scholars have written about this topic. Yet there is still much to investigate within this area. Arturo Mora-Rioja's volume offers a fresh perspective to delve further into such a vast research field, namely the study of the connections between poetry and heavy metal music. Though there have been some previous studies regarding such a connection, these have been few and far between and mostly dedicated to specific case studies, such as Sederholm's 2012 work. Nonetheless, thus far the existing literature has not provided readers with a comprehensive analysis of how heavy metal transforms poetic language, since previous studies have mostly privileged other music genres. Mora-Rioja's volume stands out, thus, as an ambitious project which aims to bridge the gap in scholarship by offering readers a comprehensible account of the interplay between poetry and metal music.

Acknowledging the controversy around metal music as a genre, Mora-Rioja addresses metal as a social and political phenomenon as well as a scholarly field. As metal music followers are "more loyal" and their "scrutiny of the music is thorough and leads to a stronger embracement of its sources" (5), the transformative process of adapting poetic language to metal music entails its recontextualisation into a new contemporary political context. After a brief introductory section which stands as the first chapter of the volume, Mora-Rioja explains the rigorous taxonomy which will be applied to the analysis of metal songs in the subsequent chapters, drawing from previous studies while creating new categories that suit his research aims. Through a close reading of the lyrics and a careful examination of the music, the author invites the readers to participate in his process of an in-depth exploration of the interrelation between poetry and metal music through a wide variety of case studies.

In the second chapter, the author focuses more directly on the process of transformation of poetry into metal music. In order to offer a clear structure, Mora-Rioja subdivides the chapter into different categories and presents readers with examples for each one. First, he deals with reproductions of heavy metal songs which set poetry to music, maintaining those poems as the lyrics of the songs, in varied case studies such as those with texts by Wordsworth, Dickinson, W. B. Yeats, and T. S. Eliot. The second category is retelling, i.e., cases of songs which rephrase the words of the source poem maintaining its plot and setting. An illustrative case in point is Iron Maiden's adaptation of the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge, where the band shortens the source text while lengthening the poem with the addition of new original lines by the band to embellish the narrative. The final inclusion of clear tables listing the transformations of each case in every chapter is one of the strong points of this book, since it facilitates an easy grasp of the main examples studied.

Re-elaboration is the third category, where the author engages with musical appropriations which borrow and recreate a poem, while they divert from it at some point so as to offer their own story. The first case study presented is Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" and its adaptation by Delain in 2016, where the band retains Wilde's imagery while telling a different story about a toxic love relationship. This is followed by other examples with poems by Chesterton, Longfellow, William Hamilton, all of them with adaptations regarding religious aspects.

Mora-Rioja then moves on to reorientation, a category which addresses the appropriation of narrative poetry with changes in the addressed person or object of the source poem. This is clearly exemplified in Iron Maiden's reorientation of "The Charge of the Light Brigade" by Lord Tennyson: lyrics are here told from the perspective of a British soldier in the first person, strengthening the contemporary political message of the source poem in a new context. These examples contrast with the case of citation, which are those cases of appropriation that insert fragments of a poem into the lyrics of a song disregarding the meaning of the source text.

Chapter three changes the scope as it concentrates on just one poet, namely Edgar Allan Poe. Though heavy metal adaptations of

Poe's poetry have received some scholarly attention (see Smith 1990; Sederholm 2012), Mora-Rioja decides to address each adaptation according to its category, thus offering a deeper exploration of the transformative process behind each song. Beginning with reproduction, the author centres on Poe's poem "Alone" (1829) as an illustrative example for metal bands to convey feelings of alienation. While discussing reorientation, the author studies different metal songs, such as Iron Maiden's song based on "Eldorado" (1849), which updates the content of the poem to speak to a world affected by the 2008 economic crisis. Most interestingly, an entire section in this chapter is devoted to Poe's "The Raven" (1845), a poem that frequently features in popular culture and has a strong musicality due to its sonority, rhythm and rhyme scheme, as well as its use of various figures of speech. The author offers detailed analyses, from Chris Violence and his *Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven: A Trash Metal Opera* to the retelling seen in Conducting from the Grave's "Nevermore." He concludes the chapter emphasising the relevance of Poe and his works in today's society, and the reasons why metal music feels particularly drawn to him due to "[h]is poetry's concern with deep, dark human feelings" (167).

Chapter four goes back in time in order to focus on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, probably a surprising source of inspiration for several metal bands, but one that has "a privileged place" (212). The epic poem with its Biblical references might seem at first glance an odd choice for a metal music song, given that the genre tends to either use those Biblical references to warn listeners about sin or to deal with Milton's Satan as an "image of rebellion against the established order" (184). Mora-Rioja sets about to demonstrate the pervasiveness of *Paradise Lost* in metal music as a complex case of adaptation, as the bands usually transform the poem in many different ways with very different purposes.

The next chapter is fully devoted to the war poets, as war is "a common theme in metal music lyrics" (225). In his conclusions, Mora-Rioja highlights Wilfred Owen as metal music's favourite War Poet, which points to the opposition to armed conflicts expressed by heavy metal renditions. Most bands, in fact, use the technique of proximisation so as to bring the source text closer to the audience, thus recontextualising the hypotext.

Especially relevant is the sixth chapter, which well demonstrates the originality and relevance of Mora Rioja's study. It aims to summarise the author's findings by offering a quantitative analysis of the data and concluding that "[t]he presence of poetry in English in metal music is pervasive" (253) and an extended practice within the community. Presenting a number of tables with data, the author shares some final remarks concerning the examined transformations in 72 songs as well as all the identified metal songs (an impressive 384 in total). Mora-Rioja finds citation and reproduction as the most commonly used categories of transformation, while reorientation is the least employed one. Interestingly, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the most frequently referenced poem in metal music, followed by Poe's "The Raven." In fact, the author points out that Poe is the most referenced poet in metal songs, which is in line with other scholarly works such as Sederholm's (2012).

In addition, Mora-Rioja insightfully points to the "lack of concern for female authors" and ethnic diversity in metal music (254-255), as evinced in the fact that, in his volume, the only female poet that features is Emily Dickinson, while the entire corpus comprise white authors only. Another noteworthy fact is that metal bands seek the critical approval associated with literature from the canon, for they transmediate older poems but not contemporary poetry. In a very visual and concise way, Mora-Rioja thus summarises and closes his study by providing a critical analysis of the quantitative data gathered.

The book offers six appendixes featuring different tables listing the corpus divided into transformation categories, into chronological order or country of origin, as well as further cases of transformation of poetry into metal music.

All in all, Mora-Rioja does not settle for merely providing an insightful and innovative study of the relationship between poetry and heavy metal. On the contrary, he transcends that by describing how the taxonomy employed could be further extended to other cases of adaptation and appropriation to become aware of its intrinsic value and validity. *Poetry in English and Metal Music* is, thus, a rich source of new perspectives and inspiration for scholars working on adaptation studies. The major strength of this publication lies in the way in which it fills a gap in current scholarship, especially since most adaptation studies tend to focus on and cultural products other than poetry.

Hoping to bridge adaptation studies and metal studies, Mora-Rioja successfully provides us with a highly valuable contribution that paves the way for further research on the topic of the connections between literature and music. This is a welcome and resourceful contribution to this very complex and engaging topic.

Works Cited

Sederholm, Carl H. "That Vexing Power of Perverseness: Approaching Heavy Metal Adaptations of Poe." *Adapting Poe: Re-Imaginings in Popular Culture*, edited by Denis R. Perry and Carl H. Sederholm, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 193-206.

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