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Natalie Fritz and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger (eds.)

Religion and Popular Music

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JOURNAL FOR RELIGION, FILM AND MEDIA

JRFM is a peer-reviewed, open-access, online publication. It offers a platform for scholarly research in the broad field of religion and media, with a particular interest in audiovisual and interactive forms of communication. It engages with the challenges arising from the dynamic development of media technologies and their interaction with religion.

JRFM publishes peer-reviewed articles in English that focus on visual and audiovisual media, feature film, documentary, advertising, interactive internet-based media and other forms of communication in their interdependencies with contemporary or historical forms of religion. It critically reflects on theories and methods, studies on intermediality, phenomenological and comparative approaches to media and religion across different cultures and periods. The main focus lies on contemporary phenomena, but diachronic analysis of the interaction between religion, film and media is also promoted as an essential facet of study.

JRFM is edited by a network of international film, media and religion experts from different countries and with professional experience in research, teaching and publishing in an interdisciplinary setting, linking perspectives from the study of religion and theology, film, media, visual and cultural studies, and sociology. It emerges from the cooperation between different institutions in Europe, particularly the University of Graz and the University of Zurich, and is published in cooperation with Schüren publishing house, Marburg (Germany). It is an online, open-access publication with print-on-demand as an option. It appears twice a year in May and November and encompasses generally 4–6 articles.

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Natalie Fritz and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger

"You Need a Big God"

Fascinating Interactions between Music and Religion

PRELUDE

Abstract

The interactions between popular music and religion are manyfold and highly complex. Popular music as an important part of popular culture is a means of communication. Music can transmit not only emotions and a sense of community but also religious knowledge, knowledge that leaves diverse traces in different times and places. In the end, whether we extract religious meaning from popular music and what that meaning is depend on our background and on our capacity to contextualise symbols, motives and narratives – and also on the media used to convey these references. By analysing Florence + The Machines song "Big God" and its music video we will address some of the questions that arise while working in the field of popular music and religion.

Keywords

Popular Music, Florence + the Machine, Religion, Meaning Making, Audio-Visual Media, Big God, Culture

Biographies

Natalie Fritz holds a Ph.D in the Study of Religions. Her research interests focus on the various interactions between media and religion. She currently works as a journalist at the Catholic Media Centre in Zurich and teaches media ethics at the universities of applied sciences in Chur and Berne.

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Fig. 1: The veiled women. Music video still from Big God, Florence + The Machine, 00:00:04.

Fig. 2: The women lift their hands, perhaps in an act of adoration. Music video still from Big God, Florence + The Machine, 00:00:14.

Motionless and colourful, a number of women stand in a black void, their reflections appearing in the water at their feet (fig. 1). All but the woman in the centre are veiled in transparent chiffon; the unveiled woman wears a nude-coloured silk dressing gown and underwear. We hear the howling of the wind, then percussion; a piano tune starts as the camera continues to zoom in. The women begin to move their hands towards the black sky (or heaven?) but then let them sink down onto their foreheads in a position of despair (fig. 2).

Fig. 3: What do the women receive? Music video still from Big God, Florence + The Machine, 00:00:46.

"You need a big god, big enough to hold your love", laments Florence Welch, the unveiled woman, singer in the British indie rock band Florence + The Machine, and then adds, "You need a big god, big enough to fill you up".[1] And while her voice still modulates the "up", she takes several deep breaths and opens her arms, as if to signal physically her willingness to receive whatever comes (fig. 3).

The Polysemy of Feeling Ghosted, or the Context Produces Meaning

Florence Welch stated in an interview that the song "Big God" was inspired by the fact that she had been ghosted, that her (text) messages to someone she liked had gone entirely unanswered.[2] "To be ghosted" is a relatively new term, used in relation to social media interactions to describe being ignored by someone loved or well-liked. As the title of the song and the video make

1 "Big God" is a song from the album *High as Hope* by Florence + The Machine (GB/US 2018, Virgin EMI; Republic). The lyrics of "Big God" can be read while watching the music video on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kIrRooQwuk [accessed 12 August 2020].

2 See Ryzik 2018; Melena Ryzik's interview with Florence Welch.

evident, however, this song is not just concerned with the feeling of being unloved; it has to do with women, with (female) strength and with religion and a transcendence we may not initially recognise.

Meaning, we are all well aware, is not permanent and fixed; it is process that will depend, for example, on the artist's background and its impact on a specific artwork and on the receiver's context.[3] Knowing that Florence + The Machine tend to compose complex and polysemous songs, we want to explore some of the possibilities "Big God" offers the willing interpreter with a particular interest in exploring interactions between popular music and religion. But first let us look briefly at relevant research on religion and popular music and define some of the terms we will use in this Prelude.

Over the past 20 years, much insightful research has been published on the interrelation of religion and popular music.[4] These include studies providing an overview of the field, as well as investigations of specific musical genres or religious traditions.[5] The Issue at hand fits into this growing tradition of research. But how can we systematise studies in the broad field of religion and popular music? John C. Lyden argues with a focus on popular culture that the conjunction *and* in this constellation marks a variety of perspectives on the links between religion *and* popular culture.[6] Lyden explains these interrelations on the basis of four interrelated categories in research that were established by Bruce David Forbes:[7] "religion in popular culture", "popular culture in religion", "popular culture as religion" and "religion and popular culture in dialogue". In the first category he places the investigation of the use of religious symbols and motifs in popular culture, while, conversely, the second perspective starts with religion and investigates how popular cultural

3 "Producing meaning depends on the practice of interpretation, and interpretation is sustained by us actively using the code – encoding, putting things into the code – and by the person at the other end interpreting or decoding the meaning […] But note that, because meanings are always changing and slipping, codes operate more like social conventions than like fixed laws or unbreakable rules. As meanings shift and slide, so inevitably the codes of a culture imperceptibly change" (Hall 2013, 45).

4 Recent examples include, with a broad view: Moberg/Partridge 2017a; Schlegelmilch 2017; Bossius/Häger/Kahn-Harris 2011, with case studies: Heinen 2017; Nava 2017; Barzel 2015; Miller/Pinn/Freeman 2015; Moberg 2015.

5 Bloomsbury has a series on this topic: the Bloomsbury Studies in Religion and Popular Music.

6 Lyden 2015, 15–17.

7 Forbes 2000. For these categories adapted to religion and popular music: Moberg/Partridge 2017b, 1–3.

processes are integrated into religious traditions and world views. Research in the third category asks how popular culture can become "religion", for example by making transcendental experiences possible or by expressing spiritual feelings. The fourth category has a dialogical basis and explores, for example, how religious groups and popular musicians debate current issues, work together or fight each other or how religion and popular music can be in dialogue on the level of media.

These four categories are helpful for systematising the main lines of the history of research. Even if they do not capture the complexity of empirical interrelations of religion and popular culture, they are useful guidelines for the classification of research perspectives. The contributions to this issue touch on all four of these perspectives, although not always to the same extent. In her contribution, Angela Sue Sawyer brings a song by Tracy Chapman and a biblical passage into an ecofeminist dialogue. Reinhard Kopanski explores two revealing case studies of how popular music is used to express Christian worldviews. And Lavinia Pflugfelder elaborates bricolages of religious motifs in heavy metal video clips.

The editor's approach considers religion as a complex communication system that interacts on diverse levels with other systems (e.g. economy, politics) of a specific culture and provides a universal orientation.[8] As a product of a specific culture, religious symbols or narratives cannot be fully understood without involving the contexts in which they are produced, distributed and perceived.[9] In addition to written or spoken language, gesture and images, music is another means used by religion to transmit a specific world view with its norms and values. And vice versa, these means use religious motives, symbols and narratives, with agents, religion and the respective means of communication therefore refreshing a cultural imaginary[10] by constantly setting and resetting meaning.

8 "Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 2004, 4). See also Stolz 2001, 33.

9 The concept of the "circuit of culture" is a fruitful starting point for analysing cultural products and artefacts. This cultural studies approach suggests we analyse a product within a complex circuit of production, distribution, perception and individual interpretation to be able to understand its meaning at a specific time within a specific group. See Du Gay et al. 1997.

10 See e.g. Pezzoli-Olgiati 2015.

In this issue, we focus on popular music and define it as part of popular culture. In everyday language, popular culture is still placed in tense relationship with something called "high culture". In this context, popular culture is associated with a mass and globalised market, while high culture is associated with an educated and/or, depending on the perspective, bourgeois context. But as John C. Lyden points out, it's not that simple.[11] Even if one wants to retain such a simple dichotomy, one must recognise that its transitions are fluid: "Jazz might have begun as a popular art form, but it soon became so sophisticated that the majority of the population lost interest in it, and now it is primarily played and studied more in academic settings than in nightclubs."[12]

We take popular music to be part of popular culture. Popular music is thus a form of cultural communication. It can legitimise power and dominant discourses, but it can also question them – which is especially interesting in relation to religion.

The inclusion of references to religious texts or persons is not at all unusual in many popular genres, but because these references have been separated from their original context, we, the audience, perceive them differently or may even miss cues when we hear a song for the first time. But still, even if unconsciously, we learn a lot about the cultural and religious background as we listen to popular music of all sorts, be it from the sound, the melody or the lyrics.

Popular music can transmit not only emotions and a sense of community but also religious knowledge, knowledge that leaves diverse traces in different times and places. In the end, whether we extract religious meaning from popular music and what that meaning is depend on our background and on our capacity to contextualise symbols, motives and narratives – and also on the media used to convey these references.[13]

The complexities of these interrelations of religion and popular music are illustrated by an analysis of our example: the music video for the song "Big God".

11 Lyden 2015, 13.

12 Lyden 2015, 13.

13 See Belting 2011, 9–62, especially the discourse about the difference between image and media.

It's All About Composition
Lyrics, Images and Emotions in BIG GOD

"You keep me up at night / to my messages, you do not reply" – as noted, on a first level the lyrics of "Big God" seem to address feelings of rejection and emptiness, but, when we add in the video's dance performance[14] and the choice of words and metaphors, second and third levels of meaning emerge. Even as we describe the music video closely, analyse it and gather further information to contextualise it, we realise that the emotional effect of the music video and its criticism lies in the abundance of interactions between sound, text, body and audiovisual medium – and all the explicit and implicit references to religion.

A Female Jesus? Emphasising Emotions in Music Videos

We can read Florence's performance as an almost-love story gone bad. We see a woman's emancipation from feelings of unworthiness as she gathers her shattered self, a progression visualised through the other women, who dance with her and at the end disappear – or better, reconnect – leaving a still injured but now whole and more mature person. This self-healing is not easy: "Sometimes I think it's getting better, and then it gets much worse, is it just part of the process? Well, Jesus Christ, it hurts."

The pain our protagonist, Florence, feels is visualised by all of the women, including Florence herself in their midst, who trudge desperately through the pond on their knees until she pronounces the words "Jesus Christ, it hurts." Then the women fall into the water as if deadly wounded. Only Florence rises in this moment, suggesting she has gone through the worst and now the healing can begin (fig. 4). After a struggle with the situation and, more significantly, with herself, Florence frees herself from the idea that she is precious only because another person says so. Interestingly, as Florence repeats the line "Jesus Christ, it hurts", the other women (or parts of Florence's shattered self) are lifted up and then dangle like puppets above her head (fig. 5). While in the background we hear a distant "Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, it hurts", we see Florence spreading her arms like wings … or like Jesus on the cross.

14 British dancer and choreographer Akram Khan worked out the choreography; the video was directed by American photographer and director Autumn de Wilde. See Reed 2018.

Fig. 4: Getting better after profound sadness. Music video still from Big God, Florence + The Machine, 00:01:57.

We see Florence go through the most extreme emotional depths, where the pain is almost unbearable, but even there hope rises, and she finds a way out of the pain (fig. 6) and to a new strength.

At the end, Florence sits in the water alone, her shattered self whole again. She is very wet after a short dive through the water, and touches her still intact body with a certain astonishment and sensitivity. A new chapter of self love and self esteem can begin. She is blessed and in a sense has baptised herself. Throughout this whole ceremony of rebirth, her gaze is directed upwards.

The interaction of the textual characterisation of an emotion and its visual representation in Big God is clearly religiously charged. The music video's choreography highlights emotional aspects of the song's lyrics by visualising them. Florence is not only visually but also metaphorically almost naked – she cannot hide her feelings beneath her clothes, which are almost transparent and actually underwear. This music video gives us a multidimensional representation of emotions, as pure as it gets.

Art historian Hans Belting proposes that an image (understood in a broad sense) does not come from nowhere but has its roots in our cultural imaginary, which has been fed over the centuries with vast numbers of images, which are more or less popular depending on the socio-political situation.[15]

15 "But it is not at all obvious what we mean when we refer to a 'new' image, for all past images were once new. Some may seem new because they employ a new medium or

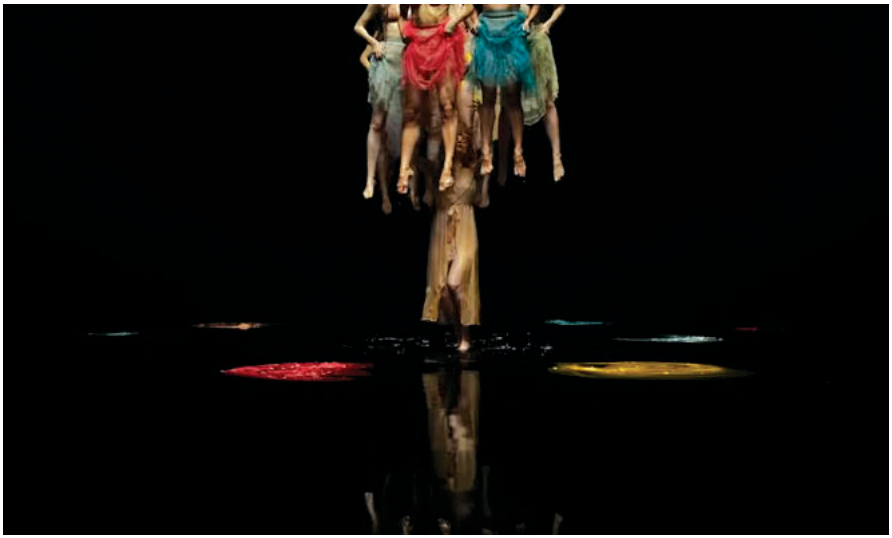

Fig. 5: Rising from the pain. Music video still from Big God, Florence + The Machine, 00:02:12.

Fig. 6: The way out of the pain. Music video still from Big God, Florence + The Machine, 00:02:17.

respond to a new collective perception" (Belting 2011, 36). Here Belting elaborates Warburg's idea of recurrent motives and representational strategies and focuses on how the qualities of a specific media – that used to transmit an image – shape the perception of the beholder.

All the images we see are in the end entangled with the vital image repertoire we have saved within us, in our human bodies. Each image is located within our bodies, with which we perceive what is external to our body, adjusting (or contextualising) what we see with what we already know.

When Florence + The Machine not only sing of a "Big God" and call Jesus by name but also highlight emotional aspects of the song's lyrics with subtle but evident references to religious imagery (cross, rebirth, baptism), we can conclude that the presence of religion is not by accident; it is intended to direct the affective impact of the song.

The "Body" of the Song

The female body is central to the representation of emotion in the music video for "Big God". Florence's body is far more than just an instrument used to articulate words and thereby shape the melody. Her voice is incredibly expressive, as she whispers, sings, cries and croaks, but so too is her physical presence, particularly the way she moves her body. In squatting, flexing and trudging with the other women through the water, she expresses anger, hope, vulnerability and relief. The female body conveys not only words but also images. Images are created by the moving bodies, the colours and the light and are representations of emotions which are part of our common imaginary.

The music video of Big God brings us words as well as images. The lyrics are polysemous: they are about a woman feeling rejected by someone she feels close to, but can also be read as a woman's fervent plea to God to answer her prayers and requests. Her words "To my messages, you do not reply" may be directed to a real person, but they could also be for a transcendent being. Or for both. In her despair and loneliness Florence returns to God, even though she does not seem sure of her faith. The line "I still like you the most / You'll always be my favourite ghost" may likewise refer to her ex-love and also to a transcendent counterpart, to whom she cannot connect. She stomps in the water, without orientation or destination. There must be a "big God", but she evidently cannot see him/her/it. The unveiling of the women, which happens with the fading of the word "ghost", can be read symbolically, as her opening her eyes and finding a way to get through this on her own, almost a visual injunction to pull herself together. With an almost angry energy she begins to struggle against the pain, and when she cries out, "Jesus Christ, it hurts", the listener might recall Jesus on the cross as he cried out to his father in his darkest hour (Matt. 27:46). This connotation is reinforced by the visualisation

of Florence under the female puppets with her arms spread out (fig. 6), as if she is hanging on a cross.

At the end, when we see Florence finding a way through her pain, we may assume that she has found her "big god", who can replenish her. She needs to love herself before she can love and be loved. The lines "You need a big god / big enough to hold your love / You need a big god / big enough to fill you up" can be read not only as a spiritual longing for a sense of life and a feeling of being complete, but also as individual insight: she has so much to give and wants to receive an equal love, and the faithful "receive" if they are open and ready to let another "see the true you". In the music video for "Big God" we see the women's bodies move beneath the almost transparent fabric, and we see Florence touch herself with a naïve, but still erotic fascination. This context makes evident the ambiguity of the line "big enough to fill you up" – is a spiritual or physical hunger to be satisfied, or is she singing of a woman's sexual hunger or longing, which she dares to pronounce and at the end feeds by touching her own body. She has overcome her longing for a transcendent or physical other who completes her, and she has emancipated herself metaphorically from a patriarchal system that sees women as passive receivers and not as agents. Director Autumn de Wilde based the composition of the dancing women on a painting by Francisco de Goya called *Vuelo de brujas* (*Witches Flight*, 1797/98, oil on canvas), seeking to show the strength of women by referring to imagery of witches – strong, unconventional women with knowledge and often persecuted by (male) authorities.[16]

When Florence sings at the end, "Shower your affection / let it rain on me / And pull down the mountain / drag your cities to the sea" and softly touches her own body, we realise that she needs no man or god at all, for she is able to satisfy herself physically and mentally. Her new confidence is based on her new strength which grew during the process of healing the trauma of being abandoned. She needs no other person, no god, to feel safe and strong. The reference to Psalm 46:2, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea" (KJV),[17] can thus be understood in terms of self-empowerment. And, remaining in this biblical context, her self confidence has grown until it is strong enough to metaphorically move mountains: "Jesus answered and said unto

16 For more information about the production of the music video by de Wildes, see Lanigan 2018, and the analysis The Pop Song Professor 2018.

17 See also Matt. 17:20.

them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Matt. 21:21).

These verbal references to the Bible provoke specific images in the minds of the audience, intensifying the vision of a double female emancipation – emancipation from the pain caused by rejection by an "other", and emancipation from the idea of needing an "other", whether transcendent or human, to feel whole and "filled" with love.

Florence has survived the trauma with an intact body and although she still feels vulnerable, she is stronger than before, knowing now what she is able to endure and that she can find strength in herself.

Religious Imaginary and Popular Music

Planning this issue was a fascinating multimedia experience. Questions ranged across how music can be adequately presented in an open access online journal and how "popular music" can be defined. The issue also explores diverse music genres, from Christian rock to metal and flamenco, all of which in some way interact with religion. We were surprised to receive no articles on religiously charged opera libretti, but integrate this last genre of popular music in structuring this issue as an online-journal libretto. Right now, you are reading the *Prelude*, which introduces some of the main arguments. Each *Act*, or thematic article, is followed by an *Interlude*, a short music video review by a younger scholar which focuses on a specific religious aspect in a music video. The section concludes with a *Postlude*, which offers a short synthesis and considers where we might go next.

Act One, Angela Sue Sawyer's article "Comfort the Waste Places, Defend the Violated Earth", opens the issue with a ecofeminist interpretation of Tracy Chapman's song "The Rape of the World" and the biblical passage at Isaiah 52:1–52:6. Sawyer shows how in the song lyrics and the scriptural text, overlapping metaphorical references to motherhood, sexual violence and environmental consequences of human actions are developed, encouraging us consider ecological questions, theology and the power of women.

Act Two, with the title "What makes Popular Christian Music 'Popular'?", by Reinhard Kopanski, compares two successful projects in Christian popular music: one by the US-American artist Lauren Daigle and one by the German music group Koenige & Priester. Kopanski explores how religious worldviews

are formed in Christian popular music and how a religious message is communicated without diminishing the broad appeal of the songs.

In Act Three, "Heavy Metal Bricolage", Lavinia Pflugfelder explores the complex reception of religious imagery and "religionised" visual language in Heavy Metal and especially Extreme Metal videoclips. She argues that these clips develop a religious language and a Metal-specific visual programme that uses and combines imaginary from different religious traditions.

The Interludes each draw on a YouTube videoclip. They discuss Lady Gaga's Judas (Katharina Luise Merkert), Rosalía's Aunque es de noche (Eva Meienberg) and Dorian Electra's Adam & Steve (Yannick Schlote).

To allow the reader to experience the mediality of the music and the virtual journal, we have added QR-codes for the music videos in the Interludes, and provide URLs for the platforms for the videos cited in the Acts. We stronger encourage readers to watch the music videos analysed in the short reviews, and also recommend they listen to songs and watch videos mentioned in the articles. The full possibilities of the media are evident when we hear the melody, comprehend the lyrics and see how music is visualised for a broad public.

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ACT ONE

Comfort the Waste Places, Defend the Violated Earth

An Ecofeminist Reading of Isaiah 51:1–52:6 and Tracy Chapman's Song "The Rape of the World"

Abstract

This article compares the personification of Zion in Isaiah 51:1–52:6 as a mother and daughter with Tracy Chapman's 1995 song "The Rape of the World", where the earth is personified as a mother. These works share the power of metaphor in prophecy, poetry, and song to provoke political and social activism in multiple areas of injustice, using rape imagery in different ways. Both pieces portray the negative effects of human activity on the earth, whether by commercial activity or war. The environmental impact of the desolation of the earth during the Babylonian exile depicted in Deutero-Isaiah is viewed through the lens of ecological criticism. The earth itself has a voice in both Chapman's and Isaiah's words.

Keywords

Ecological Criticism, Ecofeminism, Zion, Deutero-Isaiah, Tracy Chapman, Rape, Political Activism, Pop Music, Personification

Biography

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Ecological Criticism

This article engages in a creative intertextual encounter between a pop-cultural song and a biblical passage.[1] An ecofeminist reading that compares Tracy Chapman's song "The Rape of the World" with Isaiah 51:1–52:6 seeks to find commonalities and intersections between the modern concerns Chapman invokes and Deutero-Isaiah's ancient proclamation of salvation. Placing the earth at the centre of the conversation about gendered aspects of both the song and the biblical text allows us to be sensitive to what Elaine Wainwright refers to as the "ecological texture" of both texts and "ecological thinking".[2] In Deutero-Isaiah, land as well as people are victims of war. Their relationship and future are intricately bound up with one another. The primary concern of Chapman's song is raising awareness of environmental catastrophe via a metaphor of a mother being raped. I would argue that Isaiah 51:1–52:6 does not share Chapman's primary concern for the environment. However, the environment is a significant part of a broader concern for an exiled people being implored to return to their home and about the very real consequences of war for the physical environment to which they are returning. My analysis of Isaiah 51:1–52:6 seeks both a transformative reading of Chapman's song, by bringing it into dialogue with the biblical text, and a broader awareness of the biblical text's context in today's current climate emergency.

Over the past few decades, a variety of scholarly theological responses to ecological concerns have emerged. Ecotheology takes seriously the complicity of Christianity in the ecological crisis, as articulated initially in Lynn White Jr's frequently cited article.[3] This notion stems from a sense of anthropocentric superiority in the Christian tradition and a view of creation as subject to domination, perspectives which have had disastrous consequences for the earth. The most influential ecological response in biblical studies is the Earth Bible Project, which has produced a set of key principles and multiple publications and has been closely associated with the Society of Biblical Literature ecological hermeneutics sessions.[4] Empathy and identification are core aspects

1 This article was presented as a paper at the 2019 International Society of Biblical Literature conference in Rome and has been revised for the purposes of this journal.

2 Wainwright 2012, 280–304.

3 White Jr 1967, 1203–1207.

4 Habel 2008, 1–8; Habel 2009; Habel 2013, 39–58. For a list of publications associated with the Earth Bible, see Norman Habel n. d. [accessed 16 September 2020].

of the Earth Bible Project.[5] It is characterised by suspicion about the biblical text and alignment with liberation and feminist hermeneutics. The Earth Bible Project has been critiqued for risking "ethnocentrism" and "anachronism", with Hilary Marlow suggesting its underlying ideology is problematic and its method somewhat restrictive.[6] She contends the Earth Bible Project approach may have the unintended consequence "of inviting rejection of the biblical text by those who consider it to be irrelevant in today's world", and notes, "it may also encourage the rejection of concern for the environment by those for whom the Bible carries authority as sacred scripture".[7] The Exeter Project (Sheffield University) has offered a different approach than the Earth Bible Project by affirming the authority of the biblical text, arguing for "an attempt to construct an ecological theology which, while innovative, is nonetheless coherent (and in dialogue) with a scripturally shaped Christian orthodoxy".[8] More recently Tina Nilsen and Anna Solevåg have made a case for using the Earth Charter (originating from the United Nations) as the base of their *ecolonial* approach, an interdisciplinary combination of ecological and postcolonial hermeneutics.[9] Although each of these developments is informative, the Earth Bible Project principles and the connection with feminist criticism have proven most fruitful for this article.

An ecofeminist reading, as Wainwright explains, "makes explicit the interconnection between the violence against, and the exploitation and degradation of both women and the Earth".[10] The coincidental emergence of ecological and feminist studies, along with related ecofeminist and ecojustice concerns, has been long explored, with tropes of sexual violence used to express ecological degradation. The conflation of mother Earth and mother Nature in environmental discourse "is widespread and generally accepted without question", writes Tzeporah Berman.[11] These associations come with assumptions about women and the role of mothers in society. These notions, in turn, are precisely what makes a metaphor of earth-as-mother coherent, enabling multivalent but also ambiguous possibilities.[12] Combining overlapping met-

5 Habel 2008, 1–5.
6 Marlow 2009, 91.
7 Marlow 2009, 94.
8 Horrell 2010, 8–9.
9 Nilsen/Solevåg 2016, 665.
10 Wainwright 2000, 162.
11 Berman 1994, 173–178.
12 Dille 2004, chap. 1.

aphors (earth as mother, ecological destruction as rape) is variously useful and unhelpful in awakening consciousness and action in both ecology and feminism. Early connections between these interests stemmed from contexts of war, as Heather Eaton describes for the 1970s:

> during the invasion of Vietnam, the United States used Agent Orange to defoliate the Vietnamese landscape. This atrocious activity became merged with the image of raped/despoiled women and napalm burnt/scarred children. This sparked anti-war protests that linked women campaigning against militarist technologies, sexual assault and devastating ruin of the natural world.[13]

Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests a connection between ecology and feminism is based on the domains of women's work, child bearing, and child rearing, explaining that "deep ecology … examines the symbolic, psychological, and ethical patterns of destructive relations of humans with nature and how to replace this with a life-affirming culture".[14] Critique of this relationship relates to dualisms perpetuated by linking nature, earth, and mother. Marlow suggests there is a lack of data and evidence to show feminine links to nature.[15]

A reliance on images of ecological degradation and feminist concerns via a rape metaphor is objected to because of its essentialist appropriation.[16] A rape metaphor entails power and violence.[17] Eaton explains, "Ecofeminists see domination as a core phenomenon at the ideological and material roots of the women/nature nexus."[18] They seek to exchange this power dynamic for what Ruether describes as "mutual interdependency".[19] The levels of domination of the earth are perhaps on a global scale not previously seen, with the threat of nuclear weapons, highly mechanised forms of mining, and industrialised processing of finite resources. As Sigridur Gudmarsdottir explains,

> When the earth is declared a body, violated by human consumption and greed, powerful transformations of language take place. On the one hand,

13 Eaton 2005, 13.
14 Ruether 1994, 13.
15 Marlow 2009, 91.
16 Gudmarsdottir 2010, 208; Berman 1994, 177.
17 Kyung 1994, 176; Berman 1994.
18 Eaton 2005, 59.
19 Ruether 1994, 21.

> symbolic connections between nature and women are affirmed; on the other the experience of sexual violence that women especially suffer are addressed and intensified to a cosmic scale.[20]

Another major critique of the deployment of a rape metaphor to depict ecological disaster relates to its using passive victim language rather than featuring women as "figures of power, resilient survivors".[21] We might see Zion's agency emphasised in the call for her to play an active role in her own freedom in Isaiah 52:1–2. Zion is not blamed in Deutero-Isaiah for her situation, distinct from other prophetic uses of a rape metaphor.[22] Mother Earth's strength is more implicitly evident in Chapman's song in Earth's having given birth to all of humanity.

Whilst we can appreciate the risks in using rape metaphors, by avoiding these images we downplay their shock value. By not engaging with the references to rape in the song and the passage, we potentially remove them from conversation, from front of mind. Interrogation of the imagery needs to include challenging derogatory assumptions within it, particularly in the case of the biblical text, where rape metaphors emerged in patriarchal and androcentric cultures.[23]

"The Rape of the World"

The lyrics of Tracy Chapman's 1995 song "The Rape of the World" personify the earth as a mother being stripped, raped, beaten, and raised falsely as a queen.[24] Chapman's work connects issues of class, race, gender, religion, sexuality, violence, poverty justice, and politics. The intermingling of reggae, African, and pop and rock sounds with the civil rights movement is evidenced in her music.[25] As womanist scholar Cheryl Kirk-Duggan relates, Chapman's blues style

20 Gudmarsdottir 2010, 206.

21 Gudmarsdottir 2010, 220.

22 Stone 1992, 85–99; Darr 1994, 85–123. See Isa. 47 for the blaming of Babylon for her own sexual humiliation.

23 Gudmarsdottir 2010, 220.

24 The song is from the album *New Beginning* (Tracy Chapman, US 1995, Elektra). To hear the song and read the lyrics see the following YouTube link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPrGB-1lYkg [accessed 16/09/2020].

25 Whiteley 2000.

> helps make personal and social issues public … Chapman sings about love, fidelity, self-actualisation, freedom, revolution, conflict, ecology, racism, spirituality, theology, time, life and death, dehumanization, women's issues, and everyday personal struggles contextualized by social constraints and oppression.[26]

Many of Chapman's songs have an upbeat tempo that contrasts with deeply sad lyrics, demonstrating the social realities of poverty, violent relationships, human greed, responsibilities, and hope. The style of the music in "The Rape of the World" – beginning with piano, then guitar and drums that beat like a quiet but insistent tribal call or even rhythmic motherly heartbeat, then with piano reintroduced – is in stark contrast to the disturbing words, producing a cognitive dissonance.

Physical imagery of cities, of concrete and steel, is interspersed with actions of violation relating to ecological degradation such as mining. Empire and the extraction of resources for the military-industrial complex are visioned as regress. The "sun shining hotter" implies global warming. The human role in ecological crisis is decried by labelling the actions as "criminal", using the theologically loaded term "sinful". The song calls *all* people to respond and testify to the actions that exploit the earth, a call that tells us we are "witnesses" and therefore culpable if we do not intervene. Reliance on earth's resources demonstrates our vulnerability when they are destroyed. Human actions upon the earth are depicted as cataclysmic, causing the "beginning of the end", presumably of the world. The interconnectedness of creation is evidenced, a key facet of ecological criticism. When one part is destroyed or degraded, all are ultimately affected.

Chapman's personification works on commonplace notions of relationship to a mother, on our possible dependence on our mother for our life (via birth), ongoing health and survival. The song builds a portrait of a mother by calling on imagery of birth, use of terms such as "her", and depictions related to dressing, such as the crowning of a queen and clothing. She can be cut, beaten, and poisoned as well as sexually violated. These are images associated with a real person, with a person's body and emotions. Personification is an effective literary and rhetorical tool because of the personal connection evoked in the hearer. By calling on our eyes and ears, it assumes we can see her and hear her. Ecological criticism problematises the reliance on anthro-

26 Kirk-Duggan 1997, 150.

pomorphic representations of earth which play to human-centred images in order to see people care for the earth. Chapman's song gives the earth its own cries, but in human form.

There is a powerful prophetic preaching message inherent in Chapman's lyrics.[27] Language reminiscent of Isaiah's emphatic call to hear, to see, and to do something about the knowledge of an injustice (Isa. 40:21; 41:1; 51:1, 4, 7) resounds in political activism. The physicality of the response of standing and testifying at the end of Chapman's song is contrasted with the passivity of the first verse, where "we" are standing but only watching the rape. The chorus returns to the "Mother of us all" characterisation to remind us what this song is about. There is a jolting pause after "stripped mined" and "clear cut", using "word painting" to get across a message, a common device in Chapman's music.[28] The lyrics juxtapose positive imagery with negative realities: "sunshine" is positive, but it is hotter than ever before; "crowned her queen" is positive, but the power imagery is tainted by its association with "cities of concrete and steel". Sheila Whiteley cites Heidi Safia Mirza's exploration of the presentation of the black woman throughout history as fitting with Chapman's work:

> what we see is how she is permitted to appear. We see glimpses of her as she is produced and created for the sustenance of the patriarchal, colonial and now post-colonial discourse … in her representation she is without agency, without self-determination, a passive victim, waiting to be inscribed with meaning from those who wish to gaze upon her and name her. She is an object; not the subject of her story.[29]

The representation of the world in Chapman's song could also include these entailments of lack of agency and passivity, requiring witness intervention for the world to be rescued. The representation is limited and controlled.

Chapman's song invokes warlike aspects of the destruction, linking rape and violence (beating) with ecological devastation. The second major stanza talks of "bombs exploded underground", a reference to mining practices that correlates with nuclear bomb testing, which also has an ecological impact via ongoing radiation damage. The assault on Zion in Deutero-Isaiah occurs in the context of military violence.

27 Kirk-Duggan describes how many African American blues and gospel songs provide sermon-like messages of hope and transformative possibilities. Kirk-Duggan 1997, 140–166.

28 Whiteley 2000, 176.

29 Cited in Whiteley 2000, 173.

Isaiah 51:1–52:6

The earth and gendered ecological aspects in Deutero-Isaiah are highlighted when the passage is read in conversation with Chapman's song. Although this article compares two pieces of work to explore their environmental potential, their different formats need to be acknowledged. The lyrics of Tracy Chapman's song are primarily encountered along with its accompanying music, as is the intention for a pop song. The musical melody, rhythm, and style can generate emotional and physical engagement. If Isaiah 51 was originally composed as a song of Zion, it remains for us today only in poetic form.[30] Modern composers have found Isaiah rich in musical potential, but for the purposes of this article my engagement with Isaiah 51 is primarily textual, related to its imagery and language.[31]

A hermeneutic of suspicion is conscious of Deutero-Isaiah's anthropocentric bias and its theological approach to the earth, but I consider this text holds great ecofeminist potential when it is read with a hermeneutic of identification and retrieval that makes the earth the subject.[32] Discourse analysis reveals multiple voices in the oracles of Isaiah 51–52, possibly rhetorically representing different responses to the exile.[33] Isaiah 51 also evidences double-voicing, to use a Bhaktinian term, such as in 51:23, where we see the voice of YHWH speaking in the voice of Zion's tormentors.[34] Interestingly, Zion herself does not speak in these chapters (other than in Isa. 49:14); neither does the world in Chapman's song (although she apparently cries). The prophet takes on the voice of YHWH, and these voices (as well as the narrator) coalesce throughout the passage. Sometimes YHWH's voice is announced via the messenger formula (51:22; 52:3, 4). More often YHWH can be assumed to be speaking in the first person (51:1–2, 4–7, 12, 15), and YHWH is also addressed in the third person (51:3, 9–10, 17).

30 Isaiah's complex composition history is beyond the scope of this paper. There are strong arguments for Deutero-Isaiah's general dramatic form. See van der Woude 2005, 149–173. Music is imbedded in this passage via the reference to singing in Zion in Isa. 51:3 and a call for the redeemed to sing in Isa. 51:11.

31 John Sawyer explores Isaiah's rich reception history including its appropriation in art, literature, and music. Sawyer, 1996, chap. 9.

32 Habel 2008, 4.

33 Tull Willey 1997, 3, 55, and chap. 2.

34 On double-voicing see Green 2000, 35–43, 47–53. This idea is central to Bakhtin's literary criticism and has appeal for postcolonial approaches to biblical texts with notions of discourses of power and resistance.

Similes and metaphors of creation and human alternate throughout the passage in depicting one another, creating a fluid movement. First, exiles are reminded they are "cut from the rock" (51:1) and hewn from the "quarry", geological imagery depicting ancestral connection to their father Abraham. Birth language links them to Sarah as presumed mother, not to the World as in Chapman's song. In 51:3 the imagery of Zion's ruins, deserts, and waste places (the destroyed city, as well as other locations in Judah) will be turned to be like Eden and gardens.[35] The islands or coastlands are personified, told to "wait" in 51:5. Then we are taken back to the people's direct point of view as they are implored to look to the heavens, depicted in a simile as vanishing like smoke, and the earth, which will wear out like a garment, taking a human form of clothing. The clothing motif extends throughout this chapter into both Zion's and YHWH's depictions. The people are equated with flies and creatures, assuming fragility. In verse 8 another insect is referenced, the moth, which, despite its small size, is destructive to the garment. The garment previously related to the earth's being worn out now represents people being eaten, picked up in the idea of the worm eating the wool. By verse 12 people are depicted as grass. The Creator YHWH, who made these feeble humans, has power over creation. Rhetorical persuasion asserts that logically people are *not* to be afraid of other humans because of their fragility, which is in contrast to YHWH's power and deliverance. The earth as creation is both demeaned and elevated in these passages, spoken about, spoken to, or used. Isaiah 51–52 presents creation as powerful and valuable, violated but also a tool. YHWH as creator-redeemer, combined in unique formations in Deutero-Isaiah, is portrayed as in control of chaos (Isa. 51:9; cf. Gen. 2).[36] The depiction taps into the Exodus story, with the monster Rahab, representing Egypt, cut down and the sea overpowered by the arm of the Lord.

Isaiah 51–52 continues Deutero-Isaiah's development of the portrayal of Zion's journey with her presentation as a mother and daughter in various guises, drunken, bereaved, rape victim, and queen. Zion is a multifaceted symbolic poetic representation of an exiled people, an idea as well as a geographic location that has been destroyed by invasion and war.[37] In Isaiah 51:17–52:2 Zion's personification is more sharply drawn, with her depiction as a bride who has been

35 Other Eden references in the Hebrew Bible make similar comparisons between the lush Eden and the desert (cf. Joel 2:3; Ezek. 36:35; Isa. 5:6; Lev. 26:31).

36 Stuhlmueller 1970.

37 On the background of Zion in the Hebrew Bible representing geographic location, symbol, and ideology see Levenson 1985; Ollenburger 1987. Regarding Deutero-Isaiah's varied representations of Zion see Sawyer 1989, 89–107; O'Connor 1999, 281–294.

violated and language and imagery of her ruin and desolation. The use of mother and child imagery in 51:18–20 may have spoken directly to the acute pain of the loss of children in the exilic community. Zion's powerlessness and victim state are challenged in Isaiah 51:23–52:2, where she is urged to free *herself* from her slavery, whereas in Chapman's song the hearer is to act on their mother's behalf. Zion's personification as a woman at once separates her from and identifies her with creation, allowing the people in exile to identify Zion's suffering with their own suffering.[38] Chapman's line "Mother of us all … place of our birth" likewise makes earth both object and subject, identifying us intimately with her. In Deutero-Isaiah, the slippery representation of Zion provides an opportunity to read Zion in diverse ways. We could imaginatively reconstruct the narrative, seeing the story perhaps through Zion's eyes, as Peter Trudinger has demonstrated in his ecological reading of Zion in Lamentations.[39]

Zion's journey of redemption is wrapped up with the restoration of creation.[40] John Barton reminds us, "Peace and harmony on earth, for the great classical prophets, are achieved through justice and righteousness, and though these terms (*mishpat* and *sedaqah*) have definite cosmic overtones, they are still to be encountered primarily in the way that humans behave towards each other."[41] In this framework, cessation of violence is necessary for ecological harmony.[42] Rape as a domineering act of power implicitly breaks relationship, demonstrating disharmony and power imbalance, between humans, creation, and God. Creation's uprising as well as the call to stand up/rise up and overcome the violation in Isaiah 51:17 and 52:1–2 represents a rebalancing. The trajectory of Zion's story in Isaiah 51–52 is of comfort, renewal, and overcoming the victimhood of rape. Likewise, ecological destruction evidenced in the passage is not an inevitable in a nihilistic depiction but rather a threatened end, and the passage is presented as an oracle of hope and re-creation. Deutero-Isaiah innovatively re-uses ancient traditions of creation, chaos motifs, and the Exodus for new contexts and purposes. Modern musicians take the tapestry of inherited traditions and symbols for new purposes, as in the example of Chapman's use of a rape metaphor and contemporary socio-political action. Just as Deutero-Isaiah reshapes a previously utilised marriage metaphor and

38 Habel 2008, 5.
39 Trudinger 2008, 41–52.
40 Dempsey 1989, 273.
41 Barton 2010, 54.
42 Dempsey 1989, 269–284.

personification of the devastated city as a woman in new ways, so also Chapman takes a long-held trope of earth as feminine to inspire action on a new crisis. Symbolic representations of women and earth reliant on double messaging are imbedded in both Chapman's and Deutero-Isaiah's songs.

Conclusion

By combining an analysis of ancient biblical passages with a contemporary musical response to environmental catastrophe we can interrogate inherited theological assumptions and highlight previously downplayed aspects of received texts. Chapman's music does not refer to Deutero-Isaiah's proclamation song regarding Zion's future. Speaking originally to Judah's exilic crisis, the songs of Zion may not have envisaged our current climate emergency. However, overlapping metaphorical references in the song and the text to mothers, sexual violence, and environmental consequences of human actions make them fascinating interlocutors. At their heart, Chapman's songs and Zion's oracles are calls for justice. The inherent injustice of ecological degradation is that despite its affecting us all, it invariably disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable, often women and children.[43] Therefore, Deutero-Isaiah's casting of Zion as a grieving woman who has lost her children and Chapman's casting of the world as a mother tap into the plight of the people who suffer most. The interrelationality of how we treat the human other (as sexual objects to be conquered; by intervening to defend/rescue; in empowering women) can transfer our attitudes to the earth and creation.

This creative engagement can lead to heightened awareness about theological imperatives for human involvement and responsibility for ecological stewardship. By combining these readings with an ecofeminist analysis, we can appreciate the limitations of perpetuating ecological connections to tropes of rape and sexual violence. These tropes are not therefore no longer useful, for they hold potential for reframing understandings of the power of women. Problematising both sexual assault and ecological disaster provides an implicit challenge for transformative social action. Engaging Deutero-Isaiah's ancient metaphors can awaken a greater appreciation of the need to advocate verbally

43 See Dawson/Pope 2014, chap. 4.2 on the effect of climate change on the poor. Gaard observes, "Many writers note that toxic pesticides, chemical wastes, acid rain, radiation, and other pollutants take their first toll on women, women's reproductive systems, and children" (Gaard 1993, 5).

or practically against sexual assault, domestic violence, modern day slavery, and warfare. Using provocative language to illustrate violence prompts us to think twice about two domains – ecological disaster and rape. By successfully linking these issues, Chapman challenges us in thinking about both; even if the focus of the song is on action in relation to ecological destruction, the rape language shocks us to think about sexual violence. This response is also possible with how we interpret Zion's predicament in Deutero-Isaiah.

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INTERLUDE

Music video still from Judas, Lady Gaga, 00:00:49,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wagn8Wrmzuc

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Katharina Luise Merkert

Combating Gender Norms with a Lipstick-Gun

Lady Gaga's JUDAS

Keywords

Pop Music, Gender Norms, Religious Symbols, Criticism, Lady Gaga, Judas

Biography

Katharina Luise Merkert is attending a master's degree program in the study of religion at the University of Munich (LMU). She concluded her BA degree in religion as well as in language, literatures, and cultures at the same university. This article is inspired by her BA thesis.

Lady Gaga was born Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta in 1986 in New York. Ever since her breakthrough in 2008 with the album *The Fame*, she has been an international pop star and a vital part of the music scene. "Judas", a track on her album *Born This Way*, released in 2011,[1] has attracted attention not only in popular media but also amongst scholars.[2] Many questions were raised, including whether the message of the song is critical of religion and whether "Judas" is blasphemous.[3]

As Fritz Stolz has argued, following Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a "system of symbols",[4] religious symbols have a communicative role.[5] In this example, communication takes place within popular media, specifically within a pop song. The song "Judas" deals with the biblical story of Jesus of Nazareth and his discipline Judas Iscariot, who identified Jesus for his ene-

1 *Born This Way* (Lady Gaga, US 2011, Interscope Records).
2 Hawkins 2014.
3 Sun 2011.
4 Geertz 1985.
5 Stolz 2004.

Fig. 1: Lady Gaga pointing a pistol at Judas. Music video still from Judas, Lady Gaga, 00:03:36.

Fig. 2: Lady Gaga crying after she has painted Judas's lips. Music video still from Judas, Lady Gaga, 00:03:36.

mies with a kiss. In the video, Lady Gaga is shown as Jesus's companion in various situations, while the lyrics reveal her love for Judas.[6] She seems to have an opportunity to kill Judas before his betrayal of Jesus, but instead of

6 Judas (Lady Gaga and Laurieann Gibson, US 2011).

Fig. 3: Jesus kissing Lady Gaga on the forehead. Music video still from Judas, Lady Gaga, 00:04:53.

Fig. 4: Lady Gaga's stoning, video still. Music video still from Judas, Lady Gaga, 00:05:08.

shooting Judas, she paints his lips red with lipstick that sticks out of her gun. At the end of the video Lady Gaga, wearing a wedding dress, is stoned to death for her betrayal.

Judas stages Lady Gaga as a woman torn between two men – Jesus and Judas – who traditionally embody good and evil. Alongside the inner personal

conflict evident in the song, we can also identify, as I explore here, criticism of society's normative gender values. Lady Gaga is represented in JUDAS as an inconsistent and contradictory woman. On the one hand, she appears strong and independent, unwavering in her faith in Jesus. On the other hand, she seems desperate and insecure, hesitant and doubtful when it comes to deciding about Judas. The pistol scene shows this opposition very well (fig. 1 and fig. 2).

This scene illustrates her inability to choose between Jesus and Judas. She tries to accept both sides of her feelings and her personality but struggles to overcome an inner conflict. At the end of the video, Jesus appears to forgive Lady Gaga (fig. 3), yet she is still punished for her behavior and dies by being stoned (fig. 4).

On one level we can identify a retelling of a biblical story as criticism of religion and the Catholic Church.[7] The Bible recounts the use of execution by stoning as punishment for prostitution,[8] and the depiction in the video appears to challenge religious judgement of women's sexuality. But on another level, we find criticism of prevailing gender concepts. JUDAS portrays only the death of Lady Gaga and not the crucifixion of Jesus. The woman is made the scapegoat: her unfaithfulness to Jesus is the point of conflict, not Judas's betrayal. The video thus portrays the demonization of women, with Lady Gaga deliberately criticizing the normative expectations of the female role. The religious symbols are used only to contextualize the message of JUDAS, to show that religion is significant in Lady Gaga's life. The target of its criticism is society – symbolized by the angry mob that executes Lady Gaga in the end – and its insistence on women's conformity to normative conventions. The religious symbols in JUDAS are a medium for the communication of a critical message and are aesthetic and illustrative elements in the story. The song and the video are a platform on which the artist negotiates specific political and personal values.

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7 Daily Mail 2011.

8 See John 8:3–5.

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Reinhard Kopanski

ACT TWO

What Makes Popular Christian Music "Popular"?

A Comparison of Current US-American and German Christian Music Using the Examples of Lauren Daigle and Koenige & Priester

Abstract

By applying different (competing) understandings of the term "popular", this article showcases the criteria by which Popular Christian Music (labelled Contemporary Christian Music by the US music industry) can be described as "popular". It compares Anglo-American and German-language Christian songs by means of close readings of the German band Koenige & Priester (Kings & Priests) and US singer Lauren Daigle. It argues that Christian music uses strategies of popularization comparable to secular popular music. Unlike secular music, however, for Popular Christian Music the Christian message is a central genre marker, which leads me to suggest that its popularity (in the sense of reaching a large audience beyond religious/evangelical circles) essentially depends on the polysemic properties of its lyrics.

Keywords

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), Germany, Koenige & Priester (band), Lauren Daigle (singer), Lyrics, Music, Popular Christian Music (PCM), Religion, United States of America

Biography

Reinhard Kopanski is a research associate at the University of Siegen at the Professorial Chair of Popular Music and Gender Studies. His research interests include music and politics, music and technology, and music and religion. He recently completed his Ph.D. in musicology; his thesis will be published in 2021 as *Bezugnahmen auf den Nationalsozialismus in der populären Musik. Lesarten zu Laibach, Death In June, Feindflug, Rammstein und Marduk*. He has contributed articles in peer-reviewed journals such as *Metal Music Studies* and *Samples*, as well as for the online version of the German academic music encyclopaedia *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (*MGG*). His professional experience includes pedagogical work as a lecturer in Bonn and Cologne and freelance work in the field of audio production.

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Introduction

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is a label used by the US-music industry for musicians and bands stemming from the field of popular music, whose lyrics are characterized by Christian and often evangelical content.[1] In comparison, bands from the Popular Christian Music (PCM) scene in German-speaking countries play a rather subordinate economical role. The difference in economic impact is echoed in different levels of scholarly interest, for US-based Christian music has been well researched since the 1990s,[2] whilst German-based PCM has received little academic attention, although it forms a distinct musical genre and is an important aspect in the life of certain religious groups.[3] However, in addition to some interest-based publications from the milieu of the evangelical Free churches[4], the topic has been approached from a practice-oriented theological perspective discussing the "benefits" of popular music in a church context.[5]

This difference in both the success of and interest in CCM in the United States and PCM in Germany is remarkable. This article is an opportunity to address that comparison, using two case studies. In asking what makes Popular Christian Music popular, it understands "popular" not in terms of commercial success but as a descriptor, which allows us to explore the criteria for its application in these different contexts. For this exploratory examination I deployed the following method for the selection of case studies: I entered the terms "Populäre Christliche Musik" (popular Christian music) and

1 The article is based on my contribution to the interdisciplinary lecture series *This Is Our Song*, which took place at the University of Siegen, Germany, in 2019/20. My thanks to Aleksandar Golovin for help with the translation.
An important clarification to make here is that my usage of the term "evangelical" is based on its framing in Germany, rather than in Anglo-American contexts. "Evangelical" is understood as a type of piety defined by multiple (and often differently prioritized) factors such as Biblicism (Bibeltreue), Christ-centeredness (Christuszentriertheit) and the emphasis on spiritual awakening (Erweckungserlebnis), as well as activism that expresses itself in evangelism that drives to follow the bible as principle in everyday life (see Elwert/Radermacher/Schlamelcher 2017). In addition, the term is used to imply a Germany-specific genealogy which describes groups and communities tracing their traditions back to Pietism (as emerged in the late 17th century) and thus understand framing themselves in a manner that equates "evangelical" with "pietistic".

2 e. g. Jorstad 1993; Howard/Streck 1996; Luhr 2009; Stowe 2011; Harju 2012.

3 Kopanski/Albrecht-Birkner/Heesch/Stöhr (forthcoming).

4 e. g. Kabus 2003; Feist 2005.

5 e. g. Schütz 2008; Depta 2016.

"Contemporary Christian Music" into YouTube and selected the top match in each case, namely the song "You Say" by the US-American singer Lauren Daigle and the song "Alles ist möglich" ("Everything is Possible") by the German band Koenige & Priester (Kings & Priests).[6] This article analyses these songs through close readings, focusing on the lyrics and the musical design but also providing contextualizing observations.

Before commencing, I wish to express some self-reflections to outline both my relationship to the subject as well as my motivation. Although I was confirmed in the Lutheran Church at the age of 14, I now identify as agnostic; as such, I approach the phenomenon of PCM from an outside perspective. Whilst PCM has not been my main field of research so far, PCM is becoming a strong academic interest, and I am eager to explore and understand what PCM means to evangelical circles and how it is used to transmit their beliefs.

Approaches to the Terms "Popular" and "Popular Culture"

Concerning the terms "popular" and "popular culture", I will focus on the pluralistic definitions as outlined by the publication *Handbuch Populäre Kultur*[7] (Handbook of Popular Culture) and avoid providing a straightforward definition (i.e. "'popular' / 'popular culture' is …"), as what can be expressed through the terms' complex (and at times contradictory) aspects can fuel a substantial seminar without reaching a standardized (or conclusive) definition.[8]

Etymologically, the word "popular" is related to the Latin adverb "popularis", the latter meaning "regarding the people / popular within the people".[9] A first, superficial understanding of "popular" is thus that it describes something heard/read/watched by many people, that enjoy it for different reasons, in a quantity that might be assessed via sales numbers, bestseller lists, charts, download/streaming numbers or ratings.

A second perspective sees "popular culture" as a counterpart to "high culture", a dichotomy found in the dispute between Gottfried August Bürger, who understood "the popular" as a standard for art, and Friedrich Schiller, who distinguished the public as an uneducated crowd from the educated

6 You Say (Lauren Daigle, US 2018); Alles ist möglich (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017).

7 Hügel 2003a.

8 An overview of the pluralistic definitions can also be found in: Storey 2008.

9 Hügel 2003b, 343, my translation.

elite.[10] This dispute shaped scholarly debate well into the 20th century and is found, for example, in Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's critical writings on the culture industry,[11] with the suggestion that something cannot be inherently popular; it can only become popular, and indeed be made popular through strategies such as advertisement. Too readily then, "the popular" is denied any independent cultural and aesthetic value and – to me, most worryingly – its audience is devalued as essentially "stupid". This viewpoint is opposed by cultural scientist Hans-Otto Hügel whose defense of popular culture positions the mainstream as an integral part of "the popular" and thus as inherently valuable.[12]

Since the 1970s, the powerful paradigm of subculture theory, which emerged from cultural studies, has viewed popular culture not as deficient but as resistant to hegemonic (high) culture, with its construction "from below" considered intrinsically valuable – for example, by allowing "the people" to present criticism or signal grievances.[13] The nature of reception becomes much more central to the discussion, as recipients are no longer helplessly exposed to a popular mass culture but can individually generate value from popular culture or conversely utilize popular culture elements for their own purposes.

How, then, is popular culture popularized? For the purposes of this article, John Fiske's popularization concept is promising, with its argument that media texts have to be polysemic if different groups and cultures are to exchange and gain meanings and energies that meet their respective identities.[14] The original focus on the medium of television is easily applied to my discussion of intermedial elements of popular music. Taking into account the different positions on popular culture, Hans-Otto Hügel succinctly concludes, "The popular is that which entertains",[15] balancing within the category "entertaining" the tension between art and the popular without devaluing either. My analysis of the selected case studies will primarily employ Fiske's polysemy concept, whilst in the conclusion I look at how other approaches to the term "popular" can be related to the interpretation of Christian music.

10 Hügel 2003b, 343–345.
11 Horkheimer/Adorno 2006.
12 Hügel 2007, 10.
13 see Wuggenig 2003; Winter 2003b, 56.
14 Fiske 2000; also see Winter 2003a, 350–351.
15 Hügel 2003b, 247: "Das Populäre ist das, was unterhält."

Why Adapt the Term Contemporary Christian Music to Popular Christian Music?

In the Anglo-American sphere, the origins of Contemporary Christian Music as a genre characterized by evangelical content can be traced back to the 1970s and the Jesus People movement (which itself emerged from the hippie movement). Specifically, the Jesus Rock genre enabled conservative Christian milieus' critical approach to rock music to be overcome, with the enormous attraction of the Jesus People to younger audiences directly attributed to the combination of worship with rock'n'roll.[16] Since the 1990s the term CCM has been used as a genre label in the music industry, with charts established for "Hot Christian Songs", "Christian Airplay" and "Top Christian Albums" in addition to *Billboard* magazine's regular "Billboard charts" and also two awards reserved for CCM at the annual Grammy Awards ceremony.

In this article, I use the term "Contemporary Christian Music" only in reference to the specific genre label applied by the US-American music industry, preferring instead the term "Popular Christian Music" (PCM). The necessity for such change arises from the fact that the concept of "contemporary" is much more charged in Germany than in the United States, with the related German term *zeitgenössisch* understood in light of the artistic avant-garde. "PCM" thus allows for a general classification into the category of popular music that contrasts with "classical music". Despite the necessity to adjust the terminology, my observations are in line with those of Amy McDowell, who suggests that the genre "Contemporary Christian Music" is defined more by its Christian lyrics or its use in a Christian context than by its musical style, which can vary greatly depending on the artist, although semantic correlations between music and content (e.g. the lyrics) can be important.[17] In Germany, PCM artists and bands have rarely achieved great economic success. Unlike in the United States, in Germany there are no official music charts for PCM, and there was no category for Christian music in the former Echo Awards.

16 McDowell 2013.

17 Kopanski/Albrecht-Birkner/Heesch/Stöhr (forthcoming).

Case Studies

Koenige & Priester

Koenige & Priester is a band from the German city of Cologne with a changing line-up (six to eight musicians) that has produced three studio albums since its official founding in 2015. The leading members are the singers Florence Joy Enns (née Büttner), her husband, Thomas Enns, and his brother Jonathan Enns.[18] In interviews the band's members have stated that two verses from Revelation (1:5–6) are of personal importance to them and the source of the name "Koenige & Priester".[19] It remains unclear to which the German Bible translation the band ultimately refers to since the terms "Könige und Priester" can be found in various translations.[20]

In contrast to most German PCM bands, which tend to have strong evangelical roots, Koenige & Priester position themselves as non-denominational,[21] a character expressed, for example, in the musicians' involvement in the non-denominational B. A. S. E. Jugendgottesdienste, worship services attended by young people.[22] Before the band formed, its leaders were already relatively well known within the realm of secular music. Florence Joy Enns won the second season of the German TV show *Star Search* in 2004, but she was also involved in popular music with Christian content both before and after her victory.[23] After winning the show, she celebrated Top 20 chart success in Germany with the secular single "Consequences of Love".[24] Thomas Enns and his brother Jonathan also achieved short-term media exposure, by participating in 2007 in the fourth season of *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*, a spin-off of the British show *Pop Idol*.[25]

In an extensive interview with ERF Media, a leading broadcasting company for evangelical content in Germany, Thomas Enns describes how he found God and how both he and his wife rejected careers in secular music in favour of making Christian music. Furthermore, Enns emphasizes how important

18 Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

19 Walter 2017; Lippert 2018.

20 All scriptural citations are taken from translations endorsed by the German Bible Society (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft) in 2019.

21 Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

22 Gerth Medien 2015.

23 *Feiert Jesus! Christmas* (Various Artists, DE 2005, SCM Hänssler).

24 *Hope* (Florence Joy, DE 2004, Universal/Polydor); Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

25 Koenige & Priester GbR [no date].

it is to him that he lives in harmony with God and the Bible.[26] On the one hand, Enns's description can be considered an example of a classic evangelical narrative of conversion and religious awakening that echoes an evangelical dualistic worldview.[27] On the other hand such a commitment seems to me to be extremely important for musicians from the genre of PCM in order to find acceptance in their "target audience" in what I would refer to as an effort in establishing "genre authenticity". Conversely, however, such statements can lead to a backlash from outside the PCM scene, which may explain why on its Facebook page, the band describes its music as about "faith, love and hope" and notes it is "not about conveying theoretical, philosophical or even theological knowledge".[28] Through such statements Koenige & Priester may be attempting to reach two types of audience: for believing Christians they are demonstrating they are truly a Christian band; for broader, secular audiences they insist that they are not indoctrinating theological knowledge. Yet in contrast to this latter aspect, the band is quoted in an interview on a Christian website as stating: "Our goal: getting young people excited about Jesus."[29]

Since 2017 the song "Alles ist möglich", from Koenige & Priester's second studio album, *Heldenreise*,[30] has been streamed around 300,000 times on Spotify, where it is one of the band's most successful songs. The song is arranged in the style of a modern indie pop song, using a common band instrumentation (drums, electric guitar, bass, vocals, here with three voices, plus various synthesizer sounds). The high production value is clearly evident to the listener, above all in relation to current recording technologies, allowing Koenige & Priester to parallel the high musical and technical standards of US-American evangelical music productions that Sebastian Emling and Jonas Schira, for example, have noted.[31] Stylistic devices such as the frequency filter applied on the synthesizer – the initial focus on a narrow frequency range broadens later in the track – have been used in secular pop and Electronic Dance Music (EDM) songs in recent years, with the opening of the track "Sugar"[32] by the German EDM musician Robin Schulz a good example. "Alles ist möglich" is in the key of B major, although it is intriguing that unlike some mainstream pop songs, the chord progression does

26 Walter 2017.

27 Emling/Schira 2017, 297.

28 Koenige & Priester 2020, info, my translation.

29 Gerth Medien 2015: "Unser Ziel: junge Menschen für Jesus zu begeistern".

30 Koenige & Priester 2017.

31 Emling/Schira 2017, 400–401.

32 "Sugar" (Robin Schulz, DE 2015, Tonspiel/Warner Music Central Europe).

not remain static, for the song's chorus expands the chord sequence through a tonally foreign A major chord. This unexpected chordal movement has the potential to draw the audience's attention to the song and therefore to its lyrics.

Depending on the context of the listening situation, the lyrics would not necessarily reveal that "Alles ist möglich" contains a Christian message, especially given the inclusion of general phrases often found in popular music: A lyrical "I" addresses a "you", describing her/his trust in said "you", as the latter provides her/him with strength in difficult situations. The phrase "Ich glaub an dich"[33] (I believe in you) does have religious connotations, but given that God is not explicitly mentioned, it may imply an interpersonal relationship, not least as both the German phrase and its English equivalent are used to give support to another person. That said, upon closer inspection certain lines do have religious connotations, suggesting "Alles ist möglich" stems from PCM: for example, the phrases "Dir ist alles möglich" (For you everything is possible) and "über Mauern springen" (to jump over walls).[34] The phrase "Dir ist alles möglich" is found in the Text Bible, a translation from 1899,[35] and the wording "über Mauern springen" is included in the Luther Bible.[36] The full song title "Alles ist möglich" is found in the translation by Franz Eugen Schlachter.[37] Historically, Bible translations have shaped the German language significantly, so the rather general wording could refer to Bible passages but could also be taken from a general German vocabulary – still, these examples are somewhat unusual for German-speaking secular popular music. Interestingly, the line "Alles ist möglich" offers an incidental transmedial reference to the German synchronization of the feature film Almost Famous (Cameron Crowe, US 2000), where the line is used as a salutation among "groupies", an often pejorative term for extremely dedicated fans who sometimes seek sexual involvement with musicians or celebrities – altogether anything but a Christian context. Although Koenige & Priester most likely aimed at subtly referencing the Bible and had no intention of making any allusion to a promiscuous premarital life, this possible transmedial reference opens a potential polysemy. However, this fluidity of meaning exists only when the song

33 "Alles ist möglich" (*Heldenreise,* Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label), liner notes.

34 "Alles ist möglich" (*Heldenreise,* Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label), liner notes.

35 Mark 14:36, Text Bible, 1899.

36 Ps. 18:30, Luther Bible, 1984.

37 Mark 9:23, Schlachter Bible.

is streamed, as one glance at the booklet, and more specifically its credits, quickly reveals the Christian content. Not only is God thanked first in the credits, but Koenige & Priester refer to the credits as "Danksagung" (thanksgiving/acknowledgement),[38] a recognizable part of Christian worship services.

For a further level of this analysis, we can turn to Koenige & Priester's official video clip for the song. Since February 2017 the video clip has been viewed about 225,000 times on YouTube, where it is referred to as "B. A. S. E. living room session".[39] Unlike the album version, here the song is played unplugged. The term "living room session" can imply a certain spontaneity, as a private gathering to play a little music together. This spontaneity is carefully, even professionally, staged in the clip, with, for example, the room perfectly illuminated and various cameras or at least camera perspectives. In addition, the sound is remarkably precise and clear, which suggests it was not recorded when the players actually performed this video clip. It would be nearly impossible to achieve the smooth sound heard in the video clip with three highly sensitive large diaphragm condenser microphones for the singers positioned in the immediate vicinity of the drums. Ergo, this video clip features a level of production that is in no way inferior to that of the secular music scene. Secular popular music will often frame video clips (especially on YouTube) as an acoustic/basement/studio session. Then again, the specific setting of Koenige & Priester's video clip can link the band to evangelical communities, for whom non-hierarchical, informal meetings, are part of their lived religion. In addition, the clip's staging has visible parallels to the "Acoustic Sessions" by Hillsong United – one of the most successful evangelical worship bands in the world.[40] Moreover, a number of visual markers identify Koenige & Priester as Christian. In addition to the cross clearly visible around Thomas Enn's neck, all the singers' facial expressions are blissful and they make gestures of praise (fig. 1, 2).

What is "popular" then about Koenige & Priester? The production values of the song "Alles ist möglich" are highly professional, which is certainly related to the band members' experience in secular entertainment for many years. The lyrics of "Alles ist möglich" contain direct yet subtle and non-intrusive allusions to the Bible, whereas the music could have stemmed from a secular indie pop band. The band uses forms of presentation that are common in secular popular music.

38 *Heldenreise* (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017, dieKoalition Label), liner notes.

39 Alles ist möglich (Koenige & Priester, DE 2017).

40 Oceans (Acoustic) – Hillsong United (Hillsong United, AU 2013); for further reading on Hillsong United see Wagner 2020.

Fig. 1: Music video still from Alles ist möglich, Koenige & Priester, 00:01:13.

Fig. 2: Music video still from Alles ist möglich, Koenige & Priester, 00:03:32.

They include the thoroughly staged alternative version of the song in a supposedly spontaneous jam session for distribution via YouTube as well as an extensive presence in social media. However, social media is also used to express the connection to God, as illustrated by a post from the band's official Facebook page:

> After an amazing concert [in Marburg/Germany], we had a relaxed breakfast and are now on our way to Siegen! God is so good! We are so so blessed! Thanks to everyone who listens to our music, everyone who supports us! We love you all![41]

41 Koenige & Priester 2020, post, 10 November 2019.

Lauren Daigle: "You Say"

American musician Lauren Daigle (born 1991) writes most of her music as well as her lyrics.[42] Her early career has an interesting parallel to that of Koenige & Priester, for she participated in the casting show *American Idol* between 2010 and 2012.[43] Daigle stated in an interview given in 2014 that her last participation, in 2012, was spiritually important to her,[44] and indeed a strong commitment to Christianity is important for musicians from the PCM genre as a whole, as it contributes to their acceptance by the desired target group.

The song I will explore in this segment is titled "You Say" and was released in Daigle's 2018 album *Look Up Child*. As of June 2020, the official video clip has had around 157 million views on YouTube, and the song has been streamed over 235 million times on Spotify. The first musical association stirred for me by the song was with the British pop singer Adele (e.g. her song "Hello"[45]) – a comparison frequently evoked by music journalists.[46] Daigle's "You Say" is arranged in the style of a piano pop ballad in the key of F major, and in terms of the song's harmony, its chord progression focuses on a four-chord turnaround progression of F – Am – Dm – B♭ (tonal-functionally represented as I–III–VI–IV), which remains constant over the course of the song, an approach that can be identified in various secular pop ballads in recent years – very prominently in Emeli Sandé's "Read All About It (Pt. III)".[47] Despite the consistent repetition of this chord progression for over four and a half minutes, the song is by no means monotonous, by virtue of the light, yet sophisticated arrangement (e.g. the subtle adjustment to instrumentation for different segments of the song), as well as Daigle's expressive voice, which contributes to the affective potential of the song. The production of the song is perfect for the chosen style of a modern pop ballad. At the musical level, only the short "I" vocalizations in the chorus provide an indication of a religious context, based on the resemblance to a gospel choir. Daigle uses these gospel-choir-like vocalizations in various songs on the album.

The lyrics do not significantly differ from secular pop songs. Where the PCM approach is often more direct, Christian references or rather the potentially

42 *Look Up Child* (Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.

43 Yep 2014.

44 Yep 2014.

45 *25* (Adele, US 2015, XL Recordings).

46 e.g. Harrington 2019.

47 "Read All About It (Pt. III)" (*Our Version of Events*, Emeli Sandé, GB 2012, Virgin).

missionary-evangelistic approach do not jump out at listeners here; in fact, there is little evidence that the song relates to PCM at all. The lyrics, especially in the chorus, could be found in many songs focused on an interpersonal relationship in which the lyrical "I" is rather unassertive or requires reassurance. The self-doubts of the lyrical "I" are evoked in the first verse through popular music tropes ("I keep fighting voices in my mind that say I'm not enough / Every single lie that tells me I will never measure up"[48]), whereby the counterpart to the lyrical "I" provides her / him with strength, as in the opposition in the chorus "You say I'm strong / When I think I'm weak".[49] In addition to being common tropes of secular popular music, such lyrics are in line with what we saw in the Koenige & Priester example. A difference from secular popular music songs utilizing similar lyrics becomes evident to a listener only in the third verse, which addresses God directly: "Taking all I have and now I'm laying it at Your feet / You have every failure, God, and You'll have every victory".[50] That said, the booklet consistently capitalizes "You" and "your", unambiguously suggesting the lyrical "I" is addressing God as the provider of strength, not a human counterpart in an implied (romantic) relationship. For a listener who first reads the booklet, the religious connotations are evident before the music begins.[51] Moreover, a Christian background can be readily identified in the line "I believe"[52] in the chorus, for the phrase "I believe" can be heard as a strong commitment by the lyrical "I" to transcendence. However, the phrase is open to interpretation: here the line is followed by the words "what you say of me",[53] and in popular music more generally, the words "I believe" form a common phrase that does not necessarily suggest a relationship to God. In English-language secular popular music the wording "I believe" is used to build emotionally affective metaphors: in one's abilities ("I believe I can fly"[54]), in emotions ("I believe in a thing called love"[55]), in people ("I believe in you"[56]) and much more.

48 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
49 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
50 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
51 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
52 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
53 "You Say", (*Look Up Child,* Lauren Daigle, US 2018a, Centricity), liner notes.
54 "I believe I can fly" (*R.,* R. Kelly, US 1998, Jive).
55 "I believe in a thing called love" (*Permission to Land*, The Darkness, US/GB 2003, Atlantic/ Must … Destroy!).
56 "I believe in you" (*Nobody but Me,* Michael Bublé, US 2016, Reprise Records).

Conversely, the polysemic properties of the lyrics allow them to also be related entirely to the Bible. As an example, the distinctively titled Christian blog *The Berean Test* (the name is related to the Book of Acts 17:10–11), whose goal is "applying critical thinking skills to compare lyrical content from popular Christian artists against the Bible for accuracy",[57] examined Daigle's song for "true Christian" content. Concerning "You Say", the self-proclaimed "good Berean" reached the conclusion that there are no direct Bible references in the song,[58] although a relevant Bible passage could be identified as complementing almost every line: e. g. the "voices in my head" mentioned in the song's first line, are interpreted by the website's author as clearly meaning Lucifer's whispering. However, the quoted reference from the Bible has no direct connection to Daigles lyrics, but merely states that Lucifer "is a liar, and the father of it".[59] The author concluded that more direct references to the Bible would have improved the song, making it "true Christian" music. This critique of insufficient Christian content in Daigle's music expressed by conservative Christians continues in other areas of the artist's life as well. Evangelical Christian circles in the United States were strongly critical of Daigle towards the end of 2018 when during a radio interview, in answer to a question about whether homosexuality is a sin, she responded: "You know I can't honestly answer on that … […] I just say: Read the Bible and find out for yourself and when you find out let me know 'cos I'm learning too."[60] In addition to the openness of Daigle's lyrics, her reluctant position towards homosexuality, which is apparently seen as unchristian in evangelical circles, becomes a point of attack there.

What is "popular" then about Daigle's "You Say"? Musically, the song could slip by on the radio between popular pop, rock and EDM tracks without listeners necessarily noticing that it is Christian music. The production values of the song are very current and the song writing is fully in accord with the zeitgeist and therefore can be accepted by broad audiences beyond the (evangelical) Christian scene. The popularity of "You Say" in the secular world may be attributed to the limited evangelical content of the lyrics. In addition, making reference to God has a far greater tradition in popular music made in the United States than in German-speaking popular music, as for example in Joan

57 The Berean Test, 2020.

58 Wright 2019.

59 John 8:44, King James Bible.

60 Lauren Daigle's Testimony (No Jesus / Defends LGBT & Ellen Degeneres) (Doctrinal Watchdog, US 2019).

Osborne's song "One of Us".[61] As a result, the need for specific Christian references within CCM-labelled music may be all the greater to achieve acceptance within evangelical Christian circles.

Conclusion

The various meanings of "popular" can certainly be traced within the case studies. Both examples are "popular" in that they reach large audiences, although the differences in scale between Koenige & Priester and Lauren Daigle are huge, a distinction that extends into the genres of CCM and PCM more broadly. Also, Hügel's dictum about the popular being entertaining is applicable here. Precisely in such PCM of evangelical character, however, we find a contrast with most popular secular music genres: in secular popular music scenes, the music (in addition to non-musical markers such as clothing and personal appearance) works in many cases on the one hand to bind inwards (i.e. into a specific scene) and on the other hand to differentiate outwards. PCM of evangelical character attempts to avoid the negative connotations of outwards differentiation, seeking both to bind inwards as well as to reach out to outsiders. This balancing act has limited potential, as the foregrounding of a Christian message in the lyrics overwrites and subsequently negates any polysemy, the integral component of Fiske's popular-culture concept. PCM faces the challenge of balancing popularity and message. For its uptake to increase, the message must be less forthright, but that message is a central genre marker of PCM. When the interpretative possibilities are expanded – as is the case with Lauren Daigle – evangelical critics will immediately discredit the music as not pleasing to God. Whether PCM is "popular" in the sense of reaching a large audience depends on the ability of the audience to connect to the lyrics.

Although increasingly recognized as unsustainable, the dichotomy of "high culture" and popular culture can be found in PCM, but not in an opposition between supposedly "high" and "low" art, but in a distinction between "Christian" and "secular" art. The cultural studies understanding of the "popular" would even suggest that PCM is a recontextualization of secular popular music and its hegemonic undercurrents that use identical (marketing) strategies: the evangelical perspective on a world full of "unbelievers" who spread

61 "One of Us" (*Relish,* Joan Osborne, US 1995, Mercury/Blue Gorilla).

"sin" is undermined by "true" Christian music intended to spread knowledge throughout the world.

This study is based on just two comparatively well-known examples from Germany and the United States. To continue its explorations we could profitably draw on a larger corpus of artists, discourses derived from Christian and secular media and social networks, and interviews with fans of PCM and scene-outsiders, all of which offer productive additional data. Whilst such perspectives lie beyond the scope of this article, this study does suggest that PCM, especially as performed by German-speaking artists, is rife with discoveries for future research.

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INTERLUDE

Music video still from Aunque es de noche, Rosalía, 00:03:29,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s-MQzPZ6IE

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Eva Meienberg

Paths of Destiny

Rosalía's Spiritual Car Ride in AUNQUE ES DE NOCHE

Keywords

Rosalía, Religious Amalgam, Spirituality, Female Strength, Music Video, Aunque es de noche

Biography

Eva Meienberg worked as a teacher at elementary school and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in modern history and in the study of religions from the University of Zurich. She now works as a journalist at the Catholic Media Centre in Zurich.

Rosalía Vila Tobella is a Spanish pop star. Her international breakthrough came with the 2017 album *Los Angeles*.[1] Rosalía studied flamenco, where she absorbed the complex codes of Spanish cultural heritage, but she breaks the rules by creating an amalgam of traditional flamenco and contemporary popular music.

The symbols with which Rosalía grew up in the suburbs of Barcelona are also amalgamated. Thus she has said, "I [use] the Spanish cultural imaginary: My town is very industrial, so truck drivers are part of my imaginary. My grandmother took me to mass on weekends – I have memories of all that. I use all those cultural elements that are so present in my society."[2]

"Aunque es de noche" (Even Though It Is Night) is a particularly fine example of these processes in action. The single was released in November 2017.

In the video clip AUNQUE ES DE NOCHE, we – as viewers of the clip – are waiting in the back seat of a car when suddenly a man wearing a hoodie gets in, starts the engine and turns on the radio. The journey through the night streets begins. The dashboard resembles an altar and is packed with

1 *Los Angeles* (Rosalía, ES 2017, Universal Music Spain).

2 Exposito 2018.

Fig. 1: Music video still from Aunque es de noche, Rosalía, 00:01:11.

Fig. 2: Music video still from Aunque es de noche, Rosalía, 00:00:55.

statuettes of saints, rosaries and a disco ball, shining brightly in the dark night. "The Dark Night of the Soul" is a poem by the mystic John of the Cross to which the lyrics of Rosalía's song refer. The Carmelite friar lived in Spain in the 16th century and was a representative of the Counter Reformation. Locked up in a tiny cell almost without light, he wrote the poem that

Fig. 3: Music video still from Aunque es de noche, Rosalía, 00:03:02.

Fig. 4: Music video still from Aunque es de noche, Rosalía, 00:03:34.

describes the union of his soul with God. The darkness of the night represents the terrors of life on earth, but night is also the necessary condition for reaching God.

After the radio is tuned to the right frequency, Rosalía's voice accompanies us on our ride. Again and again there is static noise while symbols appear,

Fig. 5: Music video still from Aunque es de noche, Rosalía, 00:03:47.

overlaid on the film. They are commentary, but they also refer to another level of reality. Rosalía is not only heard; she also appears to us. The vision is of a woman in front of an altar, looking into the camera and addressing us with her chant.

The driver makes a turn and enters the driveway to a graveyard through a stone gate. At the end of a long white wall the headlights catch Rosalía. Sitting on a throne-like chair in a golden robe with scattered flowers and her long hair entwining her body, she seems to be a representation of the Virgin Mary and a Renaissance painting of a classical goddess.

The camera leaves the car and approaches Rosalía. Her singing becomes more urgent; she gets up and starts towards an emotional crescendo. With her eyes closed, her gaze is directed inwards, from where the energy originates that is visualised as symbols. Flames and lightning escape her body. Tears spurt out of her eyes and shackles wrap themselves around her, which she immediately breaks again. Skulls, flaming daggers, coffins and the eye of providence appear. The sequence forms a memento mori combined with symbols of the all-seeing eye.

In the poem *The Dark Night of the Soul* John of the Cross describes the path through the dark night that leads to God. The motif of the tormented night also appears in the lyrics of Rosalía's "Aunque es de noche". But she defies the darkness. She knows the source of life, light, desire and knowledge. She her-

self is connected to the source – probably she *is* the source, as the symbols of death and God emanating from her body strongly indicate. She also appears as the enthroned Madonna, while the ambient light, which oscillates from red to blue, is reminiscent of the robes in countless depictions of the Virgin Mary. So, is there no God in Rosalía's universe? Maybe there is – the word *Redentor* (saviour) appears on the car, whose driver remains hidden. Rosalía believes in destiny, a path laid out for each person. The unknown driver showed us the way, drove us through the night and brought us safely to our destination – to Rosalía, to the singer, to the music.

"I always pray, in my way, before taking the stage. I feel we all have a task in life – a path, a destiny. Before I perform, I try to connect with my body. I give thanks for the possibility of performing and sharing with others. I always try to reconnect with that intention: to be at the service of the music."[3]

The mystical experience of Saint John of the Cross becomes the spiritual experience of the Madonna-like singer Rosalía, who connects with her body to draw energy from her own source so that she can walk her path towards destiny. The driver in the cool car is waiting.

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3 Cobo 2019.

Lavinia Pflugfelder

Heavy Metal Bricolage

Religious Imagery and "Religionized" Visual Language in Music Videos

Abstract

Using the term "bricolage", this article examines the articulation of religious imagery in the visual language of extreme metal. Transgression and bricolage, which describes a specific mode of reusing elements of cultural repertoire to fashion new expressions, have their own history and tradition in heavy metal. Any implementation of its visual language relies accordingly on shared knowledge of scene traditions and patterns to decode, but disembedded religious images and religious patterns are abundant in pop cultural bricolage by itself. Analysing intermedia, here using music videos as an example, shows how media characteristics restrict and expand the possibilities in implementing bricolage. In extreme metal music videos – already pop-culturally disembedded – religious images are placed in allegorical, socially critical or philosophical contexts, but can also be re-embedded into religious freeform. Any repetition of a variation of religious imagery from the cultural repertoire that relies on the religious context to empower the bricolage solidifies this application in the visual language – even as this sedimentation further removes it from specific religious meanings.

Keywords

Bricolage, Transgression, Visual Language, Music Video, Heavy Metal, Religious Imagery

Biography

Lavinia Pflugfelder is an academic assistant at the University of Basel, where she is working on her PhD project on "religion-productive" image discourses. She completed her master's degree in the Study of Religion at University of Basel, with a thesis on the reception and production of satanic imagery in heavy metal.

Popular music's use of visual media makes its listeners also its viewers. From concert posters, tickets stubs and stage design to music videos, CD covers and clothes, material visual products are utilized by bands and fans alike to

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emphasize their sound, represent ideas or lyrics, self-stylize, sell the product and generate recognition for their in-group. Like other forms of popular culture, heavy metal is involved in extensive exchanges with religion. Religion can appear within popular culture in the form of explicit or implicit religious themes, content, images, symbols or language, while elements of popular culture can be appropriated into religion; popular culture can itself be analysed as religion, usually using a broad functionalist definition of religion; and finally, popular culture and religion can be in dialogue.[1] Even if many types of heavy metal develop their own systems of signs, heavy metal often presents itself to the outside world as a closed cultural system. Every offshoot ties itself to a shared musical tradition, recognizes fundamental "heavy metal values" and feels marginalized under real or imagined negative assessment from outside. New bands continually refer to the influence of previous bands and strengthen the "we-feeling".[2] Focusing on the incorporation of religious iconography and imagery in metal's visual language encourages us to ask questions about the particular form of bricolage and the motivations behind the selection of individual visual elements. Which factors determine this exchange? How does bricolage help us to understand the recycling and restructuring of motifs? And how does this bricolage specifically concern religious images?

To explore the interaction of image repertoire and bricolage in the visual language of heavy metal, the article is divided into a first methodological-theoretical part on bricolage and transgression and a second investigative part with two music video examples.

Bricolage

"Bricolage", a term coined by Claude Lévi-Strauss,[3] refers broadly to the restructuring of old elements in new constellations, a recycling of motifs. The audience's shared understanding of the initial context and the reimagined context is necessary for successful bricolage.

Lévi-Strauss is concerned with a universal structure of the myth, the logic of repetition in variance in myth.[4] The same compulsion for repetition can be

1 Moberg/Partridge 2017, 1–3.

2 Roccor 2000, 89–90.

3 Lévi-Strauss 1989.

4 Hans Blumenberg criticizes the "Ausfällung des Zeitfaktors" (precipitation of the temporal

observed in the field of popular culture, especially in the modern myth-medium of film.[5] The concept of bricolage has also proved extremely fruitful for analysing the production and transformation of religious content and practices. Colin Campbell uses the term "bricolage" for his "cultic milieu", describing it as syncretization.[6] Lévi-Strauss used it to describe mythical thinking in generating new myths that draws on what is already available and is restrained by the component's initial meaning, an approach that focuses less on individual practices than on structural and impersonal processes. But over time "bricolage" has increasingly become a term for describing the users of culture. Departing from Lévi-Strauss, it "became synonymous with individual creative practices in relation to youth and queer subcultures, new musical genres and techniques, 'spirituality', New Age and new religions drawing on multiple sources".[7] Perceiving bricolage only as "eclectic code mixing" shifts away from coherence and pattern in bricolage as organizational forces.

It is not only the new composition of previously disparate elements that is important to the concept of bricolage. The interplay of these elements depends on their previous integration and their content is never completely new. It is important that the raw material is already known in the respective culture that forms the framework for the creation of the new sign. Both old sign and new sign remain decodable, with the creation recognizable as an act of transformation.[8] The detachment of the elements does not empty the sign of accumulated meanings, but the decontextualization enables the new contextualization. An increasing decontextualization under the influence of modern media sets many religious ideas and motifs free: "It results in a disembedding of the religious, in an omission of origin-specific barriers of access."[9]

For the individual bricoleur in particular, this process of disembedding means the possibility of emphasizing subjective experience in the new con-

factor) in Lévi-Strauss's mythical model; see Blumenberg 2006, 299–302. The interpretation of the constitution of mythologues has, however, little influence on the mode of production of the bricolage.

5 Doniger 2009, 205.

6 Campbell 2002, 15: "The fragmentary tendencies present in the milieu because of the enormous diversity of cultural items are more than counteracted by the continuing pressure to syncretization".

7 Altglas 2014, 474–476.

8 Trummer 2011, 441.

9 Trummer 2011, 141, my translation.

textualization, while at the same time the "delimited" elements remain globally mobile and communicable. The possible return to previous embeddings of the motif or element offers authority through the construction of a line of continuity, and hence tradition: "Post-modern, eclectic bricolage has taken hold even among members of mainstream religions, so why should we expect those outside organized religion to be different?", asks Asbjørn Dyrendal.[10]

The "de-limitation" of religious concepts and images can also take place strategically as "de-traditionalization" and forms of disembedding and re-embedding.[11] Any disembedding can release single elements from certain constraints and free them up for use. This is necessary if these restrictions could prevent embedding, such as a lack of a sense of authority over these elements. Véronique Altglas uses examples from new religious movements (NRM) to demonstrate how contemporary religious bricolage is still organized by pre-constraints. Social status, knowledge and power structures all determine the coherence (pattern) and the availability of elements for bricolage.[12]

Shared knowledge of the visual language in heavy metal creates an in-feeling, while the demand for authenticity requires innovation. Moreover, balance is kept between authenticity-generating transgression and marketability, reinvention and tradition. While transgression is key for heavy metal, too much "realness" is counterproductive and acceptance of authentic inauthenticity is necessary.[13] For example, a member of the German metal band Ketzer distanced themselves in an interview from rituals onstage, referring to them as "overloaded Kabuki".[14]

The genre in which bands are writing or performing constrains their aesthetic decisions, as does the greater community and world. Likewise, each aesthetic decision made by a band is a creative repetition of the intersubjective understanding of the scene.[15] Therefore, despite the great differentiation within the heavy metal genre, this milieu is constituted as a subculture that has emerged with music as a centre, without ideological obligation or

10 Dyrendal 2008, 74.
11 Petersen 2009, 11.
12 Altglas 2014, 479–487.
13 Watts/Fisher 2017.
14 Esteban 2019.
15 Unger 2016, 62.

commitment. All other elements are subject to the current political, local, social and individual contexts in which the specific music is produced and consumed. These additional elements are also arranged in the form of bricolage: "[Heavy metal] is, in the broad sense of the term, a bricolage, which spans a multitude of differences."[16]

The field of shared knowledge includes ideas of religion and, in a broader sense, spirituality. Cultural conformity, here specifically Western and historically Christian, on what constitutes religious images concerns not only the iconography of specific religions but also the "paradigm" of religious or spiritual aesthetics. The first is used in altering or restructuring religious iconography in transgressive bricolage. The second, the shared understanding of the religiosity of any motif not assigned to a specific religious tradition – for example the vastness of nature, the ritualism of processions or sacrifice, or the dichotomies of above and below, light and dark – can lend a bricolage a numen. Heavy metal and especially black metal are set in relation to what is called "religion" but is above all the popular cultural reception of religious codes.[17] The elements available for bricolage are designated and limited by the pre-constraints of the user and their audience as mentioned, but also by the intended form of the product. The cultural context or environment may provide entitlement to some elements and not others, while the visual repertoire may lack reference points to some motifs. The selection is driven by the availability and fit of the images.

The analytical frame of bricolage is especially revealing when applied to intermedia[18] like CDs, which combine songs, lyrics, a booklet, the cover etc., or music videos, where chronology, framing, the song itself, the lyrics, sometimes the musical performance, and even the possibility of complex narrative can be used to structure visual elements in this bricolage. Learning to read the visual language of these intermedia is another form of expertise practised by the insider.

Bricolage is simultaneously the process of assembling these elements at hand coherently and a way of describing the product. The approach in this article focuses on the need to refer to the preceding motif occurrences to achieve new meanings as well as the creation of new meanings by juxtapos-

16 Weinstein 1991, 22.

17 Höpflinger 2018, 68.

18 Heesch/Kopanski 2018.

ing or combining images. Music videos present, structure and combine images in multiple dimensions. Camera perspective puts the viewer in differing relations to the picture; the chronological succession relates any image to its preceding and following images. Intercutting similarly framed motifs creates an analogy or contrast. The sound, the very reason for the video, structures the cutting speed, visual repetitions and emphasis.

Profaning the Religious

Heavy metal is a musical genre as well as a subculture or, following Keith Kahn-Harris's terminology, a "scene". Music, content and images follow certain genre-constituting guidelines. To genre tradition and a stable canon of artists, we can add the crossing of boundaries (transgression[19]) as such a guideline. Transgression as a category transcends themes, but as a discourse of groups, authority and identity it is also a defining category for metal.[20] While transgression is directed outwards, it produces internal subcultural capital. Too great uniformity or repetition allows those transgressive acts or images to flow into the larger hegemonic structure and thereby lose their transgressive effect and the power to produce the same subcultural capital. Mainstream success may become selling out, and the earlier authenticity is now perceived as inauthenticity. As mundane subcultural capital that refers to traditional powers of discourse and functions as a unifying force is needed, heavy metal bricolage fluctuates between unifying the code of its visual language and fragmenting its own traditions.[21]

Deena Weinstein also identified the theme of power as essential for understanding and analysing heavy metal.[22] In conjunction with blasphemy, we must note abjection[23] and defilement.[24] Defilement and abjection are striking

19 Kahn-Harris 2007.

20 Hjelm/Kahn-Harris/LeVine 2013, 10.

21 Kahn-Harris 2007, 27–51.

22 Weinstein 1991: "The essential sonic element in heavy metal is power, expressed as sheer volume" (23); "The sonic power of metal is supported and enhanced by a wide range of visual artifacts and effects that display its inherent meaning" (27); "What heavy metal takes seriously is power. The sonic power of the music—its inherent meaning—contributes to every delineated meaning that appears in its lyrics. Any lyrical theme, even despair or suicide, is empowered by the heavy metal sound" (35).

23 Kristeva 1982.

24 Unger 2016.

in the profaning of explicitly religious symbols in a performative act of religious transgression, as in the example of the cross built of dismembered body parts in Behemoth's Sabbath Mater.[25] The occurrence of the abject in heavy metal is well described through Weinstein's category of chaos. Chaos, as one of the embodiments of power, is uncivilized, lacks order and is destructive. War is one example of such a recurring chaos motif in heavy metal. The grotesque in itself further disembeds heavy metal chaos from reality, while constantly referring back to its materiality.[26]

Marcus Moberg points out that the omnipresent religious topics within metal culture also serve as a source of inspiration and a resource for the recipients to create world views and religious identities. He notes that "the majority of these accounts have directed particular attention to metal's interest in what is variably referred to as 'Satanism,' the 'Satanic,' or the 'figure of Satan.' Because of this, most of them have focused on the extreme and 'Satanic' black metal sub-genre in particular."[27]

Many examples demonstrate how a satanic visual programme is primarily used as a means of transgression and as an expression of anti-Christian attitudes and is integrated overall into the visual programme of black metal on a bold scale – in this context the satanic visual programme now refers primarily to black metal itself and not essentially to satanism. Most satanic imagery and iconography are themselves dependent on bricolage. According to Dyrendal, "Satanists seem to construct a sense of individual, satanic identity as much or more from media consumption than from collective activities."[28] Satanism and black metal emerge as image producers that operate very similarly. The recourse to popular media and reciprocal exchange fuels their bricolage, and both can be said to strongly orient their aesthetic decisions according to transgression. In heavy metal, there is no shortage of black metal imagery that uses Baphomet, upside-down crosses and pentagrams. The pentagram is rendered nearly meaningless by its abundance in metal visuals. Blasphemy in this context orients itself to the in-group's idea of blasphemy but not to any blasphemous effect on the scene internally. Although a global phenomenon, extreme metal uses transgressive practices that are mostly aimed at Western targets. What is

25 Sabbath Mater (Behemoth, Grupa 13, PL 2019).

26 Halnon 2006.

27 Moberg 2012, 122.

28 Dyrendal 2008, 93.

perceived as transgressive in one culture or context may not be transgressive in another.[29]

Comparing specific religious symbols and images in extreme metal music videos shows many modes of application: (1) to produce visual transgression as blasphemy, expressing a religious programme, be it satanic[30] or occult, as is the case in ritual black metal,[31] (2) to produce visual transgression for the sake of transgression, expressing a heavy metal programme and invoking scene tradition, (3) to reproduce religious symbols to talk about a specific religious narrative as allegory, or (4) to recombine religious iconography without apparent defilement[32] to represent various NRM (new religious movements) and an alternative spirituality. The last point is applicable to occult rock, but also to many forms of doom metal. More possibilities for the utilization of religious symbols and images exist, and the specific motivations blur, just as the genre boundaries do. But religious imagery that does not refer to a specific religion or philosophy is just as intriguing. Still, this category of image has its hidden past in religious thoughts and discourses such as metaphors of transcendence or the sublime. We are accustomed to associate certain patterns with contingent notions of "religiousness". Thus the boundaries between generally religiously inspired images and religious symbols cannot always be drawn clearly.

Religionized Imagery

Bricolage depends not only on what's "at hand", but also on what conceivably can be understood and is appropriate according to the scene for inclusion in the bricolage. Outside the focus on apparent religious images, we find other repetitive movable motifs. The genre boundaries within heavy metal are fuzzy, and a certain aesthetic or iconography cannot be ascribed to a

29 Kahn-Harris 2007, 48.

30 Petersen 2011, 91: "Although satanic practices of transgression are many, they frequently target the popular holy cows of sexuality and the body, religion and politics, and violence, channelling self-work through ritual, performance, and art."

31 Granholm 2013.

32 Partridge (2014, 243) concludes that many religious discourses outside hegemonic sacred forms are easily integrated into popular music. They are capable of being perceived as transgressive themselves rather than being the starting point for transgressive distortion.

certain style of music, yet tendencies are emerging that clearly differentiate certain styles from others.[33] The same motifs can appear in different combinations and with different functions at the level of meaning in several metal styles. Black metal shares a basic aesthetic structure with death metal, from which it emerged, although satanic content and iconography are considered identity markers of black metal. In both, desaturated colours and black-and-white images are dominant. In both, misty forests and ruins can be found repeatedly, be they urban ruins or archaic castle ruins, abandoned chapels or cemeteries.

At the Gates's Kingdom Gone,[34] Therion's Pandemonium Outbreak[35] and Morgoth's Sold Baptism[36] are all examples of a differentiated bricolage in contemporary black metal. These examples have the aforementioned elements but apart from general references to death, they do not have any religious motifs. Elements of (various) religious contexts may belong "to the fixed repertoire of the representation of black metal bands", but this intensive preoccupation with religious material is in contrast to the rejection of religious traditions, especially monotheism and religion in its institutionalized forms.[37]

The nature motif presents an opportunity for the romantic landscape to embody not only loneliness, but also the human–nature relationship. Far away from civilization, images of masculinity which recur to the types of the archaic warrior and the hermit are constructed through the context of nature.[38] In black metal especially, nature serves as a staging space for loneliness and archaism. Contemporary metal bands, which follow in a certain black metal genealogy, from blackgaze to doom metal, often use nature in their music videos. This nature may be spiritually enhanced (the archaic space then serves as a ritual space), and references to transcendentality may be created through an overwhelming landscape. Good con-

33 In addition, in the extreme metal subgenres of death metal or black metal, innovation is also valued as a sign of authenticity. The tendency to follow tradition always clashes with the need to differentiate.

34 Kingdom Gone (At the Gates, unknown, 1994).

35 Pandemonium Outbreak (Therion, unknown, 1992).

36 Sold Baptism (Morgoth, unknown, 1991).

37 Höpflinger 2010, 217.

38 Leichsenring 2011; Richard/Grünwald 2011, 45–47. They refer here in particular to Immortal's Blashyrkh (Mighty Ravendark) (1994) as the foundation of further depictions of nature in this respect in black metal.

temporary examples are the music video for Schammasch's "Metanoia",[39] where nature becomes almost an abstract entity in which one loses oneself, or the music videos for Uada's "Devoid of Light"[40] and "Cult of a Dying Sun".[41] In the latter two, a ritual motif is embedded in the nature scenery. The landscape and ruins in the video for Eluveitie's "A Rose for Epona",[42] by contrast, evoke more references to the past, which fits the folk elements of the band.

Many bands, productions and music videos refer intertextually to fantasy and horror genres (film and books). An early example is Iron Maiden's The Number of the Beast,[43] in which horror film material is interspersed as set pieces between scenes of the band performing.[44] Even if no film material from existing horror films is used, the genre is often referred to through compositional and production aesthetics. Rob Zombie's Living Dead Girl[45] and Ghost's Square Hammer[46] make strong visual references to the cinema of German Expressionism. Some bands from the occult rock genre extend their musical references to the occult-flavoured bluesy psychedelic rock of the Sixties and Seventies. For example, the video for Blood Ceremony's "Goodbye Gemini"[47] imitates the visuals of this period through its use of colours and blurring. The music video for Jess and the Ancient One's "Astral Sabbath"[48] illustrates how modern image technology is used to create similar psychedelic music videos. More obvious references to the band's location in the occult milieu as well as the musical orientation of the band and the contents of the specific song are indicated in this music video through the fade-in and fade-out of alchemical symbols.[49]

39 Metanoia (Schammasch, Patrick Häberli, CH 2016).

40 Devoid of Light (Uada, Tim Keenan Burgess, US 2016).

41 Cult of a Dying Sun (Uada, Jake Superchi, Occultus Visum, US 2018).

42 A Rose for Epona (Eluveitie, Grupa 13, PL 2012).

43 The Number of the Beast (Iron Maiden, David Mallet, UK 1982).

44 King Diamond's Sleepless Nights (King Diamond, US 1989) also contains short scenes from old horror movies in addition to the band's performance at a cemetery.

45 Living Dead Girl (Rob Zombie, Joseph Kahn and Rob Zombie, US 1999).

46 Square Hammer (Ghost, Zev Deans, US 2016).

47 Goodbye Gemini (Blood Ceremony, Rouzbeh Heydari, CA 2013).

48 Astral Sabbat (Jess and the Ancient Ones, unknown, 2013).

49 Granholm explains the band's place in the occult milieu at the end of his article on ritual black metal; see Granholm 2013, 27.

A Comparison

An example can be found of almost every combination of religious and religionized images, even if we restrict ourselves to music videos. Based on their typological similarity, individual images can be assigned to one motif category for later analysis of its variations through comparison. To exemplify the variety in which the same motifs with more or less religious connotations can be placed in bricolage, I will look at two music videos of the same period with comparable footage. The two videos were chosen for the striking similarities in visual motifs even as they are situated in fundamentally different scenes within extreme metal – hardcore and black metal respectively.

Venom Prison is a British death metal/hard core band founded in 2014. Their themes and lyrics examine social injustice, misogyny and rape culture, homophobia and racism.[50] They primarily use religious allegory to explore socio-political issues.[51] The music video for the single "Asura's Realm",[52] from their second album, *Samsara*, mixes two scenarios against the backdrop of a single landscape: a musical performance by the band and a narrative with archetypal figures. Some of the individual pieces of visual staffage are red water, moving with the tides, figures in black and red cowls, a woman in white, a knife, a crown of thorns, a desolate landscape and church ruins.

Uada is an American black metal band formed in 2014. Like their fellow Portlanders, Wolves in the Throne Room,[53] Uada bring a dark romanticism of landscapes and gloom to the table, rather than the gorefest of other black metal bands. Black metal as a generally misanthropic scene is far more preoccupied with personal or interpersonal strife than with societal systemic problems. In short, cultural pessimism and the symbolic rejection of the music industry are typical for black metal.[54] The themes of black metal echo

50 Everly 2019. Ruskell (2019) writes, "What Venom Prison have done is humanised this music by holding up a mirror to a cruel world and viewing people as more than simply walking dummies full of guts, but sentient beings worthy of life, rather than a grisly, gory death."

51 Guitarist Ash Gray has stated, "No one ever wants to say anything about religion […] It's the same when you talk about rape culture", see Mills 2019.

52 Asura's Realm (Venom Prison, Tom J. Cronin, UK 2019).

53 Pöhlmann 2012.

54 Hagen 2011, 196.

a yearning for some kind of archaism, be it fantasy-guide imaginations of the Middle Ages, neopaganism, Vikings or the solitude of the "old forests".[55] In a similar vein, religion can be understood as anti-modern, as an irrational relic of the pre-Enlightenment. The Book of Revelation and the Apocalypse are generally part of the fixed repertoire of the representation.[56] Finally, the assembly of religious imagery is more concerned with possible spiritual or philosophical assertions than with political allegory.

The music video for the single "Cult of a Dying Sun", from Uada's album of the same name, combines, much like Venom Prison's video, a performance and a fictional plot amidst nature. The individual pieces of visual staffage are tree trunks and ravines, the woods, candles and fire, and a deer skull mask. The latter is worn by a devilish figure, acting as the priest figure at the end and also as the singer, but in the montage the figure is separated from the performance shots.

Ritual and nature are the two paradigms which determine the general structure of the video analysis.

Ritualism

The religious charge of the staffage lies in the trope of the lonely hooded figure travelling through the landscape with a bundle. In one case it is an old man in a cowl; in the other a young woman with a head scarf (figs. 1 and 2). The deindividualization serves to mythologize.

A reading of the figure in light of a religious narrative is reinforced by their interactions with figures of seeming authority. In both cases I refer to the authority figures as "priests", as we have no more suitable term. From the symbolic gestures to the staff and mask, they are marked such that they can be recognized as the (literary) archetype of the evil priest (figs. 3 and 4). In both cases the initial exposition surrounds the main figure with religious imagery. In Cult of a Dying Sun, candles and a centred fire associate the female figure with ritual, which can be compared to the dialogue of the main figure with the priest figure at the beginning of Asura's Realm. Both place the figures in a clear religious context, which turns out to be a sacrificial pilgrimage. The rising tension consists mainly

55 Ghonghadze 2017, 369–377.

56 Höpflinger 2010, 217.

Fig. 1: Music video still from Asura's Realm, Venom Prison, 00:02:01.

Fig. 2: Music video still from Cult of a Dying Sun, Uada, 00:06:50.

of walking scenes. Both scenes situate hooded figures in a much larger landscape.

Seen side by side, the scenes lack the associative support of their individual framing bricolage and are only visual. While Uada's climax is a sacrifice that ends the video, the sacrifice in Venom Prison's video is less climactically staged and is followed by falling action. The closing scenes show the old man in a dark void, drawing attention to his crown of thorns. In Asura's Realm the active participant – the "martyr" in light of the crown of thorns – seems to act under pressure. He is given orders and later the knife by other figures. The unnatural authority figure in the church keeps himself free

Fig. 3: Music video still from Asura's Realm, Venom Prison, 00:00:42.

Fig. 4: Music video still from Cult of a Dying Sun, Uada, 00:02:49.

from guilt or consequences. A connection can be made between the idea of religion as oppressive and social systemic compulsion, with the motif of a priest-like cultic figure framed to accentuate authority. Beyond the visual support, the lyrics provide an allegorical reading of corrupt authority. Contrastingly, the priest figure in Uada's video is the sacrificing participant and enacts violence through the implied burning of the child (the bundle). The narrative of sacrifice turns into a "deal with the devil". The video description[57] names the figures as Mother/Ritualist and Djinn/Ritualist. Although

57 Cult of a Dying Sun (Uada, Occultus Visum/Jake Superchi, US 2018).

the landscape and montage do not reinforce this association with djinns, there are a few corresponding visual set pieces, primarily the head scarf and an oil lamp. The Islamic, or pre-Islamic, motif of the djinn is re-embedded in the motif of the deal with the devil, but this association is not self-evident in the visual bricolage itself – the oil lamp and head scarf could easily be overlooked alongside the overwhelming symbolism of the landscape. Awareness of these individual pieces heightens the supernatural element. The "Mother" in Cult of a Dying Sun is herself a "Ritualist", but the reading of the sacrifice as power exchange seems probable even without these designations. Likewise, in the case of Venom Prison the Buddhist or Hindu links in the song and album titles (*Samsara* and *Asura*) are not reflected in the visual programme. The content of the Cyrillic transcriptions of dialogue in the video is difficult for most viewers to access – the added value is once more visual.

The same visual language is used to shape the sacrifice motif, but in one instance with a focus on disempowerment and in the other with a focus on power exchange. In Venom Prison's video, the Christian references in the chapel and the crown of thorns direct the associations towards (religious) authority in the form of the Christian Church. The allegory of institutional oppression relies on the recognition of these paralleling power structures. In Uada's video, however, the same position within the pattern, the priest, is coded as "devilish", more archetypal and less a reference to social positions of power. Both priest figures act as authorities and they perform similar functions to denote the whole as a story of sacrifice, but "power" is not set in the same associative networks in these videos. The visual repertoire of sacrifice is limited, and the most straightforward and recognizable versions will be implemented more often. But these movable parts provide many starting points for extending or directing meaning in a particular direction.

Landscape

Anti-modernity topoi and archaic fantasies manifested themselves in austere landscapes long before the first black metal bands took their first band pictures in the Norwegian woods. The isolating and misanthropic tendencies of the scene grant nature its own power apart from any human agent. Both ritual narratives are embedded in nature. The closeness to nature can

Fig. 5: Music video still from Asura's Realm, Venom Prison, 00:01:39.

Fig. 6: Music video still from Cult of a Dying Sun, Uada, 00:03:20.

be interpreted as anti-modern in two ways: modernity is associated with urbanization, mechanization and rationalization, while the turning away from modernity is associated with nature, myth and irrationality.[58] The reference to nature is also anti-modern when it arises from the connection between nature and paganism, specifically with the claim of (pre-modern, pre-Christian) originality. This claim is also fed by the Romantic conception of nature.[59] There is no industrialized landscape in Romantic-era *Kunstreligion*

58 Leichsenring 2011, 291–293.

59 Ghonghadze 2017, 369–371.

(art-as-religion), just as there are no urban landscapes in most black metal sensibilities. In some cases, the critical reception of American Romanticists, Transcendentalists, leads bands to frame their modern ecological concerns with matching visual conceptions of nature and spirituality:[60] nature is empty and vast, and infinity or divinity are located within this finite nature.[61]

Both music videos utilize the iconography of empty nature and both communicate religious images through "archetypal" images, in this instance less through religious iconography and more by way of "religionized" imagery. But the staging of a familiar austere nature is nevertheless varied, with the human figures of the band put in relation to this nature differently (fig. 5 and 6). Venom Prison stand out against the horizon line, above the camera view; Uada, masked and depersonalized, blur into the landscape.

Their silhouettes and the mountainous skyline merge. When we put these shots next to each other (see fig. 1–2; 5–6), we see the differing camera angles. The low angle in Asura's Dream raises the verticality of its nature shots, while the high angle in Cult of a Dying Sun keeps the viewer distanced. Isolation and mythification are mediated through nature in Asura's Realm, but nature itself is not an entity, unlike in Cult of a Dying Sun. In the case of Venom Prison's allegorical motif of sacrifice, the embedding in nature is a consequence of the preceding notion of ritual. Ritual as a motif seems incompatible with any form of modernity or urbanity, and nature is therefore the required backdrop.

Here we find two different scene traditions, fed by two different outlooks, one inward-facing, philosophical and misanthropic, and the other political and focused on interpersonal dynamics. The incorporation of nature reflects these differing propositions.

Conclusion

The religious content of an image or bricolage can be manufactured through culturally learned aesthetic choices. The modus of transgression mostly rejects non-blasphemous repetition of hegemonic religions and their symbols. Heavy metal and, as we have seen, extreme metal have developed a visual language which reuses religious images according to its own tradition. This

60 Pöhlmann 2012, 269.

61 Schleiermacher 1878.

tradition overwrites religious symbols genre-internally. Even unintentionally, without directly addressing religion, the self-elevation and celebration of metal stylizes its own images according to the cultural parameters of sacred images. The building blocks for self-aggrandizing myth writing stem from accumulated religious imagery. Maintaining a recognizable visual language leads to a degree of uniformity, which in turn can support a sense of community and cohesion. A consistency of motifs arises from the fluctuation between compulsion and cliché. Religious images are no exception to this internal discourse of transgression and meaning making. Uncovering further oblique meanings requires attention to the details, in particular when obfuscation is in itself an aesthetic decision. Any repetition of a variation of religious imagery from the cultural repertoire that relies on the religious context to empower the bricolage solidifies this application in the visual language – even as this sedimentation further removes it from specific religious meanings. By analysing specific examples, I have sought to illustrate bricolage as a viable approach to describing the formation of heavy metal's visual language as well as to analysing its products. In the heavy metal tradition, embedded motifs are used in differing bricolage and with differing intentions by means of associative links and contextualizing framings. I argue for a way of looking at image production that includes an intertextual view of constructed lines of tradition. "Blasphemy" is only one of many factors in the appropriation of religious images. The moving parts of the heavy metal bricolage are recycled in its own image-producing machinery, and through creative reproduction and new bricolage they return to popular culture as a whole.

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INTERLUDE

Music video still from Adam & Steve, Dorian Electra, 00:01:04,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mViZtUHqDg8

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Yannick Schlote

"But are as the Angels which are in Heaven" (Mark 12:25)

Reimagining a Gender-Ambiguous Heaven in Dorian Electra's ADAM & STEVE

Keywords

Pop Culture, Theological Anthropology, Queer Readings of Biblical Texts, Dorian Electra, Adam and Steve

Biography

Yannick Schlote studied protestant theology in Berlin und Munich. He is working as an academic assistant at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of Munich (LMU). His research focuses on theological and ethical aspects of digitalisation, specifically on narratives concerning artificial intelligence. Furthermore he is interested in popular culture.

The American singer and songwriter Dorian Electra is a queer[1] phenomenon. Their[2] dandy appearance – their latest album is called *Flamboyant* (2019) – goes hand in hand with their criticism of toxic masculinity and gender binarism. Their stage name recalls Oscar Wilde's beautiful villain Dorian Gray and the ancient Greek tragic heroine Electra. Their trademark is the lavish use of synthesisers to lower and thereby androgenise their voice while emphasising its artificial alteration. Displaying the fluidity of gender not by its absence but by mixing traits of masculinity and femininity can be seen as the leitmotif of Dorian Electra's output.

One of the tracks on *Flamboyant*, "Adam & Steve", is a gay retelling of the Genesis story.[3] It turns on the derogative phrase, "It's Adam and Eve, not Adam

1 I use the term "queer" in a broad sense, referring to everything non heterosexual.

2 While in the lyrics Dorian uses attributes such as "guy" and "man", I follow the use of they/their pronouns in Ben Beaumont-Thomas's *Guardian* interview with Dorian Electra; see Beaumont-Thomas 2019.

3 *Flamboyant* (Dorian Electra, US 2017, self-released)

and Steve", which is used to imply an irreconcilable disparity between Christianity and gay love, i.e. queerness in general. Mischievously, Dorian gives Adam and Steve a backstory with this video (with its main chorus "And God made me just like Adam and Steve").[4] Reclaiming derogatory terms and transforming them into positive narratives is one of the tools marginalised groups rely on. The researcher and activist Gregory Coles interprets this reclaiming of words as a sort of exorcism of language from linguistically embedded oppression.[5] Strangely, the rite of exorcism marks a crucial point in the Adam & Steve video.

The Exorcism (1:55–2:20): In its aesthetics this scene heavily refers to William Friedkin's 1973 cult classic The Exorcist. Dorian is shackled to their bed, two priests (here wearing steampunk fashion including gasmasks) bend over them, reciting verses and swinging a thurible. Their intent is obvious: the Latin praefix *ex-* (out) in "exorcism" suggests the extrication of whatever power is hidden underneath the surface (mostly in humans, but also in haunted objects and places). The audience is familiar with this motif, aware that the priests are forcing Dorian's demon to show itself. And indeed, it does appear: something is reaching out and manifesting from Dorian's body, and it bends in agony. But instead of a demon's face, one sees feathery wings. The inner nature of Dorian brought to the surface is not demonic but angelic. By reusing this motif of exorcism, Dorian counters Pentecostal Christians who believe in exorcising homosexuality, thought to be caused by demons.[6] Instead, Dorian establishes theirself, a queer person, as one of God's heavenly messengers (paralleled in the lyrics "Say I'm an abomination but I'm God's creation").

Heaven (2:21–2:48): With Dorian's revelation as an angel, the scenery switches to heaven. There, Adam and Steve are kissing – the ultimate sign of God's approval of their bond. Whilst up until now no other person's face has been shown – just backs or figures cloaked like the aforementioned priests – this changes in the last heavenly scene. In typical Dorian Electra fashion, two angels pole dance next to each other. Just like Dorian, they transcend gender.

In the Bible, the symbol of heaven as a state of self-revelation occurs in several verses on eschatological anthropology. When Christ is asked by the Sadducees what life after the resurrection at the end of days will be like, he

4 Adam & Steve (Dorian Electra and Weston Allen, US 2019).

5 Cf. Coles 2016, 425.

6 For one of many examples, see TearsToJoyMinistries n. d.

replies, "For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mark 12:25 KJV). And in Galatians 3:28, Paul states, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Life in an eschatological perspective defies social conformities and attributions of ethnicity, social status, or sex and gender. These categories lose their defining relevance. But instead of forfeiting vision, Paul states, between now and then, world and heaven, people will gain true vision of what is beneath the surface: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). People's struggling to see through themselves and other people seems to nurture the urge to find clarity only in unambiguousness. As an alternative, a heavenly perspective indicates that true selves may lie in ambiguity itself. Dorian Electra really is a gain for today's pop music culture.

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Natalie Fritz and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger

"And God Is Never Far Away"

Or the Sum of this Issue

POSTLUDE

Abstract

The postlude offers a summarising reflection on music and popular culture.

Keywords

Madonna, Like a Prayer, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Religious Expectations, Meaning Making, New Spirituality, The Mercy Seat

In this Issue we have journeyed through popular music genres and scholarly approaches and now, in this postlude, we can look back to some of the most revealing discoveries. As the authors have demonstrated, popular music carries a wide range of religious symbols and motifs. In many cases, artists not only pick up religious symbols and motifs and place them in new contexts, but also create a new whole out of different religious narratives (see Eva Meienberg and Katharina Luise Merkert), which can lead to a genre-specific religious-visual language (see Lavinia Pflugfelder). But popular music can also be a means of expression for more traditional religious communities or world-views. More established religious ideas can be communicated through popular music in new and innovative ways (see Reinhard Kopanski). Popular music tells us much about the values and expectations of a specific culture and can therefore enter into fruitful dialogue with religion and pressing contemporary issues (see Angela Sue Sawyers and Yannick Schlote).

In the following we will highlight some aspects of the interrelation of religion and popular music with two examples from the 1980s: Madonna's famous song "Like a Prayer" with the video clip from 1989[1] and Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' "The Mercy Seat", from the album *Tender Prey* (1988) and focus thereby on the

1 Like a Prayer (Madonna, Mary Lambert, US 1989), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79fzeNUqQbQ [accessed 2 June 2020].

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Fig. 1: Music video still from Like a Prayer, Madonna, 00:00:10.

intermedia relation of music, lyrics and videoclips to raise for example questions about world-views, religious doctrines and formulate normative guidelines.

Holy or blasphemous?

Madonna is one of the most famous artists of the 20th century. She grew up in a Roman Catholic setting, which undoubtedly has influenced her art. "Like a Prayer" was released in 1989 and became one of her bestselling – but also one of her most controversial – songs. The discussion it stirred stemmed mainly from the accompanying video clip. The story of the video is that of a white girl (Madonna) who witnesses the assault of a white woman by white men. A black man attempts to save the victim and is arrested by the police who arrive on the scene. Madonna, who had been seen by one of the perpetrators, seeks shelter in a church. There she prays in front of a black saint, Martin de Porres, who looks like the arrested man. The statue comes to life, and they kiss. At the end, Madonna is in court and is able to ensure the black man is cleared of the crime. The story is not told chronologically, but jumps forwards

Fig. 2: Music video still from Like a Prayer, Madonna, 00:01:23.

and backwards, while between the single pieces of the plot, Madonna sings with a gospel choir.

At the start of the video, we see the singer running in the twilight and then falling, and 10 seconds in, the camera leads her gaze, and ours, towards a burning cross (fig. 1).

Even though the word "cross" is not mentioned in the lyrics, a subtle redemption may be found the lines "I hear you call my name / and it feels like home". In fact, the lyrics are arbitrary in that they refer explicitly to neither God nor a beloved person, but Madonna herself described the song as a story about a girl feeling loved and saved by God in an almost mystical way, as though God was her male partner.[2] So redemption here lies in the feeling of being loved – by whom is in the end not significant.

The video clip suggests, however, another reading of cross, not its positive Christian connotations as a sign for redemption, by setting the song within a racial controversy. Visualising a love song in terms of assault and racial injustice is unusual. On the audio level the gospel singers, who first accompany

2 Perricone 2011.

Fig. 3: Music video still from Like a Prayer, Madonna, 00:01:27.

Fig. 4: Music video still from Like a Prayer, Madonna, 00:01:30.

Madonna's voice as background choir and then in the last third take over the lead, already point to a mix of musical traditions. Consequently, the burning crosses here are indicative of racist whiteness, as symbols of the crimes of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, whereas the African American protagonists and the dark-skinned saint are good, with the African American congregation welcoming Madonna with open arms (figs. 2, 3, 4), while her kissing the dark-skinned saint, who comes to life again, is a reference to racial equality.[3]

On the audio and textual levels "Like a Prayer" provides no evidence for a political statement or criticism. If we hear the song only, we would never think of racism; it's "just" a love song. The video clip, however, visually promotes what the lyrics say: redemption can be found in the community of caring of others. Skin colour is of no importance. In the music video Madonna's statement against racial discrimination and the representation of the church as an important social actor in racial justice are explicit and highly political, which provoked protests from various parties as soon as the video was published. For fundamental Catholics she was doomed as a blasphemous singer,[4] and while a music journalist was stunned that Madonna would profit from showing burning crosses, Madonna's response was that she had always thought that art should be controversial.[5]

The interaction between music, lyrics and visual representation in the case of the Like a Prayer video clip therefore plays with aesthetic conventions and references to religious symbols and meaning, and thus not only challenges the socio-political status quo, but also opens the beholder's eye to potentially less obvious aspects of religious communication.

3 "If any one of the images in the *Like a Prayer* video blatantly violates so-called racial taboos and potentially offends viewers, it is the depiction of Madonna's character being kissed by the black male. […] In *Like a Prayer*, however, Madonna does not allow the viewer to dismiss or ignore the relationship or wish it away. She also does not give in to the racists, whose burning crosses in the background blaze with the rage of fear and hatred that would keep the races polarized. Madonna challenges viewers not by advocating interracial relationships but by presenting images that confront them with their own historically grounded prejudice" (Scott 1993, 66).

4 Romero 2010; Holden 1989.

5 Holden 1989.

From reference to a new spirituality

With our second example – the song "The Mercy Seat" by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds – we can look in greater detail at this intermedia interaction of music, text and image and the relationship to religion. The Australian artist Nick Cave grew up Anglican. His songs have often dealt with religious themes, especially in the 1980s. The song "The Mercy Seat", performed by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds on the album *Tender Prey* (1988), is a striking example of this interrelation between religion and music.

"I began to warm and chill / to objects and their fields / a ragged cup, a twisted mop / the face of Jesus in my soup." These are the first sung lines of this song – preceded by a mumbled first-person account of how the singer landed on death row. The song deals with death and hope, sin and forgiveness, and guilt and innocence, with many allusions to the Old Testament (e. g. Lev. 16:11–19; Lev. 24:19–21) and New Testament (e. g. Luke 2:6–8) on the eve of the singer's execution by electrocution. The song's music video jumps between a black-and-white prison cell where Nick Cave, aka the first-person singer, explains the feelings of a "moribund" man (fig. 5) and the band performance, in colour and somewhat distanced, of the song's chorus (fig. 6).[6]

This visual discrepancy between the two scenes reflects the many contradictory lines within the lyrics – the "mercy seat" may refer to the electric chair, used for executions, or to the throne of God, the place where mercy can be found. It also serves as a leitmotif of the band's whole œuvre. Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds constantly question humankind and humanity – even life itself – in their songs and often refer to one of the "providers of sense and orientation", to religion and especially the Bible. As Cave sings in "The Mercy Seat", "God is never far away".

"The Mercy Seat" is not the only place where the band analyses the world and human behaviour by referring either to the legitimacy of punishment in the Old Testament (as, for example, also in "I Let Love In", 1994) or the prospect of hope, the crucial element of the New Testament (as also in "Sun Forest", 2019). The fundamental questions the band – or mostly Cave – raises in its/his texts are too complex and in the end also too individual to answer in general terms, but the band frequently deals with this deficiency by integrating a critical reading of specific Christian narratives or symbols as possibilities for how to manage life.

6 For the full video see The Mercy Seat (Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 1988), https://www.nickcave.com/videos/the-mercy-seat/ [accessed 2 August 2020].

Fig. 5: Nick Cave, "the first-person singer", in the cell awaiting his execution – a cheap print of an *imago pietatis* on the wall. Music video still from The Mercy Seat, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 00:01:08.

Fig. 6: The band playing the chorus of "The Mercy Seat". Music video still from The Mercy Seat, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 00:00:49.

In his lyrics Cave sometimes struggles with his faith (e. g. "There Is A Town", 2003), prays for mercy ("Skeleton Tree", 2016) or finds a little or momentarily comfort in faith ("Waiting for You", 2019). The essential questions and feelings Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds address with their texts are approached subtly, openly and very sensitively, and even though these huge issues seem to yearn for emotion-laden answers, the band's musical qualities do not emphasise a specific feeling, but break with convention and expectations to allow the audience to agree or not.

Since the band has been active for almost 40 years, it has established not only an extensive discography but also a huge fan community. In recent years Cave has built up a close relationship with his fanbase through diverse media in addition to music. The semi-fictional documentary 20,000 Days on Earth (Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard, GB 2014), about 24 hours in Nick Cave's life, and the documentary One More Time with Feeling (Andrew Dominik, GB 2016), which accompanies the making of the album *Skeleton Tree*, following the death of Cave's 15 year old son in July 2015, present the human being behind the artist and work as a bond between fanbase and public persona. After the death of his son, Cave started the "Conversation with"-series, shows with music and personal Q&A with the audience, and also initiated a blog named *The Red Hand Files*,[7] where he answers questions and writes about life and death or anything quotidian. The posts are sometimes poetic, sometimes angry, sometimes full of grief, but they appear honest and affable and can have a religious touch – as journalist Russell Cunningham writes, "Reading the Red Hand Files brings a sense of Easter revival, of hope amid despair, inviting us to be still, be present in the moment, guided by a suited and booted vicar."[8]

Stepping down from the pedestal on which his fans place him to become human again seems to be a form of personal trauma therapy for Cave. Jem Aswad records Cave's answer to the question of why he is doing this:

> 'My son died', Cave said. 'It changed everything for me. Coming out of punk rock, I had an adversarial, conflicted relationship with my audience, especially in the early days. But after my son died I got an incredible amount of mail from people writing to me with similar experiences. I felt connected to them,' he concluded. 'I felt like we were suffering together.'[9]

7 The Red Hand Files, n. d.

8 Cunningham 2018.

9 Aswad 2019.

Fig. 7: Nick Cave singing and performing "Magneto" at Copenhagen, September 2017, 00:05:00.

Fig. 8: Nick Cave asks his fans, "Can you feel my heart beat?" Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds performing "Higgs Boson Blues" at the Beacon Theater, New York, 14 June 2017, 00:09:47.

Nick Cave gains credibility from his ability as a popular singer/songwriter, author and screenplay writer to show his suffering, his grief and how he tries to cope with the eventualities of life. As journalist Kate Hennessy puts it: "It's about being present, knowable, vulnerable and real. And funny. Always that."[10]

10 Hennessy 2019.

Cave has increasingly gained the aura of a leader of a cult, as is particularly evident when we see Cave and the band play live and celebrate their music together with their fans. Perhaps their transformation of questions into music and into performance constitutes an aesthetic sense or meaningfulness. Deploying Victor Turner's ritual theory, we can conclude that the meaning of the song is established during its quasi-ritual performance. Cave, who is well versed in the Bible, refers to Scripture as a manual for vital issues and orientation and also adopts an emotional performativity that we know from American televangelists. Even though we can assume that this form of performance carries a touch of irony (just read his blog), it is fascinating that as he sings, this critical ex-punk rocker – now usually clad in expensive, tailored suits – holds out his hand over the heads of the fans as in a gesture of blessing[11] (fig. 7) or encourages them to feel his heart beat[12] (fig. 8).

In addition to referring to biblical narratives with their texts, on a performative level Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds also bring people to their "church", where everyone who dares can find meaning in life – or as Cave sings in "Into My Arms": "I don't believe in an interventionist God / But I know, darling, that you do / But if I did I would kneel down and ask Him / Not to intervene when it came to you / Not to touch a hair on your head / To leave you as you are / And if He felt He had to direct you / Then direct you into my arms".[13]

Music as a sign of religious expectations

As the examples show, the interrelation of popular music and religion is embedded in an intermedia network; different perspectives open up different questions. At the same time, these interrelations are also part of a larger cultural and time-specific context with particular norms, values, conventions and expectations. Through popular music, normative values are conveyed. The negotiation can trigger protest as in the case of Madonna's song, or approval, but in both cases it shapes responses to existential questions and ideas of basic human norms and transmits these ideas through global distribution.

11 Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, 2015, "Magneto", performed live in Copenhagen, uploaded 13 September, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1XKc8lROTs [accessed 22 August 2020].

12 Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds ,2015, "Higgs Boson Blues", performed live at the Beacon Theater, NYC, 14 June 2017, uploaded 15 June, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTpd0RPZi5s [accessed 22 August 2020].

13 For the lyrics of "Into My Arms" see Cave 1997.

The songs addressed, and still address, different discourses. Popular music thus forms not only its own logic of mediation and representation but also its own genre-specific approach to religion. As these songs by Madonna and Nick Cave and the case studies in this issue show, the use of religious symbols, motifs and narratives in a specific song can say a lot about the respective music culture, its performances and ideas of the world, just as popular music can reveal much about common ideas on religion and dominant cultural values. Popular music thus connects the collective with the individual: a personal artistic expression of a musician or a band is placed in dialogue with the basic religious ideas of a society or community. The interrelations between music and religion are complex and fluid: a "secular" song can form "religious" emotions and/or transcendental experiences; it can help in difficult life situations. Vice versa, a song from a religious perspective or community may be secularised and transmitted in a secular context as a secular song. Some songs are both religious and secular, depending on how religion is viewed and defined. Some musicians can be worshipped like transcendent figures as saints or even gods, and a pronounced fan cult can develop around them, as in the case of Nick Cave. And for some people, popular music (as a whole) is itself more than music; it is a lifestyle or might even become a religion – regardless of religious motifs in lyrics or video clips and regardless of star-musicians.

Examination of religion and popular music poses the complex theoretical question of the fluid boundaries between religion and non-religion. That question must be answered anew in each case study, not in general, but in relation to a concrete perspective, a specific band or song. This insight brings us back to the point of departure for our Issue, which hopefully will encourage scholars to explore the fascinating interactions between religion and popular music, because, as we have learned, "God is never far away".

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Media Reviews

Simon Philipp Born

Book Review
Assaf Gamzou / Ken Koltun-Fromm (eds.), Comics and Sacred Texts Reimagining Religion & Graphic Narratives

Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2018, 322 pages, ISBN: 978-1-4968-1947-5

Can a comic book be religious? Or even sacred? At first, it seems a somewhat strange idea to look for the holy in the most mundane form of popular culture. After all, the sacred and the profane are two strictly separated realms, as Émile Durkheim informs us, "two distinct classes, […] two worlds between which there is nothing in common".[1] However, as Assaf Gamzou and Ken Koltun-Fromm argue in their edited volume *Comics and Sacred Texts*, breaking up clear-cut distinctions and transgressing boundaries is the very nature of the graphic narrative itself. Comics are a hybrid medium of image and text defying any distinct categorization and highlighting the ambiguous space left blank in between the images: "In their *showing* and *telling*, in the stutter-step of the paneled narratives, comics offer us a *liminal* experience of reading, engaging, and constructing meaning. It is an experience 'betwixt and between time' [citing Victor Turner] that in its form as an *imagetext* both undermines the separation of media and harbors the potential for rethinking how media reveal the sacred" (xiv, emphasis in the original).

So yes, on second thought, the sacred can be found even or maybe especially in the world of comic books. It can be witnessed in the religion-like treatment of comic narratives as holy texts by fans and writers, where the authority of meaning is canonized in a continuity bible like the comprehensive Batman bible by *Batman* comic writer and editor Denny O'Neil.[2] Or think of

1 Durkheim 2008, 38–39.

2 See Brooker 2012, 154–155.

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the many ways superhero comics function as modern-day myths, combining the sublime and the grotesque in excessively drawn bodies and reinforcing and subverting traditional moralities of good and evil.[3] Even more explicitly, there is a whole genre for comic book adaptations of religious stories.

Gamzou and Koltun-Fromm point out that starting with Umberto Eco and Natalie Chilton's influential essay *The Myth of Superman*,[4] there has been a long-standing tradition of analyzing the interplay between religion and comics (xiii). From the mythological qualities of Superhero stories in comic writer Grant Morrison's captivating *Supergods*[5] to the growing number of publications on the specific Jewish tradition of comic books like Danny Fingeroth's *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics and the Creation of the Superhero*,[6] comic writers and academics alike have written about the connection between comics and religion. It is no coincidence that authors of publications on religion and comics like Karline McLain[7] or editors Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman[8] also contributed to *Comics as Sacred Texts*. The book channels the results of various authors currently working on the subject and brings their studies up to date. Given this history of engagement with comic books from the perspective of religious studies, one might ask what is actually *new* about *Comics as Sacred Texts*. Primarily, it is the approach of the book: *Comics and Sacred Texts* looks at graphic narratives as "culturally educational, pedagogical texts able to motivate new modes of seeing the sacred" (xx). Reading and understanding a comic book is as much a culturally trained activity as is recognizing the sacred, both of which align in their complex manifestation in image and text: "As a visual and textual medium, comics expose the graphic interplay of seeing the sacred and reading about it" (xii). This approach enables the editors to collect a diverse selection of essays that explore not only the meaning but also the very form of how the sacred can be found in the words and pictures of a graphic narrative. In her essay "The Hebrew Alphabet as Graphic Narrative", Susan Handelman, for example, puts comic book theories and rabbinic interpretation into a dialogue. By focusing on the graphic shapes of the Hebrew letters, Handelman addresses the multi-modal qualities

3 Born 2017.
4 Eco/Chilton 1972.
5 Morrison 2011.
6 Fingeroth 2008.
7 McLain 2009.
8 Baskind/Omer-Sherman 2010.

that connect comics and Torah texts, "with parallel tracks of text and images colliding and interacting, sounding and resounding" (27).

Its unique perspective expressed in a variety of views makes *Comics and Sacred Texts* so appealing. The collection organizes its fifteen essays into four sections. The first section, "Seeing the Sacred in Comics", focuses on script and language as the modes of representation in which the sacred is articulated in graphic texts. Besides Handelman's essay, the section includes an intriguing visual analysis of the graphic novel *Habibi*[9] in "Writing the Sacred in Craig Thompson's *Habibi*" by Madeline Backus and Ken Koltun-Fromm. The authors take on the critique of the graphic novel's orientalist framework, tracking the construction of the space and gaze of the oriental sacred as the imagined other in the transgressive use of the Arabic calligraphy. In the graphic novel, the sacred words merge with the drawn natural landscapes, mythical animals and the female body of the protagonist Dodola, creating a magical world which exposes the evoked orient as projected fantasy: "The exotic and even erotic forms of calligraphy stylize a natural and imminently accessible sacred that works within the oriental mode of visual exposure" (5).

The important question of representation continues in the following section, titled "Reimaging Sacred Texts through Comics". The essays in this section look at the many ways sacred texts like the Bible or the Indian Ramayana are adapted into comic books. In contrast to other media representations, these comics both reimagine and rework the source material, as Gamzou and Koltun-Fromm highlight in their introduction to the section, which leads to a new reading experience: "So if the comic is successful, a reader will not only see the text differently but also read the text anew. The scripted text itself, and not merely its representation in image, has changed for the comic reader" (75). In his essay "Transrendering Biblical Bodies: Reading Sex into *The Action Bible* and *Genesis Illustrated*", Scott S. Elliott describes, for example, the distinct strategies of the two comics through Roland Barthes's concepts of readerly and writerly texts. On one hand a readerly text like *The Action Bible*[10] straightens out all the gaps and contradictions in the source material in order to produce a coherent and easily accessible narrative with a plain message. On the other hand, as a writerly text, Robert Crumb's *The Book of Genesis Illustrated*[11] challenges the reader by highlighting the inconsistencies and

9 Thompson 2011.

10 Cariello/Mauss 2010.

11 Crumb 2009.

complexities of the Bible instead of concealing them, creating a fragmented, at times even irritating reading experience. Both are defined by their way of engaging the reader in a dialogue about their understandings of biblical texts. Elliott summarizes: "I would suggest that the creators of *The Action Bible* and *Genesis Illustrated* similarly testify to how texts function as readerly or writerly interlocutors with readers – not as sources of authority, but as problematic renderings of the sacred" (146).

The contributions are equally strong in their quality and very insightful in their own ways, which makes it nearly impossible to single one out without wrongfully neglecting the others. The articles mentioned here thus merely function as a *pars pro toto* representing the high standard displayed throughout all of the collected essays. In "Transfigured Comic Selves, Monsters and the Body", the third section of the volume, the authors explore the monstrous bodies of comic books as boundaries of meaning and limits of the sacred. In the case of the Marvel comic *X-Men: The Dark Phoenix Saga*,[12] the liminal body of Jean Grey/Phoenix raises critical questions of agency and identity. Samantha Langsdale argues in her essay "The Dark Phoenix as 'Promising Monster'" that despite the feminist critique that the comic links "female desire and female sexuality with psychoses, lack of control, monstrosity, and ultimately destruction" (153), the troubled protagonist should be read as representing the promises of monsters: "Like female Christian mystics, Jean/Phoenix is bodily, she is mythical, she is textual, she is divine, and she is a human woman" (169).

The last section, "The Everyday Sacred in Comics", examines comics that display the presence of the holy in the mundane and teach how to look for the sacred in the everyday. And it is most fitting that this section (and the book itself) closes with an analysis of Will Eisner and *A Contract with God*,[13] the origin of the modern American graphic novel. In "Will Eisner: Master of Graphic Wisdom", Leonard V. Kaplan compares Eisner's drawn parables with the Jewish thinker Isaiah Berlin's and Walter Benjamin's conceptions of the German Tragic Drama. All confront the messianic mythos of the Jewish tradition: "Eisner's hope for a messianic politics is always tempered by the knowledge that we will fall short. Such is progress in the everyday sacred" (279). Like none other, Eisner opened a new path in the relation between comics and sacred texts. He elevated the comic book perceived as low-brow to an inspiring art form, influencing generations of comic writers and artists and encouraging

12 Claremont/Byrne 2006.

13 Eisner 2006.

the reader to rediscover the sacred in the most uncommon places. If one was to find something like a common denominator for all the diverse and inspiring essays collected in *Comics and Sacred Texts*, this would be it: the recognition, reminding of Martin Buber, that the experience of the sacred in the modern world is nothing more than a personal encounter in the shape of a comic book in the hands of an inquisitive reader.

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Sofia Sjö

Book Review
Terry Lindvall, God on the Big Screen A History of Hollywood Prayer from the Silent Era to Today

New York: New York University Press, 2019, 367 pages, ISBN 978-1-4798-8674-6

Can we learn something about church history by watching films? That films can be used to reflect on theological questions has been illuminated by a range of scholars. The ability of film to tell us about the role of religion in society and about attitudes towards religion today has also been made evident. Still, considering film's short history, any discussion of Christian beliefs and film would be limited to about a century. However, that films can offer noteworthy insights is illustrated by Terry Lindvall's *God on the Big Screen: A History of Hollywood Prayer from the Silent Era to Today*.

As the title suggests, Lindvall's perspective is clearly defined and highly focused. Lindvall explores the North American context and looks specifically at Christian prayer – at how characters pray, the consequences of their prayers in the film narratives, what prayers bring to character development, what the prayers suggest about attitudes to religion, particularly for Christianity and the Christian churches, and to the approach to a divine being in different periods. These various stages are related both to the chronology of film history – thus, for example, the first chapter, titled "Silent Prayers (1902–1927)", focuses on silent films – and to history more broadly, whether in changing experiences of religion or external events. Chapter 3, titled "Foxholes Prayers (1939–1945)", thus explores how World War II came to influence the depiction of prayer in film, while chapter 5, titled "Cynical Prayers (1964–1976)", draws on a critique of institutional religion and aspects of religious decline.

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These broad time periods and titles might suggest a rather generalizing approach to the material, with varied films brought together to tell one story. However, the titles of the chapters function to highlight a common sense of the era they address, while the subsections illustrate a great deal more interpretative variety, noting, for example, how genre affects the use and portrayal of prayer. These subsections are not just genre-specific but also tie in with aspects of belief and trends in American Christianity. Thus, for example, subsections in chapter six, "Revival of Prayer (1976–1988)", include "Country Prayers", "Adventure Comedy Prayers", "Mischievous Prayers", "Liberation Theology", "Horrible Prayers" and "Muscular Christianity".

What can we learn by focusing on prayers in films? Lindvall's study is clear that prayer changes over time. Prayers are more common at certain times and somewhat less usual at others, more sincere in one setting and less so in another. However, this work highlights that prayers remain prevalent throughout the history of Hollywood film. That framework might make this conclusion less surprising: these films do after all emerge from a North American context that has long been marked by religiosity more than many other Western contexts. Still, the recurrent use of prayer in films also underlines how prayer quickly became a staple of film language. Prayer can express central aspects of a character, whether the prayer is linked to true devotion or not. As Lindvall discusses towards the end of his impressive cinematic overview, today people even seem to turn to film to learn how to pray. Prayer may be becoming less common in the "real world", but it lives on on the silver screen, shaping its audience's views on faith and religious practice.

Lindvall's study is impressive on many counts. He discusses a remarkable number of films, but he also places those films in a wider context, an approach that brings the study to life. Perhaps not surprisingly, since this volume treats hundreds of films from a period of almost 120 years, it cannot explore in-depth. It still manages, however, to highlight many noteworthy points, relating to both genre and historical events. To take one example, in chapter 2, "Censored Prayers (1927–1939)", Lindvall shows how films could offer escape through both family-friendly dramas and horror stories, but notes that some filmic representations also captured the feeling of the time that something was amiss. The Production Code restricted how religion could be represented, but films still managed to hint that churches were not attending to the problems of the time and to the many marginalized people in need. Children's prayers in particular were at times allowed to express both devo-

tion and critique of religious hypocrisy and the thoughtlessness of people of power.

As Lindvall discusses towards the end of *God on the Big Screen*, the volume is intended not as the final word on its complex topic, but as the beginning of many possible conversations. With its broad strokes and multi-facetted material, this study opens the door for future studies with a more detailed approach. Those projects might explore, for example, the gendering of prayer, the child as a symbol in stories about faith, genre and prayer, and continuity and change in contemporary religious life as seen through the lens of film. Films are able to shape how aspects of faith are understood in a given time and at a given place, and Lindvall's study also highlights the need for more research on film reception.

I do not always agree with Lindvall's interpretation of the films that he discusses. Connections he makes between a film story and historical events or processes of change can seem to me somewhat far-fetched, and his understanding and interpretation of aspects of religious change that are represented are not mine. Lindvall is clearly more personally invested in Christian beliefs and the changes he discusses than am I. Films can also always be read in different ways. What we see is shaped by who we are, and it is unlikely that two people will interpret identically the very many films that Lindvall addresses. Thus, my disagreements with Lindvall's thinking and interpretations only make me engage more strongly with the volume.

I really have only one serious issue with *God on the Big Screen: A History of Hollywood Prayer from the Silent Era to Today*, and it relates to the title: this volume is not about God on the big screen. True, prayer can tell us about faith in God and about what one believes God can accomplish, and Lindvall highlights some of these questions. But by no means is God the central motif of the volume. This work is rather, as the subtitle highlights, a history of prayer, and, not evident from the title but clearly the case, Christian prayer. It discusses the role and construction of prayer in films and aspects of religious change, particularly changes in reference to Christianity and Christian churches in North America. The title is thus misleading and runs the risk that many readers who might find this volume interesting and useful will overlook it.

Who, then, is this volume for? Anyone involved in the study of religion and film will be able to engage with the volume, but more specifically, this work could be brought into courses and studies on church sociology and church history. It offers ample material for discussions of specific periods and questions related to certain times, without suggesting that it is a detailed histor-

ical or sociological account. It is also a volume that could work in a course on film studies that focuses on film narrative and language, as it highlights how certain aspects of religion, in this case prayer, can be used to represent elements in a story, to construct a character and the feel of the time. This volume will surely be of interest to many readers, and I hope it will find those readers, despite its misleading title.

Jade Weimer

Book Review
Ken Derry / John C. Lyden (eds.), The Myth Awakens
Canon, Conservatism, and Fan Reception of Star Wars

Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018, xxi + 173 pages,
ISBN: 978-1-5326-1973-1

When asked to review this book, I was a little hesitant to do so, because my familiarity with the Star Wars franchise is limited at best. Yet I would now argue that extensive knowledge of the Star Wars mythology is not a prerequisite for engaging with this text in a meaningful way, as issues raised by the contributors provide key insights into the discipline of religious studies as well as the intersection of religion and media which are useful in a broader context, including questions of canonization, collective memory, legitimacy, race, and gender. And perhaps one of the most exciting questions addressed in the book (for me!) is the role of music in myth-making.

Ken Derry's preface offers an introduction to the volume and he emphasizes the need for fun in scholarship. He contends that we as scholars ought to take ourselves less seriously in certain ways. The "enduring appeal" (11) of Star Wars is linked to the fun one derives from creating meaning through engagement with the films, music, and characters. Derry's concurrent use of theory and humour in the opening section is both fun to read and theoretically rigorous.

The first chapter, by John C. Lyden, argues that both the Original Trilogy and the newer films demonstrate moral and political ambiguity as the lines between villain and hero are blurred. Lyden challenges previous arguments that Star Wars has a singular political message. The main point of the chapter is that the political meaning of the franchise will be variously interpreted by the

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viewer and by extension is innately subjective. Lyden concludes that the mythic structure of Star Wars can be understood "as an important site of cultural self-reflection or as a reflection of who we are, and who we might become" (31). The ambiguity in the hero/villain dichotomy is further explored in chapter two, where Lindsay Macumber employs a Jungian model of the shadow archetype to follow Darth Vader's transition from ambiguity (as Anakin) to embracing and becoming part of the dark side. Episodes IV–VI exemplify Darth Vader as the shadow archetype who is dichotomously contrasted with the hero Luke Skywalker, but the Prequel films provide a window onto that (internal) transformation of the character. Interestingly, Macumber also argues that Darth Vader acts as shadow for Luke throughout his own journey to hero in the Original Trilogy, where Vader is an external shadow. Macumber then contrasts her understanding of Darth Vader as shadow archetype with the character Kylo Ren in Episode VII: The Force Awakens (J.J. Abrams, US 2015). In this case, she concludes that Kylo Ren is either a disappointing shadow or perhaps not the shadow at all, because his struggle is internal, which may provide an equivocation for that hero/villain dichotomy. Macumber uses this analysis to conclude that comics are now generally characterized by this type of ambiguity, which has resulted in "the loss of identifiable shadows and heroes" (44).

Chris Klassen challenges previous uses of Joseph Campbell's concept of the hero's journey through her analysis of Leia and Rey in chapter three. Klassen argues that Rey's journey is predicated on an internal transformation to find power within (similar to the traditional masculine hero journey), whereas Leia can be classified as a hero with political power who wants to free her community from oppression. Neither role is gendered, according to Klassen, but both characters "speak to a culture that has struggled with gender division and discrimination and make possible what was once unthinkable" (49). A strong case is made that both Rey and Leia qualify as heroes and one key point is Klassen's use of the term "hero" and her dispensing with the less significant "heroine". This nomenclature immediately changes the reader's perception of the inherent masculinity associated with the term "hero" and places both Rey and Leia in a category typically reserved for the male (super)-hero.

In one of the most interesting sections for me, in chapter four Kutter Callaway explores the role of music in the creation and perpetuation of a mythological narrative. He also examines the way in which music influences or dictates the nature of the fan reception of the Star Wars films. Callaway makes important claims here about the functionality of music and proposes that John Williams's score is not just a typical leitmotif deployed for semiot-

ic reasons but rather a leitmotif that initiates mythic recapitulations in the viewer. He argues that the melody played during the scene where Leia and Rey hug in The Force Awakens prompts the viewer to make certain interpretative conclusions about Rey's possible status as Leia's daughter and identifies both characters as the real heroes of the story. However, Callaway concludes that the use of the same melodic motif actually subverts this potentiality for a female hero by taking the viewer/listener back to something they have already experienced (where Luke is the hero). The main point he makes is that the music subverts the audience's gendered expectations. This is a fascinating argument that deals with the often-neglected topic of music in myth-making. However, I would have liked to see a more detailed analysis of the leitmotif in that scene in order that the point might be more clearly (and strongly) argued. For example, what type of emotional response is this melody meant to elicit? How does that response shape the viewer's interpretation of the scene more generally? Further discussion on the musical aspects of the melody (i.e. mode, rhythm, etc.) would be useful here.

In chapter five, Daniel White Hodge and Joseph Boston explore the issue of racist fan responses to the casting of John Boyega in The Force Awakens. In light of the legacy of racism and stereotyping in Hollywood films, they argue that the casting of non-white characters in Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (Gareth Edwards, US 2016) and The Force Awakens challenged the white hegemony of the Star Wars franchise and therefore met resistance from some fans. Yet despite the attempt at diversifying the franchise, all of the Black characters are in roles that reinforce whiteness as superior: "Lando is a traitor, Finn is a coward, and Lupita Nyong'o is buried under latex" (86). The authors aim to provoke further discussion on issues of race and racial representation in film, and they conclude that while Star Wars still reflects long-embedded tropes of whiteness and patriarchy, a positive mythical component is also present. Chapter six continues the issue of race as Joshua Call argues that the films have not sufficiently recognized or embraced the "generative and rhetorical power of myth-making that has so captured the Star Wars fandom" (93). The Black characters are often tokenizing, which is problematic considering that myth-making is successful only when a person can recognize themselves within the narrative or story. Call contends that other iterations of the franchise such as video games are actually more successful at achieving diversity by allowing players to create their own avatar, which reflects other ethnicities besides the "white hero" figure so prominently featured in the franchise.

In chapter eight, Syed Adnan Hussain discusses the importance of collective memory in establishing continuity or a "heritage of belief" (138) as it applies to Star Wars canonicity. Hussain problematizes the idea of canon here by highlighting George Lucas's attempts to alter the Original Trilogy through the re-releases, which were strongly resisted by some fans. Hussain argues: "The fundamental schism caused by de-canonization and revision in the Star Wars universe should be conceived as a crisis of collective memory or as a break in the chain of tradition" (143). He concludes that the sale to Disney changed the trajectory of the franchise but reiterated the role of fans in shaping future films.

Chapters seven and nine both problematize the notion of canonicity. In chapter seven, Justin Mullis examines the nature of the relationship between George Lucas and his fans and concludes that it can be likened to the relationship between a hierophant and their devotees. He contends that Lucas's diversion from the "canon" of the original trilogy (particular with regard to the "Han shot first" controversy) in re-released editions challenged core aspects of the mythology, resulting in the fans' rejection of Lucas as "leader" or director. Mullis references the "established canon" of Star Wars in his discussion of how the Prequel films (Episodes I–III) altered the Original Trilogy (Episodes IV–VI), but it would be useful to address in further detail the process of canonization itself. The process is complex and deserves somewhat fuller theoretical consideration here. When and how does the Original Trilogy come to be characterized as canonical? And what role do ritual and repetition play in that process? Here drawing from scholars of ritual such as Catherine Bell or Ronald Grimes might be useful for explaining how ritualization occurs (and in this case leads to the formulation of a canonical mythology). Chapter nine contains what might be expanded in chapter seven: a clear theoretical outline of canonization. Kenneth MacKendrick employs J. Z. Smith's framework on canon and religious authority to argue that canon refers "to the creation and authorization of a shared imaginary world" (147). MacKendrick describes the process of canonization, the mechanism for moving from an open to a closed canon, and the role of authority in determining "canon". The discussion of fan reactions to the Disney takeover is analogous (in some ways) to new discoveries of non-canonical religious texts such as the Nag Hammadi scriptures (which are labeled as Gnostic but have clear references to Christian theology). MacKendrick considers how "truth" is determined to be present in some parts of the mythology but not others. He argues, "Once canonized, the arbitrary assemblage of items takes on a totalizing function. The canon and its authorities establish an im-

aginary world as a world that can be understood [...] as a virtual world" (157). And these imaginary worlds have to be maintained and authorized in order to exist, which means they are subject to continual interpretation.

Overall, this volume offers an interesting and novel approach to Star Wars through a religious studies lens. The emphasis on fandom reflects a common line of inquiry in religious studies that focuses on the reception history of texts or mythologies. In fact, this approach is one of the greatest strengths of the book, because it goes beyond mythological hermeneutics and presents a more nuanced analysis which accounts for the significance of this franchise in popular culture. The relationship based on mutual influence between the mythology, the creator George Lucas, and the fan base provides insights for other aspects of religious studies that examine the role of "adherents" in legitimizing mythologies and perpetuating those mythologies in varying forms. The distinct emphasis on the newest films, such as The Force Awakens, highlights both the comparative approach taken by several contributors who distinguish between "parts of the canon" and the attempt to trace the impact of the changes to the "original mythology". The book proved both accessible and valuable to a scholar who previously had very little knowledge of the Star Wars franchise. It would be a terrific addition to any course (graduate or undergraduate) on religion, media, and film, but it also has broader appeal and utility to the non-academic fans of Star Wars, who are often the focus of the volume.

Filmography

The Original Trilogy
Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope (George Lucas, US 1977).
Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back (Irvin Kershner, US 1980).
Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand, US 1983).

Prequel Trilogy

Episode I: The Phantom Menace (George Lucas, US 1999).
Episode II: Attack of the Clones (George Lucas, US 2002).
Episode III: Revenge of the Sith (George Lucas, US 2005).

Sequel Trilogy

Episode VII: The Force Awakens (J.J. Abrams, US 2015).
Episode VIII: The Last Jedi (Rian Johnson, US 2017).
Episode IX: The Rise of Skywalker (J.J. Abrams, US 2019).

Rogue One: A Star Wars Story (Gareth Edwards, US 2016).

Andre L. Price

Music Review
Kanye West, *Jesus Is King*

US 2019, Def Jam Recordings

As any emcee should, Kanye West has developed and matured as a producer and lyricist since his 2004 triple-platinum debut project, *College Dropout*. West's Gospel project, *Jesus Is King*, is his ninth studio project and the follow-up to his June 2018 release, *Ye*. After delays, *Jesus Is King* was released on 25 October 2019. For West, openly talking about Jesus in his music is not new, for he rocked the mainstream hip-hop world in 2004 when he released the single "Jesus Walks", the final single to be released from *College Dropout*.

Jesus Is King features eleven tracks totaling 27 minutes and 4 seconds, which is short for either a secular or gospel hip-hop project.[1] Interestingly, significant changes were made to the track listing order on the album. Kim Kardashian-West announced the tracks and order in August 2019, but the listing and order released by Kanye West in October 2019 were markedly different.[2] Such a change could suggest an earlier lack of clarity on what the album was going to be. West did promise that *Jesus Is King* would be "fully immersed in religion […] with lyrics about God, being saved, and minimal cursing".[3]

Jesus Is King employs several aspects of Black Christian worship, from mass choir to melodic organ. West takes the best of the Black gospel tradition, infusing it with his own lyrical genius to proclaim what God has done for him, which is best expressed on the track "God Is", a remake of the classic spiritual. West's version is still able to touch the soul while allowing you to ride the beat

1 See e.g. *Christology: In Laymen's Terms* (The Ambassador, Seventh Street Records/Cross Movement Records, 1999), 1:13:51; *Please Excuse Me for Being Antisocial* (Roddy Ricch, Atlantic/Dream Chasers Records, 2019), 43:18.

2 TMZ 2019.

3 TMZ 2019.

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and nod your head. Additional themes that West touches on in the ten other tracks are judgement, baptism, and the experience of new life.

The song "Everything We Need", for example, deals with divine sufficiency post-conversion and God's ability to provide. West says:

> We began after the storm inside
> Lay the land (ah), it's just the morning light (oh, yeah)
> Switch my, switch my attitude
> I'm so, I'm so radical
> All these people mad at dude
> This for who it matter to
> What if Eve made apple juice?
> You gon' do what Adam do?
> Or say, 'Baby, let's put this back on the tree' 'cause
> We have everything we need.

The storm inside is the tension between the life before and the life after conversion. After conversion, there is a realization of newness of life, "morning light", that elicits a change in attitude, and it is because of this change in attitude provoked by the Gospel, West opines, that people are mad at him. For West, it seems that his recommitment to Jesus is an opportunity for a fresh start, evidenced by the line inquiring about Eve making apple juice and the listener doing what Adam did.

West talks about the purifying experience of Christian baptism in the track titled "Water". The lyrics are simple and the verses are terse. West says:

> The storm may come
> But we'll get through it because of Your love
> Either way, we crash like water
> Your love's water
> Pure as water
> We are water.

It is unclear whether West has a sacramental imagination. It is possible that this track reflects his experience of watching his children being baptized at Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, Armenia's main cathedral.[4] While Kanye

4 Parke 2019.

West is not Orthodox, the Kardashians have ties to Armenian Orthodox Christianity.

The song "Hands On", featuring gospel legend Fred Hammond, is a unique track conceptually. Two minutes and 30 seconds into the track, Hammond makes a life-giving intervention in what is otherwise an exceptionally bland song. West's verse sounds more appropriate for spoken word or slam poetry. Conceptually though, the song tells of West's experience of the light of Jesus and the perceived Christian rejection of him and his renewed faith. West asks several times: "What have you been hearin' from the Christians?" It seems that West is wrestling with having to navigate between two distinct spaces with distinct audiences, the gospel audience and his mainstream secular audience. I wonder if in his attempt to navigate this complicated space, lyrical and musical creativity is sacrificed for fear of alienating Christian or secular fans. West's other projects birthed certain sounds, but in the end, this project does not push the boundaries musically or lyrically, and "Hands On" is an example of this failure. *Jesus Is King* did well commercially. It is West's ninth consecutive number one album. It reached the top of the Billboard 200 charts and stayed on the Billboard 200 charts for sixteen weeks.[5] In addition, it topped the gospel charts. Controversial statements notwithstanding, the project was arguably West's second subpar album in a row. Like *Ye*, *Jesus Is King* is short and lacks the musical and lyrical force displayed in *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* or *College Dropout*.

The court of public opinion argued strongly about the project because of West's relationship with Donald Trump as well as West's comment about slavery being a choice.[6] Many would not touch anything that he was involved in. Maybe all publicity is not good publicity.

With the reinvigoration of his faith commitments, West has aligned himself with a socially and politically conservative Protestant Evangelical wing within North American Christianity. Broadly speaking, this brand of Christianity tends to understand the Gospel a-politically and a-historically. The alliance between West and conservative Protestantism is reflected in the album to the degree that West fails to see or connect with the political and social implications of his embrace of the Gospel. To me, the lack of political and social reflection, as it relates to Jesus, is the biggest shortcoming of the project. But

5 Each week, the Billboard charts record the relative popularity of songs and albums in the United States and elsewhere.

6 Kaur 2018.

this shortcoming should not come as a surprise to listeners in light of West's previous actions and statements surrounding Donald Trump as well as slavery in the months leading up to the album's release.

Personally, I would pass on the album. West's comments about slavery and Donald Trump are problematic. Furthermore, I am a product of the Black church, and I prefer the old-school gospel sound popularized by the late great Mattie Moss Clark. And a good lyricist tells a story, but I am not sure of the story that West is trying to tell in *Jesus Is King*. The delays with its release and the changes to what songs were going to be on the project cause me to question whether *Jesus Is King* was rushed in order to take advantage of the mushrooming popularity of West's "Sunday Service" concerts, which debuted at Coachella.[7] I can imagine *Jesus Is King* being desirable among the most devout and dedicated Kanye West fans, those who are committed to him as a musical innovator and personality. Arguably, there was a time when West could be included in conversations about the greatest rappers of all time. I can also see this project being popular in Christian communities that might make an appeal to the potential in West (think of West's platform and audience, an audience churches have trouble reaching) to help evangelize and win "souls for Jesus" and/or in communities that buy into a brand of Christian formation and practice that elevates the inner and the spiritual over against the material and the political. *Jesus Is King* is the wholesome theological hip-hop that America has so badly desired since the gangster rap era of the early to mid Nineties.

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7 *Jesus Is King* was scheduled to come out a year earlier, under the name *Yandhi*. Coachella is an annual arts and music festival in Indio, California. The first public Sunday Service was held on 21 April 2019 at Coachella, to celebrate Easter.

Discography

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JRFM 2022, 8/1
CALL FOR PAPERS

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Theoretical and Methodological Challenges in Media Ethics and Religion

With the media playing a crucial role in how we communicate with each other and how we perceive the world, other people, and ourselves, consideration of the ethics of media practices is both necessary and valuable. This issue will focus on the interface of media ethics and religion. Religious actors are producers and consumers of media, but vice versa too, religious symbols, worldviews, and narratives are omnipresent in the media.

Ethical questions are raised whenever groups or individuals interact. Transferred to the context of the media, that tension dictates that ethical questions are located where people interact within the space of the media. Just as ethics deal with systems of norms and corresponding practices in a specific cultural context, media ethics engage with media practices, their normative regulations, values, and moral concepts within the media-specific spaces of production, representation, distribution, and consumption. Media ethics consider the characteristics, pragmatics, and effectiveness of media practices. They also reflect critically on normative systems that refer to specific practices as morally correct or objectionable.

Responsibility is undoubtedly a useful heuristic category for an exploration of morally correct actions. We can deploy the lens of responsibility in examining the key players and others concerned, concrete acts and the consequences of those acts, and finally why and to whom individuals or groups have responsibility. In an increasingly mediatized, digitalized, and globalized society, it becomes challenging to distinguish agents from those affected or to evaluate which authority is in control, to estimate the consequences of actions, and last but not least to understand what role norms and values play or should play. These questions are paradigmatic in the digital age, where the roles of producers and consumers often intersect with the space of rep-

resentation and where attribution of responsibility becomes increasingly complex.

We are looking for contributions that deal with the topic of media ethics and religion in a broad sense: case studies, historical and contemporary, that discuss media-ethical questions regarding religion are welcome, as are meta discourses about approaches to media ethics and methodological questions in media ethics.

The contributions may deal with, but are not limited to, the following questions:

- Which images of religion receive more attention, become iconic, and why? And why are they referred to more often and distributed more broadly than other images?
- What moral criteria govern the dissemination of specific images of religion? What is the role of governmental and other (e. g. religious) control in this context?
- Are there good (idealized) or bad (defaming) images of religion or religious agents/actors in the media? How might we define good and bad images of religion or religious agents/actors? What guidelines do these moral judgements follow?

We are seeking innovative scholarly discussion within a broad spectrum of case studies that includes media productions such as documentaries, fiction films, short films, drama series, and reality shows as well as material from distribution channels such as streaming platforms, webpages, and social media. Contributions from the perspective of media practitioners and professionals are also welcome.

The issue also includes an open section for articles on other topics linked to the profile of JRFM. The deadline for all submissions is 15 August 2021. Contributions of 6,000-8,000 words (including notes) should be submitted for double-blind peer review through the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register and consider the instructions for submitting contributions, especially the stylesheet. Publication is scheduled for May 2022. For questions regarding this call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the editors of the issue, Natalie Fritz (natalie.fritz@kath.ch), Marie-Therese Mäder (Maeder@evtheol.uni-muenchen.de) or Baldassare Scolari (baldassare.scolari@icloud.com)