‘The Raven and the Rose’: Tradition and Death/Doom Metal Music
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Any familiarity with metal music culture will suggest the importance of categories in metal. This brief conversation below, from the comments sections of one of Swedish gothic/doom band Draconian’s videos on YouTube, highlights this issue well.

As one can observe, fans are arguing about specific categories within metal. How should we interpret this narrow identification of music? Of course, one is tempted to think that this is an isolated case where a few people, or maybe even people professionally involved with music, arguing about details of a music. However, this type of conversation is not an uncommon occurrence. One may be able to find thousands, if not millions, of conversations similar to this one all over the Internet. Further in fact, musicologists in metal music studies are still small in numbers, so one cannot talk of an academic influence on the bigger cultural phenomenon. However, this example shows that these detailed categories existing in metal is an embedded
cultural feature. Every metal fan, hence, mimics a musicologist without the formal analysis techniques. The obsession with detail results in a multi-layered structure of styles and genres.

"Music world" concept denotes a social space centred upon a self-identified musical style; a space set aside from other concerns, at least to some extent, where music is a primary focus and where participants share a set of musical preferences and knowledge.’ (Crossley, 2015: 472)

Moreover;

‘participants within music worlds may derive pleasure from the accumulation of knowledge, experiences or artefacts which, like a chess opponent's king have no value outside of the world but great value within it.’ (Crossley & Bottero, 2015: 44)
The way participants of these music worlds identify themselves as members is through conventions. The conventions act as important symbols to identify members of a music world. Tradition in metal becomes the cultural identifier. In this paper, I will focus on death/doom metal music world: a small group of bands located in northern England and a relatively small fanbase spread all around the world and discuss the idea change and convention.

I will use ethnographic data I collected during my research in the later parts of this talk, so it is crucial that I now briefly discuss my position as the researcher in this culture and how I collected my data. Firstly, this research has been conducted as part my PhD project at Leeds Beckett University, of which I am half-way through and for which I receive no funding. Like I mentioned above, I focus on three bands from northern England; namely My Dying Bride, Paradise Lost, and Anathema, and their fans. I come from Turkey, and have been living in northern England for 1.5 years and in the UK for 2.5 years. My relationship with this music world started when I was a teenager and I have been a fan of these bands for close to two decades. I have composed this style of music in an amateur way, I have written reviews of albums and concerts of this style, and I worked as a photographer in concerts of bands in this style. I wear black band t-shirts often and I also listen to this style of music often in my personal time. This is important because I consider myself an insider of this culture, thus, I can only have an insider perspective even though I attempt to distance myself as the researcher. Vikki Bell argues that ‘embodied movements, [...] operate to recall and reconnect with places […], through those very movements, and at the same time, a site of diasporic belonging is created’ (1999: 3). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty suggests ‘a notion of the “institution” of personal history, which is intended to capture the process by which repeated responses and forms of understanding and interpreting become sedimented in our praxes over time, giving rise to stable preferences for certain types of response’ (Crossley, 1998: 33).
I conducted 74 interviews with fans of these bands over the course of last year mostly either meeting them face-to-face or talking to them via e-mail and these participants are from 28 different countries around the world. My Dying Bride and Paradise Lost helped me recruit these participants by sharing my flyer on their Facebook pages, websites, and Twitter accounts. These posts on Facebook, as of this presentation, have close to 3000 likes and 200 comments, all of which is supportive. I reveal this because the research has been overwhelmingly welcome in the community and I received no objections to what I was doing in any form. This is a culture that was craving attention. All the participant names you will see have been anonymised with random pseudonyms taking surnames from the index of William Atkins’ *The Moor: Lives, Landscape, and Literature* (2014, London: Faber & Faber) and these pseudonyms do not reflect the participants’ gender or nationality. The pseudonyms that do are purely coincidental.

Then, what is death/doom and how does this music world incorporate convention and conflict to its culture? Before discussing this, I will introduce the more specific structure doom metal as it is one of the more complicated ones in metal music. In the map above, one can note a (not the) large overview of metal before. One may notice that around the boundary between the decades 80s and 90s the number of styles show a significant increase. This is called the extreme turn in metal music (Kahn-Harris, 2007). This turn around the turn of the decade gave birth to many styles which then became separate cultures over the course of 1990s and noughties. As one can witness Doom metal, alongside Death metal and Black metal, is one of the main branches.

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<td>Traditional Doom</td>
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In this table, I list doom metal styles. I will not go into any of them except for death/doom however, to give the reader an idea, these style names can represent two things. Firstly, there are styles named death/doom, black/doom, stoner/doom etc. These names with a virgule suggest that the style is an amalgamation of two styles in diverse ways depending on the specificities of the styles involved. When there is only a space between the two identifiers, that suggests that the first word is descriptive. For example, ‘funeral doom’ does not formally incorporate funeral music from distinct cultures to doom metal style, but rather it is doom metal that sounds funereal. These are important categories and there is a clear internal friction one can observe in the culture in relation to these cultural and stylistic categories.

For example, death/doom fans and music are called ‘whiny goths’, ‘ghey [sic], or ‘romantic bullshit’ on one of the main doom metal forums (doom-metal.com). One ‘true’ doom musician in interview says, ‘doom metal is not some band with a violin’ referring to My Dying Bride; and one of my participants makes sure to distinguish between doom in strict sense and then a wider sense which includes death/doom bands. Death/doom style, bands, and fans get called with derogatory things and usually not seen to be ‘true’ doom.

Death/doom is style that started around 1990 with the extreme turn with three bands My Dying Bride, Anathema, and Paradise Lost. These bands were and for the most part are still based in northern England; namely Bradford and Liverpool. These bands are also known as the ‘Peaceville trio/three’. Peaceville is a record company based in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, UK. Many musicians from these bands have a working-class background however, the fan base is firmly lodged in middle class with 90% of my participants stating they have a degree-level university education or higher, including several professors.

From the musicians’ point of view, this music belongs to northern England in a significant way. This is also reflected in the work and presence of these bands. For example, one can see from the Facebook page of Paradise Lost that they define themselves as being from
Yorkshire rather than Bradford or Halifax specifically. Anathema, despite being from Liverpool, shot a video for the song ‘The Silent Enigma’ in Saddleworth Moor which is currently in Greater Manchester area however historically it belonged to West Riding of Yorkshire. And My Dying Bride is embedded in Yorkshire culture themselves, frequently performing in Whitby Gothic Weekend or Bram Stoker International Film Festival or writing songs about the folklore of Yorkshire such as ‘The Barghest o’ Whitby’. Also, Aaron Stainthorpe, the vocalist of My Dying Bride, prepared a guided Dracula walk app for tablets in collaboration with North York Moors National Park Authority. This northerner identity is further observed from the outside, sometimes from as close as Yorkshire;

I’d say there’s much more a raw quality, much more of an honest, much more of a… I’m really tempted to say Northerness, kind of that the reflection of the… I don’t know how to describe what I mean. There’s that kind of roughness that you just associate with Northerness, that kind of simplicity. (Gimzatte)

But more interestingly, this identity is noticed by outsiders such as from southern UK;

It's like watching Nick Cave front a version of the Bad Seeds gone wholly metal; My Dying Bride positively ooze class. Upper working class, it is true, but class nonetheless. [...] As you might expect, the band bitch and moan in true Yorkshire style about sound quality and fluffed chords afterwards. (Nick Terry, Terrorizer: …Extreme music magazine #35, 1993: 26)

Or more drastically from Poland or Greece;

The emotion, the atmosphere, the texture: it feels dark and humid, like in a cave, it’s transcendental and theatrical, I love the folk influences, like soft, flowing scents of Irish and Welsh old Celtic here and there! But far from overpowering, rather hidden. Very
personal and unique musical expression, as well, honest and true to the individual band members and the bands as a whole. (Gumb)

I liked the emotions, the heaviness and the unique musical ideas they created with atmosphere of their art (some touch of... don't know... at one moment epic, at the other Celtic sound?). (Brady)

One may argue that there is a local identity and tradition performed through this style of music. What makes these people react in these ways in the music? In order to answer this, I will discuss examples from the music of these bands. First of all, the general characteristics: these bands are comprised of six, and in case of My Dying Bride, seven musicians. The band consists of two electric guitars, a bass guitar, a drum set, a vocalist, a keyboard, and in the case of My Dying Bride, a violin. While the first five instruments are not particularly shocking in metal music, the keyboards and especially violin are drastic changes to traditional metal orchestra. This change is crucial in differentiating death/doom from others.

I listened to some gothic metal bands prior to discovering MDB and I guess the combination of keyboards and violin combined with the slow and heavy music gives me a certain feeling that I can't find elsewhere in life. (Acland)

The most interesting aspect of My Dying Bride’s music is of course its darkness and the violin. First time I listened to them I was left speechless. The violin parts on so many songs still haunt me. And that’s why we love Martin Powell [violinist and keyboardist for My Dying Bride between 1991 and 1998]. (Blackmore)

One can guess from the style name that stylistically there are two main components in death/doom metal: death metal and doom metal. These are contrasting styles and it is reflected in contrasting sections in the structures of songs. As Aaron Stainthorpe of My Dying Bride told me in an interview (2016), there are death metal sections and there are doom metal sections.
There are two vocal styles in death/doom style: non-melodic recitation-like clean singing and growling which is common in death metal. These are the main characteristics of this style. Interestingly, all these bands have changed their style immensely over the course of their careers. ‘The Snow in My Hand’ (My Dying Bride 1993, Peaceville Records) is a representative example from early 90s for all three bands, however, now these bands sound significantly different from both each other and their earlier works. There is melodic singing in My Dying Bride, Anathema practically has nothing to do with any of the metal styles, and Paradise Lost is much more energetic and their vocal style is a fusion of raspy singing and 1980s gothic rock bands. As a side note, I am deliberately not discussing Paradise Lost’s last album here because they completely went back to their early 1990s style, but that is not representative of their oeuvre. I am also interested in what fans think about these changes. So, I asked my participants what these bands represented for them and in what they were interested in the specific bands. 29 fans said Anathema is change.

Anathema doesn't play doom ... for a very long time now, but they are greatly appreciated anyways. (Bart)

This change is appreciated for some fans, but some see it as a betrayal.

Anathema is one of my top favorite bands. I really love how the band evolved through the years and didn't stuck in one style. (Chase)

As for Anathema… I am not a fan of their music at all. They are like [the] children of Paradise Lost (Katatonia […] too) who moved not only in their own way but also broke up with metal genre [completely]. (Brierly)

Anathema I never really liked, even though their first albums are pretty great. However right now they are too far away from metal and their roots. (Blackmore)

For Paradise Lost, 10 participants said that they represented variety.
Paradise Lost are the most experimental of the three bands. If you look at their discography, they went from traditional doom-death metal to some Depeche Mode Industrial rock style and afterwards their recent return to their roots. (Bradbury)

And this variety is usually appreciated but there are nay-sayers present as well.

I think Paradise Lost is more accessible, and maybe is the best of the Big 3 of Doom? You can see they always try to create catchy songs, and I don’t say that in a bad way. I’m truly amazed by their songwriting and perpetual renewal. (Gilpin)


And for My Dying Bride, 14 participants called them consistent and five called them genuine.

My Dying Bride is obviously the band that has had least changes during the years and is basically the only of the three that is still proper doom metal IMO. I like and each and every album they’ve ever done and I guess I will listen to them until the day I die.’ (Acland)

Stylistically speaking, while all these bands have altered their style over the years, fans see the band that have stuck with conventions the most as part of their culture the most. This statement of life-long commitment is not the only one when talking about My Dying Bride among the participants. This shows how tradition and convention serves an important function in this music world. The sentiments of betrayal points towards the same direction and people appreciate variety only when there is an eventual return to tradition.

This case of death/doom music world shows tradition as performing an adhesive function within the culture. I discussed death/doom and metal music to demonstrate how
tradition is performed and valued and how it is one of the key factors in the construction of a
culture even under the popular music idiom.

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