

<http://dx.doi.org/10.16926/pe.2025.18.25>

Jakub KOSEK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7664-4599>

University of the National Education Commission, Poland

Contact: jakub.kosek@uken.krakow.pl

How to cite [jak cytować]: Kosek, J. (2025). Cultural and Social Dimensions of Contemporary Heavy Metal Narratives. *Podstawy Edukacji*, 18, 423–440.

Cultural and Social Dimensions of Contemporary Heavy Metal Narratives

Abstract

The article addresses the cultural and social dimensions of contemporary heavy metal narratives. It delineates the principal theoretical premises regarding the pedagogy of popular culture and the educational significance of scholarly inquiry into heavy metal within the broader framework of popular music studies undertaken both in Poland and internationally. The study employs a qualitative content analysis of song lyrics drawn from albums released between 2020 and 2025 by selected Anglo-Saxon heavy metal pioneers (Osbourne, Saxon, Girlschool, Metallica). Particular attention is devoted to the identification of thematic categories, with an emphasis on the articulation of social discourses in the artists' oeuvre. Furthermore, selected aspects of the biographies of two deceased figures of the heavy metal canon, Ian "Lemmy" Kilmister and John "Ozzy" Osbourne, are examined in the context of mythologizing processes and the construction of cultural narratives.

Keywords: metal music narratives, song lyrics, musician biographies, popular culture.

Introduction

This article explores the educational and socio-cultural dimensions of (hard) rock and heavy metal music. The inquiry is situated within the interdisciplinary field of *popular music studies* as well as within the pedagogical discourse on popular culture (see, e.g., Melosik, 2010; Jakubowski, 2016). The rationale for con-

ducting critical analyses of the rapidly evolving domain of popular culture arises from its constitutive role in contemporary social life. As Wojciech Burszta incisively noted, popular culture functions as

an inalienable element of everyday existence, the subject of casual conversations and scholarly debates; it provokes tears as well as bursts of laughter, provides pleasure yet irritates through schematism, offends with intellectual shallowness while simultaneously surprising with the unpredictable richness of symbolic references (Burszta, 2002, p. 9).¹

In this sense, popular culture may be conceptualized, following Burszta, as “one of the fundamental *praxis* of contemporary society” (Burszta, 2002, p. 9).

In scholarship within anthropology and pedagogy of culture, media studies, and cultural studies, the educational dimensions of popular culture have long been emphasized. As Wojciech Burszta observed, “the education of the twenty-first century should also become a ‘preparation for life in popular culture’” (Burszta, 2002, p. 10). The potential of popular music within this context has been underscored by various researchers. Witold Jakubowski notes that

popular culture serves as a vehicle of identity patterns, with popular music playing a crucial role in this regard. Song lyrics and music videos, phenomena that uniquely combine the visual dimension of culture with popular music, embody diverse representations of identity (Jakubowski, 2021, p. 89).

Rock culture, in turn, is described as “a source of affective communities formed around a set of values shared by its participants” (Burszta, 2004, p. 19). The educational potential of rock narratives has been addressed on multiple occasions in both international studies (see, e.g., Flory, 2014; *Journal of Popular Music Education*) and Polish scholarship (Adamska-Staroń, 2018; Regiewicz, 2020). The present article examines cultural texts emerging from heavy metal music after 2020, as well as biographical narratives surrounding two deceased pioneers of hard rock and heavy metal: Ian “Lemmy” Kilmister, who passed away a decade ago, and John “Ozzy” Osbourne, who died recently on 22 July 2025.

Theoretical and methodological assumptions

In Polish humanities, rock culture has for decades been the focus of multi-perspectival analyses, conducted from cultural, literary, political, linguistic, anthropological, media, and musicological perspectives. Today, diverse academic centers, including the University of Opole, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Jagiellonian University, the University of the National Education Commission in Kraków, the University of Warsaw, the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków, SWPS University, Jan

¹ All translations into English of the original texts are the author’s own translations.

Długosz University in Częstochowa, and Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, are engaged in multifaceted research on popular music. Recent publications by Polish scholars have addressed such issues as the cultural contexts of rap, metal, and pop; the geography of music; musical taste as an analytical category; the poetics of music videos; and the anthropology of festivals.

Noteworthy recent works include the volume *Artyści. Samoświadomość twórców polskiej muzyki popularnej w warunkach zmiany społecznej*, edited by Mirosław Pęczak and Michał Rauszer (2024); a collective monograph focused on *identity* as a key research category in popular music cultures (Kaszuba, Kosek, Nożyński, eds., 2024); a book devoted to philological analyses of song and the relationship between (literary) text and popular music (Regiewicz & Rott, 2024); and two thematic issues of *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura*: one dedicated to selected aspects of blues music culture (16.1/2024), and the other to contemporary discourses and genres of popular music (17.1/2025).

It is worth mentioning, of course, the international multi-threaded research in the field of metal music studies, which has been developing steadily for many years, including pioneering works in musicology (Walser, 1993) and cultural sociology (Weinstein, 2000; 2011), but also important monographs published in recent years addressing gender aspects (Hill, 2016; Berkers, Schaap, 2018), issues related to the identity of heavy metal youth (Rowe, 2018), and interdisciplinary studies addressing various issues related to metal music culture and indicating further directions for research (Brown, Spracklen, Kahn-Harris, Scott ed., 2016; Herbst, 2023).

This article focuses primarily on the lyrics of songs featured on selected albums released between 2020 and 2025 by internationally recognized hard rock and heavy metal artists whose output has been valued both commercially and artistically: Ozzy Osbourne's *Ordinary Man* (2020) and *Patient Number 9* (2022), Girlschool's *WTFortyfive?* (2023), Metallica's *72 Seasons* (2023), and Saxon's *Hell, Fire and Damnation* (2024). These albums ranked highly on hard rock sales charts, including the UK Rock & Metal Albums Chart, and have been favorably reviewed by critics, with some also awarded major prizes. For instance, Metallica received the Grammy Award for *Best Metal Performance* in 2024 for the title track *72 Seasons*, while *Patient Number 9* won the Grammy Award for *Best Rock Album* in 2023, and the song *Degradation Rules* (Ozzy Osbourne featuring Tony Iommi) received the Grammy for *Best Metal Performance*.

Saxon and Girlschool were chosen because they are key representatives of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal, a genre that was important for the development of rock and metal music. These bands were formed in the 1970s and are still active today. Their work is therefore part of the *longue durée* structure of rock music (compare Burszta, 2019). Saxon's work influenced many later artists,

including the thrash metal scene (Metallica, Anthrax, Megadeth, and others) and glam rock (Skid Row, Mötley Crüe, and others). Girlschool is one of the longest-running female bands in the history of popular music. It is a band that, despite numerous difficulties, has tried to break through the patriarchal system of metal culture. The artists have released numerous albums and continue to tour with notable passion and dedication, exemplifying a distinctive form of feminine energy and an uncompromising artistic stance. It is worth noting that Girlschool and Saxon performed in Kraków, Poland, in 2024, delivering a dynamic and well-received concert.

Ozzy Osbourne ranks among the pioneering figures of hard rock and heavy metal, having commenced his artistic career in the 1960s. As a distinguished musician and performer, he has sold tens of millions of records both as a solo artist and as a member of Black Sabbath, profoundly influencing successive generations of rock musicians. His death was commemorated by rock legends such as Robert Plant and Elton John, as well as younger popular artists such as Lady Gaga and Yungblud. Metallica, on the other hand, is the most commercially successful metal band in history, ranked number one by “Forbes” magazine as the greatest band of all time, selling millions of records, achieving very high streaming results, and regularly selling out world tours. All the bands discussed in this article are Anglo-Saxon groups that share a common genre – metal in the broadest sense. The early work of these groups has been described many times, so it is worth looking at their latest releases to see what message comes across in the albums of mature artists who continue to influence numerous fans and subsequent generations of bands inspired by their work. In the case of Ozzy Osbourne, the discussion centers on the most recent albums released during the artist’s lifetime. These recordings may be interpreted as a retrospective reflection on his artistic trajectory – a synthesis of the turbulent phases in the career of a musician who has made a profound and enduring contribution to rock culture.

Rock and metal word-music narratives can be fruitfully analyzed through broader contextual frameworks that encompass voice, genre, performance space, communication and language, and corporeality. Each narrative constitutes a discursive act, understood here as “a set of communicative practices expressing relations of power, states of knowledge, and the agency of communicating subjects” (Lisowska-Magdziarz, 2019, p. 279). Music itself, as Simon McKerrrell and Lyndon C. S. Way argue, represents a form of multimodal discourse (McKerrrell & Way, 2017, pp. 1–20).

It is also essential to acknowledge the transmedial dimensions of rock narratives. Song lyrics are often expanded and recontextualized across media platforms, including album artwork, music videos, and textual-visual communication in social media. Within the convergent media environment, songs circulate across diverse music scenes, media carriers, and formats. They are further re-

shaped through (e-)covering practices, while fragments of lyrics function as quotations, slogans, or memes in both online and offline contexts, frequently serving as resources in fans' identity projects (Kosek, 2022, p. 85). Given these dimensions, this article also considers selected music videos and biographical as well as necrographic narratives. Biographical storytelling in heavy metal culture is a particularly rich research site, where identity formation intersects with processes of myth-making. Necroographies of rock and metal icons appear less frequently, yet, in light of the widely discussed passing of Ozzy Osbourne, they call for renewed critical attention.

Given the heterogeneity of the research material, this article employs methods of qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis, as well as discourse analysis and the analysis of biographical narratives. In conducting the qualitative content analysis, the author applied inductive open coding, also referred to as exploratory coding. The analytical categories were derived directly from the examined texts. In accordance with this approach, the set of categories is developed only after a thorough reading of the data and the identification of its key features, without imposing theoretical frameworks or preconceived interpretations (Gibbs, 2010, pp. 90–92).

The article discusses song lyrics and artists' biographical narratives—elements that contribute to the formation of a musician's artistic and media persona. In the context of image creation and artistic expression, it is important to recall the significant findings of Philip Auslander, who distinguishes three inter-related dimensions of popular music performers: the real person, the musical persona, and the character/ song personality (Auslander, 2006, pp. 100–119). Song lyrics, music videos, biographies, autobiographies, and other related components together constitute a complex "scene" composed of numerous cultural elements, understood here in accordance with the framework proposed by Keith Kahn-Harris (Kahn-Harris, 2006, pp. 9–49).

Socio-cultural discourses in the song lyrics of heavy metal pioneers (after 2020)

From its very inception, heavy metal has been more than a musical style: it has functioned as a socio-cultural formation, generating subcultures, scenes (see Kahn-Harris, 2007), fashions, lifestyles, value systems, and modes of communication. Today, the genre encompasses dozens of subgenres, each marked by its own complex specificity. The present analysis focuses on the pioneers of heavy metal; however, the primary object of inquiry is not their formative output of the 1970s and 1980s but rather their more recent albums released within the past five years. This raises a number of questions: What themes are articu-

lated in the lyrics of these canonical figures, both male (e.g., Ozzy Osbourne) and female (Girlschool)? What cultural and social issues, particularly those related to human identity, are important in their work? A starting point may be found in the late John “Ozzy” Osbourne, one of the most significant figures in the history of metal music, who passed away on 22 July 2025. His two most recent solo albums repeatedly engage with themes of transience, mortality, and self-reflection, offering lyrical meditations on life, death, and the retrospective evaluation of an artistic career.

Tab. 1
Thematic categories in the lyrics of Ozzy Osbourne’s solo albums (2020–2022)

Artist	Album	Key Thematic Categories
Ozzy Osbourne	<i>Ordinary Man</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– The human condition as a social being: life, death, and symbolic representations of mortality (black roses, garments, ashes); suicide; addictions (alcohol); memory; loneliness; cries for help; deception; farewell; escape; raid; emotions; the body (skin, bones, flesh); cannibalism; finitude (of life); the figure of the child.– The life of a musical star (fame, stage)– The sphere of natural elements and atmospheric phenomena (night, sky, sun, moon)– The religious sphere (hell), purgatory; Mother Maria, Jesus Christ, salvation, prayer
	<i>Patient Number 9</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Characters: the patient, the vampire, father and mother figures, the parasite, divine figures, the madman, children– The human condition as a social being: sexuality; intoxicants (alcohol); hedonism; the pornosphere; death; burial; immortality; blood; loss of faith and the search for meaning in life– Places and institutions (hospital)– The sphere of natural elements and atmospheric phenomena: storm, sun, earth, night

Source: Own study.

The musician, who is over seventy years old, is obviously aware of the inevitability of death and the transience of his career, fame, health, and life when creating his albums. An important theme in the lyrics on the albums is the problem of alcohol and drug addiction. When considering the lyrics from the transmedial perspective mentioned above, it is worth paying attention to the music videos released for the album *Ordinary Man* (2020). The music video for the title track from the album is retrospective in nature. Osbourne is shown in a dark cinema room watching a documentary miniature about his life and turbulent career. Archival footage shows, among other things, important

places such as Birmingham, the musician's hometown and the birthplace of heavy metal, as well as people important to the artist (his children, wife Sharon Osbourne, friends), but also to the history of rock music (Randy Rhoads, Zakk Wylde, and others).

The fictional music video for *Under The Graveyard* features actors Jack Kilmer and Jessica Barden as the singer and his wife. The narrative takes up autobiographical themes from Osbourne's life, particularly illustrating the dark side of rock stardom and the musician's severe addictions. The music video for *It's A Raid*, on the other hand, shows an animated story of Osbourne and his American rapper companion Post Malone's confrontation with the police. The humorous narrative is a self-deprecating tale about the fate of rebellious, anti-establishment musicians.

The British artist's latest solo album, *Patient Number 9*, contains serious themes concerning the transience of human life, illness, the search for purpose, faith and its absence, security and conflict, and images of children "playing with weapons." The lyrics on the album also touch on controversial topics, such as sexual themes (masturbation) and pornography addiction (the song *Degradation Rules* mentions the pornographic website RedTube). There are also lexical games, for example, in the title of the song *Mr. Darkness*, there is a reference to the poetics of titles recognizable in the artist's work (*Mr. Tinkertrain*, *Mr. Crowley*) or the humorous theme in the closing track *Darkside Blues*, at the end of which Osbourne can be heard laughing and saying "Hahaha, that's jazz."

Social themes can also be found in the work of the still-active British band Girlschool. However, the lyrics on the album express a critical assessment of the condition of humanity. In *It's A Mess*, the words "The human race is a mess, psychologically weak and falling apart" are sung. There are also themes referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, where there is mention of an "invisible killer" ("There's a deadly virus spreading fast, It has no conscience, built to last, There's no future, it's so strong, Taking lives, like we don't belong").

Tab. 2.

Thematic categories in the lyrics of Girlschool's album WTFortyfive? (2023)

Artist	Album	Key Thematic Categories
Girlschool	<i>WTFortyfive?</i>	– Animal characters (wolf)
		– The figure of the devil
		– Man and society: humanity in disarray; the virus, an invisible killer/enemy; the figure of a woman
		– Characteristics of matter (darkness, gloom)
		– Music (guitar sounds) and rock and roll (as a lifestyle, rebellion, toasts, breaking the rules)

Source: Own study.

Girlschool's lyrics also include motivational themes (*Believing In You*), praise for rock and roll, and encouragement to rebel, but also to party (*Up To No Good; Party*). The clearly intertextual song *Party* contains references to famous songs by rock bands that created the canon of the genre, including Led Zeppelin ("We'll do the misty mountain hop" and "We got a whole lot of love"), Ramones ("We'll do the blitzkrieg bop"), David Bowie ("We'll do the genie gene gene"), Queen ("Just like a killer queen"), T.Rex ("We can ride a white swan"; C'mon and get it on"), AC/DC (We do it all night long); Saxon ("We'll Be the Strangers in the Night"); Motörhead ("With the bomber in flight"); Rainbow ("Since you've been gone"; "Rainbow rising up above"). The album *WTFortyfive?* also features a cover of Motörhead's *Born to Raise Hell*, with guest appearances by musicians such as Peter "Biff" Byford, Phil Campbell, and Duff McKagan.

Saxon, who collaborated with Girlschool, devoted more attention to historical themes in the lyrics on their latest album, *Hell, Fire And Damnation*, released in 2024. The use of historical themes by a heavy metal band can have educational value, encourage listeners to deepen their knowledge of past events and figures, and even serve as teaching material through which teachers can introduce certain topics in school lessons. In Saxon's song *Madame Guillotine*, we find an ironic reference to the historical figure of Marie Antoinette, the Austrian archduchess, queen of France and Navarre from 1774 to 1791, who was accused of treason and sentenced by the Revolutionary Tribunal to be beheaded by guillotine on October 16, 1793. In the song *1066*, we find references to the Battle of Hastings, the famous clash on October 14, 1066, between the Norman army led by William the Conqueror and the Anglo-Saxon militia and guard commanded by King Harold II:

Harold had beaten the vikings at Stamford
 Routing Hardrada the end of an age
 Dayglow was finished, the shield war defeated
 An army triumphant, they marched to their grave
 But news traveled fast of a second invasion
 The army of Saxons would face a new foe
 Tired and weary they marched to the battle
 Where William was waiting with quiver and bow

(Saxon, *1066*, in: *Hell, Fire And Damnation*, 2024)

In the song *Kubla Khan And The Merchant Of Venice*, we find a direct reference to the title character of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan* about the eponymous Mongol ruler, who was described by the famous Venetian merchant and traveler Marco Polo. Saxon's narratives also contain references to the burning of the Salem witches and the so-called Roswell incident, an event that took place on July 2, 1947, in New Mexico, where a ship belonging to extraterrestrial beings allegedly crashed. In addition, the narratives deal with the strug-

gle between good and evil, the category of freedom (*Hell, Fire And Damnation*), war (*The Prophecy*), and urban and industrial themes (*Fire And Steel*). In *Pirates Of The Airwaves*, we learn the story of a teenage boy who listens to a transistor radio under his blanket and tries to find a station where he can hear the Rolling Stones. The lyrics mention the names of historical radio stations that broadcast without a license from ships (Radio Luxembourg, Radio Caroline, Radio London Town, Radio Avalon, Radio KSHE).

Tab. 3
Thematic categories in the lyrics of Saxon’ album Hell, Fire And Damnation (2024)

Artist	Album	Key Thematic Categories
Saxon	<i>Hell, Fire And Damnation</i>	– Historical events (Battle of Hastings); Roswell incident
		– Historical figures (Kubla Khan; Marco Polo; Marie Antoinette)
		– Theme of war, army
		– Elemental sphere (fire)
		– Industry: steel, machines
		– Man, condemnation
		– Characters: child of Satan, Salem witches
		– City and city sounds
		– Hell

Source: Own study.

The work of the aforementioned bands influenced the most famous metal band in history, Metallica. On April 14, 2023, the Californian band released their eleventh album, *72 Seasons*. The band’s vocalist already pointed to the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal scene as an inspiration in the song *Lux Aeterna*. James Hetfield said that it was “an optimistic, fast, happy song, with a nod to New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, a kind of ‘back to the 80s’ riff.” There has been a lot of darkness in my life and our career, but there has also been hope; we have always seen the light in the darkness. Without darkness, there is no light, so it’s good to focus on the brighter side of life instead of the bad things” (Koziczynski, 2023, pp. 18–19). The title *72 Seasons* refers to the time of maturation and the formation of human identity, which is 18 years of life. The themes contained in the lyrics on the album can provoke self-reflection, introspection, observation, and analysis of one’s own mental states and thoughts. The lyrics on Metallica’s album also feature themes related to religion, death, interpersonal relationships, and human flaws and weaknesses (including lying and lust).

Tab. 4
Thematic categories in the lyrics of the songs on Metallica’s 72 Seasons album (2023)

Artist	Album	Key Thematic Categories
Metallica	72 Seasons	– The human condition as a social being: emotions (anger, shame, fear), mental states, inheritance, the figure of a boy and older people; escape, fame, stage fright, 72 seasons of life, violence, illness, death, suicide
		– Social behaviors and expressions: lying, temptations, longing for freedom, misery, despair, pain, separation, sleepwalking, the human body, bones
		– Figures of demons, witches
		– Objects and places: mirror room, cyanide, barbed wire
		– The realm of the elements, atmospheric phenomena, and matter: night, moon, light, shadows, sky, darkness, fog, fire, flames

Source: Own study.

As has been briefly demonstrated above, the narratives of the precursors of heavy metal music address a variety of themes, including human functioning in society, interpersonal relationships, human weaknesses, emotions, addictions, depression, death (sometimes suicidal), adolescence, and the formation of one’s own identity. The narratives also feature motifs related to the elements and atmospheric phenomena, supernatural characters (e.g., the devil), and references to historical events and figures. The lyrics also touch upon, albeit infrequently, themes related to the rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle, partying, sex, and hedonism. Rock and heavy metal narratives are not limited to song lyrics. Here, we adopt Mieke Bal’s understanding of narrative text. According to the researcher, it is

a text in which an agent or subject conveys a story to the recipient (‘tells’ the reader) through a specific medium, which may be language, image, sound, structure, or a combination of these (Bal, 2012, p. 3).

In the context of the stories of two figures key to the emergence of heavy metal, Ian Lemmy Kilmister and John Ozzy Osbourne, it is worth briefly reflecting on selected aspects related to the study of biographical narratives and the creation of necrobiographical stories.

Biographical narratives in the perspective of *metal music studies*

The history of these English musicians can be viewed through the prism of mythical narrative in the process of creating artistic mythology. Marek Jeziński, researching the mythologization of musicians’ artistic message and analyzing the profiles of artists such as Roy Harper, Billy Bragg, and Neil Young, compared

the narrative elements present in their biographies with components found in mythical stories. He distinguished the following elements of narrative:

Separation; Searching for one's place; Embarking on a journey; The road; Breaking taboos; Overcoming adversity; Performing tasks; Fighting monsters; Bearing ideological witness – achieving artistic maturity (Jeziński, 2014, pp. 149–150).

Based on an analysis of (auto)biographical materials concerning Ian Kilmister, who died in 2015 (Kilmister, & Garza, 2002), it can be noted that the first of the above components – “Separation” – would refer to his disagreements with his father and leaving his family home; “Searching for one's place” would be associated with odd jobs, including at a riding school and then at a factory specializing in assembling Hotpoint washing machines. In his autobiography entitled *White Line Fever*, Kilmister recalled:

About that time, my stepfather got me into a factory that made Hotpoint washing machines. Everyone worked on just one piece of them. I was one of the first in line: I had to take four small brass nuts and bolt them on this thing and then a machine came down and knocked a ridge across the sides of them. Then you took the pieces off and threw them in a huge box. There were 15,000 of them to do, and when you were done with that batch, and really garnered a sense of achievement, they'd come and steal them and give you an empty basket. (Kilmister, & Garza, 2002, pp. 20–21).

The narrative element – “Embarking on a journey” – in the case of the Englishman, this was his decision to become a musician; in the section entitled “The Road,” one would point to his wanderings around Great Britain, living in squats, and his first small performances with amateur bands. This stage of his career is well illustrated by the musician's memories from the 1970s:

All through the rest of '76 and early '77, we played gigs here and there, a lot of one-offs. I remember at one gig, in a disco place in Shrewsbury – Tiffany's, for God's sake! – Eddie and I both fell flat on our backs onstage. It was one of those slippery plastic floors with lights under it. But the crew only lifted me up – Eddie used to treat them like servants so they left him down there. There he was, lying on his back, waiting confidently to be picked up and it never happened. On the way to another gig, Phil was angry about something and kicked the side of the van, breaking his toe. By this point, the morale of the band was getting pretty low; all our efforts were getting us nowhere. We were starving, living in squats and nothing was happening. I was well prepared to keep going but Phil and Eddie wanted to give it up. It wasn't their band and they didn't have the commitment I did. So finally in April, after much debate, we decided to do a goodbye show at the Marquee in London and call it a day. (Kilmister, & Garza, 2002, pp. 75–76).

“Breaking the rules” is a component that played a significant role in Kilmister's life: examples include prison arrests, a countercultural attitude, provocative slogans, and skirmishes with the police. In his autobiography, the musician recalls the moment of his high-profile arrest for drug possession while crossing the border from the United States to Canada.

So there I was, stuck with the Canadian police. They didn't even bother charging me for the pills, but I was arraigned and sent down to jail on remand. This was, as you can well imagine, not a pleasant experience. I'd been locked up in cells overnight, but never in a serious jail like this one. I remember I was in the delousing room, ready for the spray when this wonderful voice behind me said, 'You're bailed.' Well, as I found out later, the only reason the band got me out was because my replacement wasn't going to get to Canada in time. Otherwise, they would have just let me rot. I wouldn't have rotted anyway – since what I had was amphetamine sulphate and not cocaine, the case was thrown out as a 'wrongful charge', and they couldn't charge you again for the same substance. So I was free and clear. (Kilmister, & Garza, 2002, p. 65).

In the "Overcoming adversity" section, we can list, for example, problems and frequent disputes with record labels, financial difficulties, criticism of corporate systems and politics, contained, for example, in the lyrics of some Motörhead songs. An example of this can be found in the lyrics of the song *Just 'Cos You Got the Power*, which explicitly criticises the political and corporate system.

You might be a financial wizard
With a sack of loot
But all I see is a slimy lizard
With an expensive suit

Go on and run your corporation
Go on and kiss some ass
You can buy up half of the nation
But you can't buy class
You bastards think it's funny
Lyn' and thieving all your life
Think all there is, is money
Got your future wrapped-up tight

But just 'cos you got the power
That don't mean you got the right

(Motörhead, *Just 'Cos You Got the Power*, in: *Rock 'n' Roll*, 1987)

The element of "Performing tasks" in the musician's life would be associated with criticism of the vices of Western societies, while the "Fighting Monsters" component of the narrative would concern the premature death of Sue Bennett and other friends and family members of Kilmister, as well as the singer's deteriorating health and illness in the last period of his life, which ultimately led to his death. Looking at the last of these elements of the story – "Bearing ideological witness – achieving artistic maturity" – it should be noted that the musician was primarily a champion of rock 'n' roll, its ideas, aesthetics, and spirit. His political views, which were reflected in some of his ideologically engaged lyrics, would only come second. Sometimes, especially during press interviews, the rocker also acted as a socio-political commentator.

Marek Jeziński notes that an artist who is conscious of creating his own artistic mythology takes responsibility for the content that reaches his audience –

it then takes on a flagship significance, it is “a factor to which the musician devotes a lot of space, shaping this mythology in accordance with his own worldview, presenting to the audience those events that are important for the formation of his career and its most important stages” (Jeziński, 2014, p. 151). The career of Ozzy Osbourne, the precursor of heavy metal who died in July 2025, is an exhibitionist story of an eccentric artist. If we look at the singer’s history in the context of the narrative categories mentioned above, the element of “Separation” could refer to leaving his family home; “Searching for one’s place” would be associated with odd jobs (including working as a plumber and in a factory producing car horns). Osbourne’s autobiography contains many humorous passages describing his experiences in various workplaces. For example:

On my first day at the Lucas plant the supervisor showed me into this sound-proofed room, where I’d do my shift. My job was to pick up the car horns as they came along a conveyor belt and put them into this helmet-shaped machine. Then you’d hook them up to an electrical current and adjust them with a screwdriver, so they went, ‘BAGH, BOOO, WEEE, URRH, BEEOOP.’ Nine hundred a day – that’s how many car horns they wanted tuned. They kept count, because every time you did one you clicked a button. There were five of us in the room, so that’s five car horns burping and beeping and booping all at the same time, from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon. (Osbourne, & Ayres, 2014, 22).

The element of the narrative – “Embarking on a journey” – is the decision to become a musician; the part entitled “The Road” refers to life on the road and the first amateur performances. “Breaking the rules” is a component that also played an important role in Osbourne’s life: examples include prison arrests, a rebellious attitude, and skirmishes with the police. The section “Overcoming adversity” could include, for example, disputes with other musicians, record labels, and criticism of corporate systems. The element of “Accomplishing tasks” would be associated in the musician’s life with criticism of the vices of Western societies, while the narrative component of “Fighting monsters” would concern the premature death of Osbourne’s friends and the singer’s long-term illness, which ultimately led to his death. In the musician’s autobiography, one can find, for example, memories related to the death and funeral of Randy Rhoads:

Randy’s funeral was held at the First Lutheran Church in Burbank. I was one of the pallbearers. They had big pictures of Randy all around the altar. I remember thinking: It’s only been a few days since I was sitting on the bus with him, calling him mad for wanting to go to university. I felt so bad. Randy was one of the greatest guys who’d ever been in my life. And I suppose I felt guilty, too, because if he hadn’t been in my band, he wouldn’t have died. I don’t know how Randy’s mother survived the funeral – she must be some kind of woman. Her little baby had died. She was divorced, Delores was, so her kids meant everything to her. And Randy really loved her – he absolutely adored her. For years after, every time me and Sharon used to see Dee, we felt terrible. (Osbourne, & Ayres, 2014, p. 132).

“Giving ideological testimony – achieving artistic maturity” is an element that would be associated with some of Black Sabbath’s ideologically (e.g., ecologically) engaged lyrics and Osbourne’s solo achievements. One of the first environmentally conscious songs in metal music was *Into the Void*, with lyrics written by Geezer Butler:

Rocket engines burning fuel so fast
Up into the night sky they blast
Through the universe the engines whine
Could it be the end of man and time?
Back on earth the flame of life burns low
Everywhere is misery and woe
Pollution kills the air, the land and sea
Man prepares to meet his destiny

Rocket engines burning fuel so fast
Up into the night sky so vast
Burning metal through the atmosphere
Earth remains in worry, hate and fear
With the hateful battles raging on
Rockets flying to the glowing sun
Through the empires of eternal void
Freedom from the final suicide

(Black Sabbath, *Into The Void*, in: *Master of Reality*, 1971).

From a cultural studies perspective, but also from the point of view of popular culture pedagogy, posthumous stories related to rock and metal musicians, fan reactions and practices, memories, notes, and commemorative entries may prove interesting. In the broader field of obituaries related to the band Motörhead and the “(necro)persona” of Lemmy Kilmister and Ozzy Osbourne, the following practices, cultural “products” and events can be identified: posthumous publications and commemorative narratives (biographies, magazines, etc.); posthumously released songs; new original songs by the artist released after his death (in Kilmister’s case, these were *Bullet In Your Brain* and *Greedy Bastards*); reissues of important albums in the musicians’ discography; songs dedicated to musicians recorded by other performers; albums containing covers of songs by deceased singers; concert activities of bands operating in the “tribute to” formula; fan art – in this area, it is worth highlighting murals, drawings, paintings, memes, sculptures, statues, and many other forms.

In the context of Kilmister and Osbourne, among others, we can observe tanatourism trips, statue unveiling ceremonies, exhibitions and presentations of items related to musicians, but also countless online posts and discussions on social media, which constitute an important area of cultural practices in the obituary field of heavy metal culture. Fans of deceased metal music pioneers co-create a rock structure of feeling and experience, meeting in Birmingham, Burs-

lem, London, Los Angeles, and other locations, in clubs, at monuments, and murals, to talk about music. They reminisce about concerts they attended in the past, exchange experiences, raise toasts, and create various forms of cultural rock *praxis*.

Conclusion

This article draws attention to the cultural and social aspects of contemporary heavy metal narratives, using the example of the Anglo-Saxon precursors of the genre. The analysis focuses primarily on lyrics from albums released after 2020. The lyrics from the latest albums by Ozzy Osbourne, Saxon, Girlschool, and Metallica contain themes related to, to a greater or lesser extent, human functioning, its place in social reality, the formation of identity, addiction problems, loneliness, illness, and death.

There are also metaphorical images related to the elements, atmospheric phenomena, images and characters straight out of fantasy worlds (witches, devils, demons, hell or heaven, struggle). Some artists refer to religious and historical themes, sometimes also referring to content related to the stereotypical image of rock and roll life, sex, pornography, and partying.

Heavy metal narratives have critical potential. Song lyrics can be used in school lessons to encourage young students to explore certain topics (e.g. historical or environmental) in greater depth. Many metal artists, such as Metallica, Ozzy Osbourne, Saxon and Girlschool, discussed in the text, address current and socially important issues. Musicians' biographies are also interesting texts, showing the positive sides of rock stars' lives, but also describing the dark sides of fame, struggles with addiction, and problems related to the high pressure in the music industry and business. Autobiographies obviously serve to create a certain image of artists, but they are also often stories that review their artistic careers and show the process of constructing artistic identity, thus constituting important research material for further analysis in the field of contemporary culture pedagogy and popular music studies.

The heavy metal narratives analyzed are therefore part of social, identity, historical, pathological, and artistic discourses. Attention was also drawn to the biographical narratives of two precursors of heavy metal music from the perspective of mythologization processes. The stages and events (including leaving home, odd jobs, stays in detention, problems with colleagues, addictions, illness, and death) that influenced the creation of the artists' mythological narratives were identified. A separate thread that awaits further development in future work is the necrobiographies of artists. An increasing number of artists from the pioneer generation of rock and heavy metal are passing away. The death of art-

ists generates considerable interest among fans, the media, and other entities responsible for contemporary necromarketing. These are important social issues in the fields of cultural studies, anthropology, and popular culture pedagogy, among others, which should be addressed in future research.

References

- Adamska-Staroń, M. (2018). *Edukacyjne konteksty rockowych narracji. Perspektywa teoretyczno-badawcza*. Warszawa: Difin.
- Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura. Kultura bluesa. Wymiary, sceny, reprezentacje* (2024), 16(1).
- Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura. Współczesne dyskursy i gatunki muzyki popularnej* (2025), 17(1).
- Auslander, P. (2006). Musical Personae. *The Drama Review*, 1(50), 100–119.
- Bal, M. (2012). *Narratologia. Wprowadzenie do teorii narracji*. Transl. E. Kraszkowska, E. Rajewska. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Berkers, P., & Schaap, J. (2018). *Gender Inequality in Metal Music Production*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Brown, A. R., Spracklen, K., Kahn-Harris, K., & Scott, N. (eds.) (2016). *Global metal music and culture: Current directions in metal studies*. New York – London: Routledge.
- Burszta, W.J. (2002). *O kulturze, kulturze popularnej i edukacji*. In: J.W. Burszta, & D. Tchorzewski (eds.), *Edukacja w czasach popkultury*. Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Akademia Bydgoska.
- Burszta, W. J. (2019). *Yes i długie trwanie w rocku*. In: J. Osiński, M. Pranke, & P. Tański (eds), *Kultura rocka 2. Słowo, dźwięk, performance*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK.
- Flory, A. (2014). Rock Narratives and Teaching Popular Music: Audiences and Critical Issues. *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, 5, 135–142.
- Gibbs, G. (2011). *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Herbst, J.-P. (ed.) (2023). *The Cambridge Companion to Metal Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hill, R.L. (2016). *Gender, Metal and the Media*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jakubowski, W. (2016). *Wstęp*. In: W. Jakubowski (ed), *Pedagogika kultury popularnej – teorie, metody i obszary badań*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Impuls.
- Jakubowski, W. (2021). *Edukacja w popkulturze – popkultura w edukacji (szkice z pedagogiki kultury popularnej)*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Impuls.
- Jeziński, M. (2014). *Mitologie muzyki popularnej*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.

- Kahn-Harris, K. (2007). *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, Oxford–New York: Berg.
- Kaszuba, D., Kosek, J., & Nożyński, S. (eds.) (2024). *Kultury muzyki popularnej: Tożsamości*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie.
- Kahn-Harris, K. (2006). *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. Oxford: Berg-Publishers.
- Kilmister, I., & Garza, J. (2002). *Lemmy. The Autobiography. White Line Fever*. London.
- Kosek, J. (2022). Tilla Lindemanna songi transmedialne. *Forum Poetyki*, 27, 76–89.
- Koziczyński, B. (2023). Bezpieczna przystań. *Teraz Rock*, 5(242).
- Lisowska-Magdziarz, M. (2019). *Znaki na uwięzi. Od semiologii do semiotyki mediów*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.
- McKerrell, S., & Way, L.C.S. (2017). *Understanding Music as Multimodal Discourse*. In: S. McKerrell, & L.C.S. Way (eds), *Music as Multimodal Discourse. Semiotics, Power and Protest* (pp. 1–20). London – New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Melosik, Z. (2010). *Pedagogika kultury popularnej*. In: B. Śliwerski (ed.), *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki. Subdyscypliny i dziedziny wiedzy o edukacji*. Vol. 4. Gdańsk: GWP Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Osbourne O., Ayres Ch. (2014). *Ja, Ozzy. Autobiografia*. Transl. D. Kopociński, Czerwonak: In Rock.
- Pęczak, M., & Rauszer, M. (eds.) (2024). *Artyści. Samoświadomość twórców polskiej muzyki popularnej w warunkach zmiany społecznej*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa.
- Regiewicz, A. (2020). *Głośne pióra*. Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie.
- Regiewicz, A., & Rott, D. (2024). *Filolog na pięciolinii. Dwugłos polonistyczny*. Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jana Długosza.
- Rowe, P. (2018). *Heavy Metal Youth Identities: Researching the Musical Empowerment of Youth Transitions and Psychosocial Wellbeing*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Walser, R. (1993). *Running with the devil: Power, gender and madness in heavy metal Music*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Weinstein, D. (2000). *Heavy metal: The music and its culture*. New York: Da Capo Press.
- Weinstein, D. (2011). How is metal studies possible? *Journal of Cultural Research*, 15(3), 243–245.

Discography

Girlschool, *WTFortyfive?*, Silver Lining Music, 2023
Metallica, *72 Seasons*, Blackened Recordings, 2023
Ozzy Osbourne, *Ordinary Man*, Epic, 2020
Ozzy Osbourne, *Patient Number 9*, Epic, 2022
Saxon, *Hell, Fire And Damnation*, Silver Lining Music, 2024

Kulturowo-społeczne wymiary współczesnych narracji heavymetalowych

Streszczenie

W artykule zwrócono uwagę na kulturowo-społeczne wymiary współczesnych narracji heavy-metalowych. Nakreślono główne założenia dotyczące pedagogiki kultury popularnej oraz edukacyjnej wartości badań nad muzyką metalową w optyce krajowych i zagranicznych studiów z zakresu *popular music studies*. Jakościowej analizie treści poddano teksty piosenek obecne w albumach muzycznych wydanych w latach 2020–2025 przez wybranych anglosaskich prekursorów heavy metalu (Ozzy Osbourne, Saxon, Girlschool, Metallica). Zwrócono uwagę na kategorie tematyczne ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dyskursów społecznych w twórczości artystów. Omówiono także wybrane komponenty biografii dwóch zmarłych pionierów heavy metalu: Iana „Lemmy’ego” Kilmistera i Johna „Ozzy’ego” Osbourne’a w kontekście kreowania narracji mitologicznych.

Słowa kluczowe: narracje muzyki metalowej, teksty piosenek, kultura rocka, biografie muzyków.