

# explorations



Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature

## REVIEW

**Jarosław Giza, Kacper Horowski, Tomasz Kiwak, Adrian Sajewicz, Aleksandra Sajewicz, Maksymilian Totoś. 2024. *Literature and Heavy Metal Music: A Comparative Analysis of Literary Motifs in Lyrics of the Heavy Metal Band Iron Maiden and the Practical Guide for Lyricists Implementing Literary Motifs*. Nowy Sącz: Wydawnictwo Naukowe ANS w Nowym Sączu.**

DOI: 10.25167/EXP13.25.13.10

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*Literature and Heavy Metal Music: A Comparative Analysis of Literary Motifs in Lyrics of the Heavy Metal Band Iron Maiden and the Practical Guide for Lyricists Implementing Literary Motifs* by Jarosław Giza, Kacper Horowski, Tomasz Kiwak, Adrian Sajewicz, Aleksandra Sajewicz, and Maksymilian Totoś is a valuable contribution to the still developing field of rock – or metal, to be more precise – studies, especially within the Polish academia. The approach proposed by the six authors situates the book in the context of literary studies as it analyses the ways Iron Maiden reinterpret the canonical literary texts, predominantly – but not exclusively – those representing the British canon. In other words, this approach opens the world of literary studies to popular culture, here represented by one of the leading heavy metal bands. These relations between heavy metal and literature that constitute the foundational goals of the book are clearly and convincingly explained in the introductory section, in which Jarosław Giza, the major author of this publication, notes that “beneath its loud and «evil-like» exterior lies a rich tapestry of literary influences and themes”, and that this symbiosis “not only enriches the music per se but also provides the listeners with a deeper understanding of both art forms” (5). The choice of Iron Maiden as the subject of the research is not random either, as “[i]n essence, Iron Maiden’s symbiotic relationship with literary texts confirms the enduring power of music as a vehicle for storytelling and cultural expression. By drawing inspiration from the annals of literature and history, the band has been constructing a body of musical work that transcends the confines of genre, encouraging the listeners to explore the depths of human experience and imagination” (8).

Consequently, the subsequent chapters of the book provide the readers with detailed analyses of Iron Maiden’s lyrics based on original literary texts: novels (e.g. “New Frontier” based on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, “Brave New World” on Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* or “Children of the Damned” on John Wyndham’s *The Midwich Cuckoos*), short stories (“Murders in the Rue Morgue”

*Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature*, 13 (2025), pp. 101-103

based on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*), poems ("The Trooper" on Alfred Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade"), and even graphic books ("When the Wild Wind Blows" on Raymond Briggs' *When the Wind Blows*). What is worth mentioning here is the emergence of a new form of artistic expression, a hybrid of a literary text and song lyrics. It is a huge achievement of the book: to demonstrate that Iron Maiden's lyrics should not be ignored and treated as a lesser form of literature. At the same time, they cannot function completely outside of its pop-cultural context, also because "heavy metal music is a form of artistic expression that easily captures and expresses the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences" (5). Such an attitude ennobles this kind of artistic activity, at the same time making the source material – by that I mean the literary texts that serve as the basis the lyrics – more available and alive, especially when we consider the book's target readers, i.e. students of English philology, or young people in general.

The considerations about opening classic literature to the world of popular culture and, consequently, to a new type of readers leads me to another important element deciding about the value of the book, which also decides about its originality in the field of literary studies. It is predominantly connected to the authors' intention, which is directly explicated by Jarosław Giza in the following way: "The most important objective of this team academic endeavour (in the form of application research in the field of literary studies) is an in-depth analysis of the correlation between the lyrics of the heavy metal band Iron Maiden and the literary works on the basis of which the lyrics of the songs have been created. An equally important aim of the research work is to design – in addition to the analytical and descriptive part – a practical guide for songwriters who want to use literary motifs in their work" (8-9). These words not only outline the basic goal of the book – one that carries in itself both the academic potential and its practical, didactic realization – but also explain the need for such a publication. It is especially true in the Polish cultural context, as well as its utility for the students of English philology. After all, the publication may be also considered as an attempt – and a successful one – to create a handbook for students on how to create their academic papers.

*Literature and Heavy Metal Music: A Comparative Analysis of Literary Motifs in Lyrics of the Heavy Metal Band Iron Maiden and the Practical Guide for Lyricists Implementing Literary Motifs* is an interesting and highly needed project, especially from the perspective of those who teach literature, and those who study it. Probably its most powerful contribution is to show that rock/metal lyrics can and should be analysed with the methods and tools taken directly from the literary studies. All the reasons why a publication of this kind is needed enumerated in this brief review only prove that its objective – opening literature to popular music and, simultaneously, opening popular music to the analytic methods taken from literary studies – has a great chance to be achieved.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Sławomir Kuźnicki, PhD is an assistant professor at the Institute of Literary Studies, University of Opole, Poland. His academic interests cover literary and cultural contexts of rock music; utopian, dystopian, speculative and science fiction; gender, feminisms, and sexualities. He is the author of two monographs: *Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Fiction: Fire Is Being Eaten* (2017) and *Na stykach iskrzy: literackie konteksty rocka [Sparking Points: Literary Contexts of Rock Music]* (2023), the co-editor of *Sex in the States: Media, Literature, and Discourse* (2022), and the author of articles in the academic fields mentioned above. He is also a literary critic and a poet.

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