

Chapter 42

Vitalizing Ancient Cultures Mythological Storytelling in Metal Music

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter is focused on the relationship between ancient narratives “music” and “mythology.” Technological developments and changes in social structure caused the occurrence of different music genres over time. “Metal music” is one of these genres. In the present day, it is possible to observe that there is a tendency to mythology in sub-genres of metal music. This tendency is observed in lyrics, album artworks, videos, and gig performances of some bands. In this chapter, metal music is examined based on its root, content, and technical features, primarily. Afterwards, mythology, content of mythology, and cultural and social functions of mythology are discussed. In the praxis of this study, the cover of the album *Twilight of the Thunder God* (2008) of the Swedish metal band Amon Amarth is analyzed by semiological analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

The myth, which has been emerged at first because of the need of the humans “to understand”, then “to let the others to understand” by narrating, has a language structure full of symbols. This narrative characteristic of the myths leads this narrative genre to have a dynamic structure impeding it to be stuck in a certain period of time. Thereby, the myths have gotten a foothold existing in different narrative genres, and have even become a culture all by itself.

For instance, as the most known example, Classical-era Greek Mythology has been a part of the Western culture for centuries. It is known that Greek mythology has reached to this day nourishing various narrative genres. Aforementioned mythology is still in action in those genres thanks to its symbolic structure. Mythology enriches its own universe by interacting with different narrative genres. In fact, writers, artists and intellectuals have enhanced this enrichment including mythology in other fields such as literature, painting, sculpture, philosophy, theatre and music for centuries. The use of mythological

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motif in a work of art not only fosters the culture that it has emerged into, but also leads to a positive result for the recurrent mythology.

Today, the myths are used being included in different narrative genres. Thus, myths still continue to be active in cultural production. For instance, one can find traces of mythology in academic studies, literature, fine arts, theatre, computer games, TV series, movies and music. As it is seen, myths are positioned as a discipline that protects its dynamics in expressional fields, e.g., literary, visual and audio.

Today, the other factor that ensures that myths being active in the cultural field is the myths of different geographies can be included in the production field thanks to the increasing number of various narrative mediums in modern day. While in the past the motifs of the dominant narratives, e.g., Greek and Roman Mythology, were mainly used in the works that were created, in today's world almost every mythology that has been found and put together by studies may find itself a place in the cultural production. The narratives ranked among mythologies like Egyptian, Celtic, Norse and Hindu Mythology, used in fields like literature, films, painting and music is presented as an example for this statement.

The relation between music and mythology gets ahead of aforesaid narrative genres. The most important reason of this pioneering position of music is that music, just like mythology, is one of the ancient forms of narration. Music, whose origins go back to the sounds of nature, has a history of thousand of years. Cavidan Selanik (2010) defines music as "...with the aim of thinking with sounds, feeling and enhancing life through sounds, the art of researching and narrating the reality of man in all of its contexts". The desire of man to narrate the facts and the events around him with the aim of feeling and enhancing life is similar to the starting point of mythology, inasmuch as myths also emerged thanks to the effort of man to interpret and narrate 'the things' happening around him.

Among the music genres of this day, number one genre that includes mythology and the myths in its area of usage is metal music which has begun to evolve around the UK and the USA in the late '60s and in the early '70s. Many bands in the history of metal music have used mythology in their lyrics, the video images, on the album covers, for their costumes and stage shows. Hence, mythology is renewed and enriched also in today's cultural production process. The relation between two of the most ancient narrative genres, mythology and music, which maintains on a contemporary level, is a subject that has been manifested to be studied about.

Based on the manifested research subject, it is intended that the subjects of metal music and mythology are of the top priority to be analyzed. In the chapter of praxis, in the aim of showing the connections of mythology, the lyrics, album covers, videos and concert performances of contemporary metal bands such as Amon Amarth, Eluveitie, Týr, Therion will be analyzed briefly. In addition to the praxis, Swedish metal band Amon Amarth's album "Twilight of the Thunder God" (2008) will be studied using semiotic method of analysis.

BACKGROUND

In this study, principally the conceptual framework will be specified by surveying literature reviews on 'metal music' and 'mythology'. In the praxis, semiotic analysis will be practiced upon. The reason of utilizing this method is that the band Amon Amarth enables us to read and study the mythological images on their album cover under the light of semiotic analysis, inasmuch as the reading method which semiotic analysis offers, assists us to reveal the mythological meanings in the visual product that the band released.

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