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A CONCEPTUAL CONNECTION BETWEEN CLASSIC HEAVY METAL AND WORLD WAR I: THE CASE OF IRON MAIDEN'S 'PASCHENDALE' AND MOTÖRHEAD'S '1916'

Abstract: In this essay, I deal with the connections between World War I and the musical style of early Heavy Metal (HM). HM has always dealt thoroughly with the topic of war, sometimes criticizing it, sometimes celebrating it. While World War II is a very frequent, lyrical topic, World War I is definitely less addressed, for a number of reasons. I nevertheless argue that, in spite of this general lack of interest, with such a historical topic early HM shares the ideological perspective of a crisis in the existing systems of values.
Key words: classic or early heavy metal, World War I, Iron Maiden, Motörhead

In this study, I approach the relationship between World War I and the popular music style of classic heavy metal. Such a musical style can be traced back to the beginning of the 1970s and is usually considered to have been born in England and the USA.

I neither expect to give an ample analysis of any of the First World War causes, phenomena, events, or consequences, nor attempt an explanation of what classic heavy metal consists of in technical terms. Both endeavours would take a lifetime of academic work, and they are not the main point of this study. My purpose is to raise the awareness of a parallel relationship between the two topics of the study, which consists of a crisis in moral values and a loss of faith in optimistic world views.

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The paragraph *Characteristics of classic heavy metal* gives a short account of the main historical, musical, and contextual stylistic features of the genre.

The rise of heavy metal music and the end of the hippie movement points out – primarily by referring to previous literature – how original heavy metal re-elaborated many themes of the 1960s youth subculture, and blended them with working-class, blue-collar cultural patrimony. The point is to illustrate how this culture blending is a partial response to the disappointment with the 'peace-and-love' ideals, which entered a phase of decline and fall at the turn of the 1970s. Flower-power addressed many problems of contemporary society with a prescriptive attitude and the belief that they could be permanently solved, whereas classic heavy metal culture acknowledges them and fully understands their importance, though giving no prescriptive indication about how to deal with them. On the contrary, it looks like classic metal was born as a fantasizing way to successfully manage the disillusion and disappointment left by the decline of the hippie movement, without trying to find a solution to the same categories of problems.

The scarcity of references to World War I in classic heavy metal presents some plausible reasons why such a topic is less often addressed, musically or contextually, by classic heavy metal in comparison to other war topics, primarily World War II. Nevertheless, songs like 'Paschendale' by Iron Maiden and '1916' by Motörhead are later presented as meaningful examples of classic heavy metal bands addressing WWI.

The crisis of moral values after World War I temporarily leaves music aside. It describes the role of the First World War in the radical change of values, which took place during the 19th and the 20th centuries; this multifaceted subject cannot be dealt with in detail here, and originated from a plurality of factors mostly related to the advent of the mass society. Such a change undermined the credibility of the all-embracing philosophical narrations of the Modern Age. In response to these optimistic models, others arose with a darker and more pessimistic cypher (each one to a different degree).

Direct references and conceptual connection: 'Paschendale' and '1916' focus on the understanding of such a relationship as a parallelism: its common trait is the decline of an optimistic view after World War I, and at the rise of classic heavy metal from the ashes of the hippie movement. Of course, such a trend arguably originated for very different reasons in the two scenarios, and expressed itself in different ways.The crisis of morality, the interest in mysticism, and suspicion towards technology are the most outstanding of these tendencies. 'Paschendale' and '1916' exemplify some of these elements in an excellent way.

As a result, a strong parallel between World War I and classic heavy metal can be established. The purpose of this study is not to establish WWI as a pri-

mary topic in this music genre, but it is rather to shed light on how – although seemingly, quantitatively so distant – they share a pivotal element of crisis as a constitutive cypher. The crisis in moral values and the hope for a better (i.e. a 'progressive') future was spawned from the immediate consequences of the war. The crisis in the flower-power ideals gave rise to many of the primary features of classic heavy metal.

Characteristics of classic heavy metal

Previous studies report many different opinions about when exactly heavy metal came into existence.[1] Walser states that the namesake albums *Led Zeppelin II* (1969), *Deep Purple In Rock* (1970), and *Black Sabbath* (1970), all produced by English bands, marked a fundamental milestone in defining the primary features of heavy metal.

The main musical characteristics include a) loud volumes and distortion; b) strong riffs usually played on the electric guitar, sometimes on keyboards; c) the frequent use, according to each singer's style, of high-pitched strong vocals; d) the great display of virtuosity derived from the aesthetics of Western art music practice;[2] e) the predominance of modes other than major and minor, and a preference for modal harmony rather than tonic-dominant (i.e. 'classical') structures;[3] f) the extensive use of power-chords. A power-chord is an amplified and distorted chord – usually performed on the guitar or keyboard – formed by the chord root, the perfect fourth or fifth, and sometimes also, the perfect octave.[4]

In the end of the 1970s, this once rather coherent genre began to split into sub-genres with further particular characteristics. *Extreme* metal enhanced the roughness and violence of the sound through heavier distortion, vocal harshness, aggressive and hectic drumming influenced by punk music, and frequent de-tuning of the string instruments in order to achieve a deeper and darker sound. Mainly due to its uncompromisingly violent characteristics, *extreme* metal has often been an esoteric genre, disinterested in achieving mainstream success, and

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[1] Esa Lilja, *Theory and Analysis of Classic Heavy Metal Harmony*, Helsinki, IAML, 2009, 29–47; Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, Hanover,University Press of New England, 1993, 1–16; Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal. The Music and its Culture*, rev. ed., sine loco, Da Capo Press, 2000, 11–21, 43–45.

[2] Robert Walser, op. cit., 53–107.

[3] For a definition of "mode", Cf. Philip Tagg, *Everyday Tonality*, New York & Montréal, The Mass Media Music Scholar's Press, 2009, 45–48.

[4] Robert Walser, op. cit., 2–3. Esa Lilja, op. cit., 102–104.

targeted to an exclusive committed fandom.[5] Metallica, Slayer, and Death are examples of *extreme* metal groups.

In contrast, *pop* metal has been orientated to the mass media since the very beginning of its existence. The birth of the television cable channel MTV in the USA in 1981 gave wide visibility to many *pop* metal acts, which proposed a less exclusive music than classic heavy metal. The musical characteristics are similar to the ones of earlier metal, except for the usually shorter duration of the songs – tailored to the format of mainstream radio stations –and the inclusion of various pop music elements. From the non-musical point of view, *pop* metal generally presents an androgynous outfit and make-up, and romantic lyrical themes. The successful *pop* metal bands are, for instance, Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, and Journey.

The rise of heavy metal music and the end of the hippie movement

Many agree that the sub-culture of classic heavy metal immediately assumed a distance from the flower-power ideals, which had been very influential among the younger generation throughout the 1960s.[6] Some of the causes for such a rejection are certainly to be found in the social fabric of both the audience and the musicians' community.

Several historical events contributed to such dismay: the police action against the youth demonstrations in Chicago, Paris, and Mexico City; the murders of M. L. King and Robert Kennedy; the killings of students at the Kent State and Jackson State universities in the USA; the tragedy of Altamont in 1969, when a youngster was stabbed to death during a Rolling Stones' concert; the break-up of the Beatles; the Vietnam War and the protest movement related to it, etc. "Heavy metal was born amidst the ashes of the failed youth revolution".[7]

Weinstein states that the origins of the heavy metal sub-culture are rooted in the appropriation and re-elaboration of youth culture, achieved by blending its ideals about sexuality, politics, hedonism, drug use, and gender with the pre-existing cultural heritage of the working-class.

> By the late 1960s, the youth culture had spilled beyond its origins in the fusion between political protest and romantic hedonism to become a style and a mood, a fashion and an ethos, which could be appropriated by youth outside the colleges and the middle class, the sites at which that culture originated…. Blue-collar, white, male youth found in the styles and hedonistic pursuits of the 1960s youth culture a means of justifying and enhancing their normal rebelliousness against conforming to the

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[5] Deena Weinstein, op. cit., 48.

[6] Cf. *infra*, n. 1.

[7] Deena Weinstein, op. cit., 13.

disciplines of a social order that did not provide them with privileges or an attractive future. They adopted the long hairstyle, the casual dress, the drugs, and the psychedelic music of the prevailing youth culture, but they preserved their traditional machismo and romance with physical power, which were epitomized by the images of the outlaw biker gang.[8]

Classic metal fans and performers were almost exclusively white people, from the lower or middle-level working-class, with a strong industrial background. The original members of Black Sabbath, for example, were all born and raised in Aston, an industrial district of Birmingham where the landscape, at the time of their adolescence in the 1960s, consisted of factories and wrecked buildings which had mostly been destroyed in the bombings of WWII.[9]

Lilja identifies five main themes which hippie culture transmitted to heavy metal: love, peace, drugs, mysticism, and musical style. Love maintained its previous connection to the theme of peace, such as a concrete, far more carnal dimension, mainly due to the development in contraceptives and the loosening of sexual intercourse from marriage.[10] Peace, at least in its romantic 'Lennonian' interpretation, lost its credibility from Altamont onwards, "… a point after which faith in the goodness of mankind was no longer taken as self-evident – at least in rock circles".[11] The anti-militaristic stance, especially against the Vietnam War, did not blow over but underwent a major attitude change, clearly replacing the typical hippie philosophy of 'peace and love' with "unmasked frustration and depression about mankind's evil deeds".[12] The point was the abandonment of faith in a better world, which gave way to the pessimistic descriptive (not prescriptive) addressing of the war topic.

Death became a particularly celebrated topic in classic heavy metal, especially when its protagonists were the musicians themselves, e.g. B. Scott (Ac/Dc), K. Moon (The Who), J. Bonham (Led Zeppelin). Death became a way of achieving immortality and a mystical aura in the memory of the fandom, and continued the hippie rock tradition of early demises, exemplified by J. Hendrix and J. Joplin, but also by the classical musicians such as Pergolesi, Mozart, Schubert, and Mendelssohn.[13]

Mysticism, sometimes in its darkest implications, was particularly famous as a topic in classic heavy metal. The bands Black Sabbath and Mercyful Fate built

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8 Id., 100.

9 Deena Weinstein, op. cit., 75. Cf. Id., 98–117. Cf. also Robert Walser, op. cit., 180 n. 7.

10 Esa Lilja, op. cit., 26.

11 Id., 27.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Cf. Id., 28.

most of their contextual references upon Judaic and Christian-based occultism; Jimmy Page and Ritchie Blackmore, two guitar heroes from the classic metal generation, were passionate about spiritualism and séances (Page, for example, was a collector of Aleister Crowley's memorabilia);[14] outside the classic metal scene, Iron Maiden and Dio used Egyptian themes, later in the 1980s.[15] Walser observed, anyway, how such a use of mythological references should not be taken literally:

> … all have certain fundamental characteristics in common, not in terms of their 'real' history, but rather in terms of their present significance. Christianity, alchemy, myth, astrology, the mystique of vanished Egyptian dynasties: all are available in the modern world as source of power and mystery. Such eclectic constructions of power, which might be usefully called postmodern, are possible *only because* they are not perceived as tied to a strict historical context. All can be consulted, appropriated, and combined, used to frame questions and answers about life and death…. Then, heavy metal surely qualifies as a religious phenomenon. But mystical metal draws upon the power of religious traditions without obeisance to any.[16]

Furthermore, Cope identifies a strong misogynistic feature in classic heavy metal, as exemplified by Led Zeppelin. This misogynistic element collides with most of what was expressed by the youth culture in the 1960s about gender equality and the role of women in society.

> In other places, the lyrics of Led Zeppelin, in further drawing on the blues, frequently reflect the 'cheating woman' themes found within much rural and electric blues…. The idea of the woman as 'lyin' [sic], 'cheatin', hurtin'', as heard in the opening line of 'Your Time Is Gonna Come', draws on the established precepts by upholding the woman as 'un-natural', as challenging the subordinated aspects of patriarchal dualities – man/woman, dominance/nurturance.[17]

The exiguity of references to World War I in classic heavy metal

If one considers war as "Hostile contention by means of armed forces, carried on between nations, states, or rulers, or between parties in the same nation or

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[14] Cf. Camille Paglia, "Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s", *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics*, 10.3, winter 2003, Trustees of Boston University, 57–110.

[15] Esa Lilja, op. cit., 28.

[16] Robert Walser, op. cit., 154.

[17] Andrew L. Cope, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*, Farnham, UK / Burlington (VT), USA, Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series, 2010, 75–76.
Cf. Robert Walser, op. cit., 114–119.
Cf. Deena Weinstein, op. cit., 102–106.

state",[18] a great many immediate references between war and classic heavy metal can be found, mainly from the lyrical point of view, but also in the attempt of recalling the sounds and atmospheres of conflict through musical characteristics.[19] While metal in its many afore mentioned forms has addressed war from many perspectives and with various evaluative attitudes – disapproval, idealisation, praise, historical description, etc. – through more than four decades of existence, classic heavy metal usually gives a negative moral judgment on most forms of war. This is exemplified by songs such as 'War Pigs' (1970) by Black Sabbath, 'Child In Time' (1970) by Deep Purple, and 'Genocide' (1976) by Judas Priest. Although few if any bands at all developed an explicitly declared political consciousness in their musical production, anti-militaristic lyrics and behaviour are relevant in the history of classic heavy metal.[20]

When the field of inquiry is narrowed down to the two World Wars, one acknowledges that World War II is much more frequently mentioned as a topic than World War I. Understandably, the most common connection can be found in the lyrics, which often describe the events of WWII from the Allies'perspective, since the vast majority of classic heavy metal bands came from the environment of Great Britain and United States. In a few rare cases, the music tries to imitate the sounds of war, mostly the clanking of tank girdles or the sirens of aeroplanes. The conspicuous amount of references to the Second World War can be possibly explained with various reasons:

1) Most classic heavy metal musicians were born in the immediate post-war period, which means they grew up surrounded by the most visible consequences of the conflict, and most likely heard about the war from their parents or relatives.

2) The Allies' victory contributed to creating the idea of a 'righteous' war, and to exalting its most important or heroic deeds.

3) The Second World War was thoroughly documented through the mass media, such as newsreels, radio, films, and newspapers. Also, the alphabetisation and the possibility of access to information after WWII were generally higher than after WWI, thus musicians achieved a great amount of knowledge about the historical facts of their recent past.

But why are references to WWI much rarer than those to WWII in heavy metal? Although the chronological distance is the first possible cause that comes

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[18] "war, n.1." OED Online. Oxford University Press, March 2014. Web. 10 June 2014.

[19] An obvious but easily understandable example is the bolero march played on drums in 'Child In Time' by Deep Purple (1970).

[20] Andrew L. Cope, op. cit., 90.

to mind, it does not seem a reasonable one, since other less recent historical topics received more attention than World War I, e.g. the Norsemen's invasions in the Middle Ages. There are, though, other credible reasons.

1) The First World War was a conflict in movement only at its very beginning. After a few weeks or months, the positions became substantially stationary, and were held by trench warfare. Unlike the many swift and hectic assaults of WWII, the so-called 'war of attrition' primarily involved the use of resources, rather than the ability of commanders or the bravery of the combatants, therefore offering less 'epic' or sensational narrative material than WWII.

2) WWI was – politically speaking – quite consistent with most wars fought in the previous two centuries: its causes were mainly economic and territorial, which might have lessened its appeal as a lyrical topic. In the culture of the former Allied nations, on the contrary, WWII is often depicted as a fight for freedom from the tyranny of German National-Socialism.

3) The First World War deployed a vast array of technologically improved weapons of mass slaughter, e.g.machine guns, *barrage* artillery fire, and poisonous gas.[21] Signs of such destructive potential had been revealed during the American Civil War (1861–65), but they had been sporadic and substantially unknown outside of the USA. The psychological consequences of the horrors of such technological massacre, which led to a massive number of men suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders unseen thus far,[22] made many WWI veterans reluctant or unable to offer extensive accounts of their experiences, even if they had been able to keep their full mental sanity.

4) The political outcomes of the conflict were extremely disappointing compared to the initial expectations of a 'war to end all wars',[23] which was supposed to last just for a few weeks or months, and the view was held that the loss of

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[21] Cf. John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1976, 227–37, 243–46, 254–56, 305–07, 322–23.

Cf. Sir Douglas Haig, "Features of the War", document n° 952, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1919, web, accessed 20 June 2014, http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/comment/haigvue.htm.

Cf. "AEF Weaponry Resources", web, accessed 20 Jun 2014, http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/weapons.htm.

[22] Joanna Bourke, "Shell Shock During World War One", 2010, web, accessed 12 June 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/shellshock_01.shtml.

YouTube, "Shell Shock 1914-18", 2013, web, accessed 12 June 2014, http://youtu.be/faM42-KMeB5Q.

[23] Cf. Herbert George Wells, *The War that Will End War*, London, Frank & Cecil Palmer Red Lion Court., 1914.

millions of lives had led to no benefit of any sort, insomuch that Pope Benedict XV described it as 'the useless carnage'.[24]

The crisis of moral values after World War I

The process through which the moral values of modernity entered an irreversible crisis has countless causes. Such a phenomenon began in the second half of the 19th century, and the awareness of it emerged throughout European culture in various forms and degrees. Intellectuals such as Spengler, Nietzsche, Freud, Wilde, and many others – although in different manners, results, and prescriptive paradigms – acknowledged the twilight of modernity and the rise of mass society. Most great narrative frames conceived between the 17th and the 19th centuries, e.g. as Hegelian rationalism, economic capitalism, scientific positivism, lost their credibility: this brought an end to the idea that a single all-embracing key principle could explain the whole of reality and its complex processes.[25] Furthermore, the generally optimistic consideration of the human being was undermined by the gradual realisation that the human mind is multifaceted and multi-layered, that it often acts irrationally, and is sometimes driven by a compulsively destructive instance, which apparently contradicts – for example – the instinct of self-preservation.

The First World War did not *cause* these forms of disbelief, but it certainly made a major contribution in aggravating them. Some of the grounds exposed in the previous paragraph soon signalled how technological expansion could greatly help civilization, but could also lead it on the road to ruin. Not only did highly technological weaponry in a strict sense raise suspicion, but also 'mechanisation' and automatism in general,[26] which partly came from the development of mass industrial production. History ceased to be considered as a teleological process towards a better human society, since the World War had been the costliest in terms of human casualties and material resources until then, and had deployed new weapons meant to be as deadly and destructive as possible.

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[24] Pope Benedictus XV, "Lettera del Santo Padre Benedetto XV ai Capi dei Popoli Belligeranti", 1 August 1917, web, accessed 12 June 2014, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xv/letters/1917/documents/hf_ben-xv_let_19170801_popoli-belligeranti_it.html. The letter is also available in French language.

[25] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, tr. H. Tomlinson, London and New York, Continuum, 2002, 147–194, et al.

[26] Cf. Franz Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie*, Leipzig, Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1919. Id., *Der Prozess*, Berlin, Die Schmied, 1925. Kafka's work is enlightening about the dangers of excessive bureaucratization and particularization ofthe social processes, which were a trait of the development of mass society.

In general, the European culture of the post-war period was dramatically influenced by this awareness: good examples can be found in the visual arts (Expressionism, the French *fauves*, the cinema of R. Wiene and F. Lang), philosophy (Bloch, Benjamin, Marcuse, Adorno, Russell), poetry (Ungaretti, Owen, Rilke), and prose (Kafka).The crisis of moral values and the dispersion of the individual self in the vastness of mass society contributed to starting many of the historical post-war phenomena, and facilitated the rise of fascisms and nationalisms, which took over in Europe throughout the next two decades.[27]

Direct references and conceptual connection: 'Paschendale' and '1916'

Considering the scenario so far described, it is possible to identify at least three important conceptual connections between the two topics.

A first term of comparison is the revolution of moral standards and values, encouraged by the failure of previous ones. In the case of the post-World War I scenario, this phenomenon contributed to amplifying distrust in the old political categories, the loss of individual identity, and ultimately led to the rise of totalitarian regimes, which exploited the masses' thirst for strong and determined leaders who promised a new golden age, often by recalling a glorious past: the Aryan race for Austro-Germans, the Roman Republic for Italians, the consolidation of the colonial empire for Great Britain, equality and socialism for the USSR. In the case of classic heavy metal, the actual failure of the 'peace-and-love' movements was re-elaborated in a blend of hippie and working-class heritage. Two of the afore mentioned examples are the relinquishment of active anti-militarism in favour of a fierce but discouraged disapproval of war, and the misogynistic cypher of early heavy metal.

A second common trait is the rise of interest in mysticism. Occultism and spiritualism were overtly part of the National-Socialist ideology, and were employed as an ancestral justification for the theory of supremacy of the Aryan race. Nevertheless, Nazism did nothing but exalt a school of thought which was already at a very advanced stage of development in the Germanic world, primarily due to the work of G. von List and J. Lanz, two Viennese scholars who were deeply involved in ancient German mythology, and had theorised – way before the outbreak of WWI – most of what Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf* (1925) about the theory of the master race. The mythology of the elected race was a tremendously influential narration, and a successful tool for Nazi propaganda.[28]

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[27] Cf. among others Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century*, London, Abacus, 1995.

[28] Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism. Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, London and New York, Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004 (1985), cf. especially 33–48, 90–105, 192–204.

Furthermore, while spiritualism had usually been considered as no more than lots of spectacular tricks in the 19th century (true science lying 'elsewhere'), the post-war German scenario offered more interaction between official science and mysticism, as in the case of *Ariosophy*.[29] Other European totalitarianisms did not have such powerful occult elements, but still relied on a mythical past in order to enhance their own moral credibility. Classic heavy metal, as explained earlier, made extensive use of mythological and mystical contextual references, as well. The main characteristic of this usage is the re-appropriation of the meaning of such narrations, mainly untying them from their original context and religious implications. This process has resulted in a source of alternative reality, which can be inhabited without requiring a commitment of faith, and appears as a possibility to escape the disillusionment with contemporaneity and everyday life.

Technology is a third important connecting topic. The improved lethality of weapons employed on the battlefield and the increasing involvement of civil life in military industrial efforts amplified already existing forms of technophobia, which had been processed since the Romantic age.[30] In parallel, a similar distrust in technology can be found in classic heavy metal.'Children Of The Grave' (1971) by Black Sabbath and 'Electric Eye' by Judas Priest (1982) are just two examples. In particular, classic heavy metal conveys the influence of the Cold War and shows serious concern about a possible 'nuclear winter', artificial intelligence, space war, alien invasion, mass warfare, and so on.

The connection between classic metal and WWI is exemplified in the songs 'Paschendale'[31] and '1916'.[32] Despite being quite recent, thus outside the actual 'early age' of metal, they were composed and performed by two fundamental bands of that era, which retained most of the classic characteristics. Therefore, they can be fully considered as classic heavy metal songs dealing with WWI, in which some of the above mentioned themes appear.

'Paschendale' has a long complex structure, and a very detailed lyrical description of the battlefield; it expresses the meaninglessness of the conflict and the absence of any glory in the death of the soldiers, both for the Allies and the Germans. The idea of death as anything but 'tragic' in the classic Greek sense, being that it serves no higher purpose, is mirrored in the lyrics *"Many soldiers*

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[29] *Ibid.*

[30] E.g. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus*, London, Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones, 1818.

[31] Iron Maiden, *Dance Of Death*, EMG Records, 2003.For the complete lyrics, consult the link at http://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Iron_Maiden/Dance_of_Death/21633.

[32] Motörhead, *1916*, WTG Records, 1991.Complete lyrics at http://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Mot%C3%B6rhead/1916/948.

eighteen years / Drown in mud, no more tears / Surely a war no one can win / Killing time about to begin"; furthermore, the combatants do not show any sign of bravery or nobility: *"In the smoke, in the mud and lead / Smell the fear and the feeling of dread"* denounce war as a mere massacre, despoiling it of any possible glorious dimension. At the same time, the uncompromising criticism of war is matched by the awareness that there is no hope for a reasonable solution to the conflict, and that – in a more general sense – mankind will keep on fighting until the end of its days, as proclaimed in the chorus: *"Home, far away / From the war, a chance to live again / Home, far away / But the war, no chance to live again"*. The recurring reference to gunfire, barbed wire and artillery offer a precise picture of the confusion and horror on the battlefield, also hinting at the increased destructive potential provided by technological discoveries: *"Whistles, shouts and more guns fire / Lifeless bodies hang on barbed wire"*, and later *"Cruelty has a human heart / Every man does play his part / Terror of the men we kill / The human heart is hungry still / I stand my ground for the very last time / Gun is ready as I stand in line / Nervous wait for the whistle to blow / Rush of blood and over we go"*. Furthermore, the lyrics offer a quite precise picture of the nervous tension of life in the trenches, constantly waiting for the next assault: *"Laying low in a blood filled trench / Killing time 'til my very own death / On my face I can feel the falling rain / Never see my friends again"*.

'1916' is a slow and solemn ballad, rather atypical in the otherwise hectic and punk-like style of Motörhead, presenting only three verses and no chorus. The lyrics describe how the point of view of a volunteer soldier changes as the war progresses. In the beginning, he takes up arms, moved by the noble ideals of homeland, religiousness, glory, and by the hope for a better society: *"16 years old when I went to war / To fight for a land fit for heroes / God on my side, and a gun in my hand / Counting my days down to zero"*. As the war goes on, he witnesses the slaying of his comrades, without any trace left of the previous spirit of greatness and nobility. Soldiers die side by side, screaming for their mothers, *"Clinging like kids to each other"*, and the fact that nobody will remember their names intensifies the senselessness, and the absence of glory in warfare in WWI.

As they are depicted in the song, the comrades are valuable only to their immediate neighbours on the field, but their identity and personalities are lost among the millions of casualties of a war which did not leave any heroic character to posterity (*"Though it wasn't my fault and I wasn't to blame / The day not half over and ten thousand slain / And now there's nobody remembers our names / And that's how it is for a soldier"*).

Conclusions

At a first glimpse, World War I seemed a theme of little importance in classic heavy metal, primarily due to its seldom being adopted directly as a contextual topic (even more rarely, compared to the sheer quantity of references to WWII). Examples like 'Paschendale' and '1916', though, prove the contrary. Furthermore, there is a more subtle connection, which derives from a common distrust in previous ideologies and moral values; the optimistic, progressive tendencies of Positivism, systemic dialectics (e.g. Hegelianism), and the natural sciences were heavily questioned starting from the second half of the 19th century, while classic heavy metal re-discussed the fundamental ideals of the 1960s youth sub-culture, giving them new contexts and meaning, mainly by re-contextualising them in the working-class background of values. In the specific case of the two mentioned songs, the focus is on themes such as the pessimistic criticism of war, the horrendous scenes of massacre caused by the technologically more advanced lethality of the means of warfare, and disenchantment with the mythology of a noble death on the battlefield.

What is important is to point out the similar direction towards which ideals moved: crisis, disbelief, pessimism. Understanding the common features of the two historical phenomena certainly helps to contextualise them and find out their causes and repercussions. World War I and classic heavy metal share being turning-points, the former is the macro-event, which possibly starts what Hobsbawm called 'the short century', and the latter is the beginning of one of the most controversial and revolutionary genres in popular music.