From *The Wicker Man* (1973) to Atlantean Kodex: Extreme music, alternative identities and the invention of paganism

Abstract

The German epic heavy/doom metal band Atlantean Kodex has written two concept albums based on the folklore and paganism of old Europe and the West: *The Golden Bough*, and *The White Goddess*. The two albums owe their titles to two books that have influenced the rise of modern paganism, though they remain deeply problematical. In this paper, I explore possibly the most important influence on Atlantean Kodex, which is also one of the most important influences on modern paganism: the 1973 horror film *The Wicker Man*. I discuss the ways in which the film uses the speculative folklore of Frazer and Graves to construct a set of invented traditions about paganism and its alternative, counter-Christian nature, which have made paganism appealing to extreme metal musicians and fans. In this discussion, I use examples from other metal bands and fans who have name-checked the themes and the traditions of the film. In discussing the folklore of the Wicker Man, I also explore the folk music used in the soundtrack, which has also contributed to the invention of modern paganism and extreme folk music. I conclude by suggesting that although many pagans have adopted this extreme music and myth into their world-views, the myth of the Wicker Man is also used as a playful rejection of Christianity and its authority by those of a secular or humanist persuasion.

(8143 words excluding front matter)

Introduction

As Amanda Digioia (2016) has shown, heavy metal has a long-standing interest in horror and the occult, and the two areas of popular culture are inter-twined. Metal music is often used as on soundtrack to horror films (Tompkins 2009). Metal musicians write songs that draw explicitly on a wide range of horror film themes, forms and stereotypes, typified by lyrics in death metal and thrash metal (Harrell 1994), album covers and themes of the gore-grind sub-genre (Overell 2014) and the use of samples from iconic horror films in the work of Rob Zombie (who famously crosses over from music to the making of horror movies: see Dudenhoeffer 2014) and the occult doom-metal band Electric Wizard (Coggins 2016). For Rob Zombie, horror provides a thematic shock value to his cartoon-like, lust-drenched songs, which are designed to provoke a reaction from the mainstream of the media. For Electric Wizard, samples from horror films and horror themes in lyrics are designed to unsettle the fans in the audience,[1] who want to feel something uncanny, something numinous (Moberg 2012).

But not all horror in heavy metal is used to provoke and make ill-at-ease: sometimes the horror is pagan, esoteric, anti-Christian but up-lifting. The German epic heavy/doom metal band Atlantean Kodex have written two concept albums based on the folklore and paganism of old Europe and the West: *The Golden Bough* (Atlantean Kodex 2011), and *The White Goddess* (Atlantean Kodex 2013) In the latter album the song 'Sol Invictus' tells the story of a 'neolithic magick', a sacred truth, about death and resurrection. This pagan cycle is described in the song lyrics as underpinning not only the established religions such as Christianity, but runs deep in today's secular, scientific society: 'Beneath the fragile crust of this modern age of reason'. The two albums owe their titles to two books that have influenced the rise of modern paganism, though they remain deeply problematical: Frazer's well-learned but speculative myths about the meaning of the story of the Golden Bough in the Aeneid (Frazer 1890, 1922);

[1] Although of course on stage the imagery used from the films is nearly always exploitative and sexual,

and Graves' far-fetched claim of thousands of years of continuity of a pre-historical cult worshipping the White Goddess (Graves 1948).

In this paper, I explore possibly the most important influence on Atlantean Kodex, which is also one of the most important influences on modern paganism: the horror film *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973). This film tells the story of a pagan revival and survival on an island off the coast of Scotland, and ends with the Christian police officer sent to investigate a crime there being burned in an enormous wicker man. I discuss the ways in which that film uses the speculative folklore of Frazer and Graves to construct a set of invented traditions about paganism and its alternative, counter-Christian nature, which have made paganism appealing to extreme metal musicians and fans. In this discussion, I will use examples from other metal bands and fans who have name-checked the themes and the traditions of the film. I will use Wikipedia in a small number of instances because it is a source that reflects what people to believe to be the 'truth' about something, the 'common' knowledge of the internet (see defence of Wikipedia as source in Spracklen 2014), though these references will be cross-referenced to other more reliable sources. In discussing the folklore of the Wicker Man, I also explore the folk music used in the soundtrack, which (along with the film) has contributed to the invention of modern paganism and extreme folk music, and also pagan goth music (see Weston and Bennett 2014). I will conclude by suggesting that although many pagans have adopted this extreme music and myth into their world-views, the horror myth of the Wicker Man – refracted through the lens of the 1973 film - is also used as a playful rejection of Christianity and its authority by those of a secular or humanist persuasion. Before I turn to the theme and the horror at the core of the film *The Wicker Man*, I need to return to Atlantean Kodex, and the work of Frazer and Graves, to show how exactly the band uses their work and references *The Wicker Man*.

Atlantean Kodex, *The Golden Bough* and *The White Goddess*, and *The Wicker Man* (1973)

Atlantean Kodex were formed in 2005, and released a number of demos and live albums before the release of their first album *The Golden Bough* (2011). The band do not explicitly say they are influenced by J. G. Frazer, but they clearly are. The album has the sub-title 'A Study of Magic and Religion', which is also the sub-title of later editions of J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1922), first published in 1890 then subsequently expanded then abridged (see discussion in Ackerman 2002). Frazer's multi-volume exploration of the history, sociology and anthropology of belief begins with the mystery of the golden bough mentioned in Virgil's *Aeneid*, a poem well-known to his middle-class, well-educated Western readers (Spracklen 2016: 11-13). But it soon moves on to try to account for the ways in which magic and religion are used historically, and among pre-modern cultures of his own time. Frazer believes that there is a common mythology about death and resurrection at the heart of the classical tales, at the heart of Christianity, and at the heart of contemporary folklore and superstition: this is the idea of the sacrifice (of the god, or the king, or the scapegoat or fool) in the middle of winter to ensure the sun returns (Ackerman 2002; Spracklen 2016). Frazer's work is incredibly detailed and careful, though his belief in this hidden truth behind all human myths is clearly problematic and open to careful demolition by anthropologists (Ackerman 2002). Atlantean Kodex's *The Golden Bough* borrows key moments from the book to frame the lyrics of each song, and the band naturally end the album with the song 'The Golden Bough: A Study In Magic And Religion' with the lyrics:

> Grant me the Golden Bough
> To give back the soul I had
> When I was a child
> Ripened with legends

With a blossom crown

And a wooden sword

In 2013 the band returned with an album called *The White Goddess*. In Frazer's book there is discussion of the feminine divine exemplified by the Greek and Roman earth goddesses, and he speculates on the nature of the true goddess who marries the Sun King. Robert Graves book *The White Goddess* expands and critiques Frazer's speculative primordial myth and narrative (Graves 1948). But rather than dismiss the leaps of faith in Frazer's reasoning, Graves goes further and constructs from meditations on the hidden meaning of symbols and letters and poetry, and an entire mythology of the White Goddess as a triple moon goddess sacred to the Celts and others in pre-history. The book has unfortunately clouded popular understanding of pre-Christian culture and religion Western Europe, and its claims have been criticised and rejected by most academics (Hutton 1993, 2001; Lindop and Firla 2004; Smith 2007). But it has had a powerful influence on modern paganism – and obviously on Atlantean Kodex, who use the myth to frame more songs that tell of the mythology constructed in Graves' and Frazer's books. Atlantean Kodex use their album's songs to map out the occult, pre-Christian knowledge of sacrifice, of death and resurrection common to previous generations of Europeans, which they imply they believe has been lost with the rise of science, capitalism and modernity: hence the lyrics and the title of the song 'Sol Invictus', referencing the victorious sun god (born on 25 December), who is destined to return at the start of every year, so long as the right sacrifices are made. Clearly, Atlantean Kodex have read Frazer and Graves very carefully. But the second album provides some secret knowledge of its own, known only to those with the ears to hear. The album begins with an instrumental track called 'Trumpets Of Doggerland' (the land bridge that connected Europe to Britain in the last Ice Age, on which archaeological remains have been found, demonstrating humans lived there).

The track begins with the sound of waves on rocky beach, and one lone, plaintive horn, before Christopher Lee, as Lord Summerisle, says: 'Welcome, fool: you have come of your own free will to the appointed place'.

The sample is from the 1973 version of *The Wicker Man*, and we who know this know it is the key to the rest of the album.

The Wicker Man **(1973)**[2]

The Wicker Man was directed by Robert Hardy, the screenplay was written by Anthony Shaffer, and its headline star was Edward Woodward playing the Christian police offer Sergeant Howie. It has already been the subject of a small but significant academic and popular critical analysis (popular: Brown 2010; academic: Murray, Franks, Harper and Stevenson 2005; Murray and Rolston 2017). This literature gives the film cult status, and turns its making and reception into a mythology of its own. Rumours still circulate about the way in which the film was wrecked by a brutal edit, and how the original version of the film was lost by EMI, who took over the original production company British Lion. Wikipedia embraces this mythology of the destruction of the original film negatives and uncritically repeats it as truth:

> During the mid-1970s, Hardy made inquiries about the film, hoping to restore it to his original vision. Along with Lee and Shaffer, Hardy searched for his original version or raw footage. Both of these appeared to have been lost. Cult film director Alex Cox said in his *Moviedrome* introduction in 1988 that the negative had "ended up in the pylons that support the M4 motorway".
>
> (Wikipedia, 2017a)

[2] All references here are to the original version released in 1973.

The truth is that various cuts of the film have been released over the years, and Hardy, Shaffer and supporting actor Christopher Lee have all claimed ownership of the film's genesis, and its legacy (Brown 2010; Murray and Ralston 2017). Again, according to Wikipedia (ibid.):

> In the early 1970s, the actor Christopher Lee was a Hammer Horror regular, best known for his roles in a series of successful films, beginning with *The Curse of Frankenstein* (as the monster, 1957). Lee wanted to break free of this image and take on more interesting acting roles. He met with screenwriter Anthony Shaffer, and they agreed to work together. Film director Robin Hardy and British Lion head Peter Snell became involved in the project. Shaffer had a series of conversations with Hardy, and the two decided that it would be fun to make a horror film centering on "old religion", in sharp contrast to the Hammer films they had both seen as horror film fans.

This claim reflects the narrative given in Murray and Ralston (2017). The film was released and marketed as trashy horror film, a B-Movie filler (Brown 2010). The new owners of the film, EMI, were clearly nervous about the film's market potential. Although Lee, Shaffer and Hardy have argued that they intended to make an intelligent horror film, something with artistic merit, the casting choices of horror *femme fatale* Ingrid Pitt (Egan 2013; Forshaw 2013; Simkin 2014), and 'sex symbol' Britt Ekland, suggest the kind of audience the film was supposedly designed to attract: Hammer Horror fans and teenage boys (in an age when female horror fans were forgotten about). Ekland plays Willow, the daughter of the landlord of the pub, who is free with her sexual favours and who attempts to seduce the virgin Christian Howie through dancing naked[3] outside his room during the 'Willow's Song' scene. Lee is

[3] The person dancing naked with her back facing the camera was not Britt Ekland but the stand-in Lorraine Peters (Carpenter 2002).

marvellously cast as the Lord of Summerisle, an island in the Hebrides in Scotland where paganism is found to be alive and well. He is intelligent, sophisticated, but determined to ensure that his people survive. In the film, Lord Summerisle explains to Howie that the island was very poor, and people starved, until his grandfather found new, hardier strains of fruit that could be grown there. It was this ancestor who introduced the old gods back to Summerisle. In this scene, Lee makes sure we are never quite sure if he is mad, or rational: we are left wondering what actually happened in the recent past, and what actually happened to those who refused to convert back to the old pagan ways (we do see the ruins of a deserted church, opposite the School House where the children are taught pagan truths by the schoolmistress). In the climax of the film, Lee again is on spectacular form, delivering a moment of delicious ambiguity. In the scene, Howie points out that: 'If the crops fail, Summerisle, next year your people will kill you on May Day'. To which, Summerisle replies: 'They will not fail!' Lee delivers the line as if he is the rational, educated man of countless horror films, trapped by his grandfather's mad ways, knowing that there is nothing in the sympathetic magic, that he knows he is really the next one who will have to die for this pagan folly. But the line is also delivered with another meaning: that Summerisle actually knows the sacrifice of Howie will work, because the magic actually works.

Edward Woodward's unsuspecting copper arrives after a tip-off that a girl has gone missing. It is a trap to lure him to his sacrifice in the Wicker Man, because the crops have failed. In failing to give in to the temptation of Willow, and in staying true to his Christian faith, he passes the test and proves himself to be a worthy sacrifice. The crucial genius of the film is its direct use of ideas, content and images from Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890, 1922). When Howie consults a book in the library the text is from Frazer's description of the Celtic Wicker Man. When we see the pagan islanders dressing up and undertaking various rituals, such as the procession carrying Death out of the village, these are all variations

or direct copies of examples Frazer uses to make his argument that old pagan ideas about sympathetic magic survived through time. We see a child cured of her sore throat by transferring it to a toad, through placing the toad in her mouth. We see John Barleycorn represented as loaf of bread baked for the May Day celebrations. And, of course, we see the giant Wicker Man itself. It stands high on the top of the cliffs, on some projecting headland, and in it Howie is burned to his death – despite the viewer expecting some kind of sudden twist that allows him his freedom. The Romans are to blame for the idea that the Druids of the Celts used a wicker man to burn sacrificial victims:

> The nation of all the Gauls is extremely devoted to superstitious rites; and on that account they who are troubled with unusually severe diseases, and they who are engaged in battles and dangers, either sacrifice men as victims, or vow that they will sacrifice them, and employ the Druids as the performers of those sacrifices; because they think that unless the life of a man be offered for the life of a man, the mind of the immortal gods cannot be rendered propitious, and they have sacrifices of that kind ordained for national purposes. Others have figures of vast size, the limbs of which formed of osiers they fill with living men, which being set on fire, the men perish enveloped in the flames. They consider that the oblation of such as have been taken in theft, or in robbery, or any other offense, is more acceptable to the immortal gods; but when a supply of that class is wanting, they have recourse to the oblation of even the innocent.
>
> (Caesar *The Gallic Wars*, Book 6, Chapter 16)

There is no evidence for this to be anything other than the usual Roman propaganda about the evil barbarians of the North (Hutton 1993). The belief in the Wicker Man sacrifice,

though, continued into the work of antiquarians such as Thomas Pennant (ibid.). Frazer used it as part of his evidence to claim a common, essential belief in the West about sacrifice, death and renewal.

The costumes and design are also influenced by the descriptions of the rituals in *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890, 1922). The costumes – the ones used in the May Day rituals, and the animal masks – are also direct copies of costumes used in English folk dance traditions (themselves constructions or re-inventions of folk dances and folk traditions – see Boyes 2010; Harker 1985; Jefferies and Tyldesley 2011; Spracklen and Henderson 2013), such as the costumes and colours associated with Border Morris, and the hobby horse ('Obby 'Oss) present in the genuinely pre-Victorian celebrations of May Day at Padstow (Spooner 1958). Then there are the fantastical locations chosen to represent Summerisle, which are dressed with brightly shot but mundane reminders of sympathetic magic, from the May Pole to the Hand of Glory, from the placenta and the trees growing in the graveyard to the blossoms and strips of rag that float in the breeze (Brown 2010). And the locations, for all that they move around Scotland, are real places: the school house, for example, can still be found opposite the old abandoned church and graveyard at Anwoth; and the opening credits include the weird rock formations of Storr and the Quiraing on Skye. This, combined with the credit on the original release that thanks 'The Lord Summerisle and the people of his island' for their support in making the film, gives the film the feeling of a documentary. Just as Frazer has found the actual truth of all these religions and myths, so the film is an account of this deeper truth.

The soundtrack to *The Wicker Man* (1973)

One of the most important aspects of the construction and reception of *The Wicker Man* (1973) is the folk music. The extremely unsettling 'pagan' soundtrack performs the ritual and myth of death and resurrection effectively. Wikipedia claims:

> Composed, arranged and recorded by Paul Giovanni and Magnet, The Wicker Man soundtrack contains folk songs performed by characters in the film (including some by members of the cast). For example, Lesley Mackie, who plays the character of Daisy in the film, sings the opening song, and various others in the CD Soundtrack. The songs were arranged to hint at a pre-Christian pagan European culture and vary between traditional songs, original Giovanni compositions and even nursery rhyme.
>
> (Wikipedia 2016)

This summary is an accurate reflection of the information included in the booklet of the CD release of the soundtrack (Carpenter 2002; Magnet 2002; Wells 2002). Paul Giovanni was an American playwright and musician who recruited Gary Carpenter, a recent Royal College of Music graduate, as a musical director. Together they recruited other graduates from RCM, and three musicians from the folk-rock band Hocket, to compose, arrange and record the work. Magnet (briefly known as Lodestone) were only formed for the duration of the recording of the music and the shooting of the film (in which members of the band can be seen playing various instruments). The traditional songs and tunes drawn upon (without a 'trad' credit in the booklet of the soundtrack CD) include the Middle English poem 'Sumer Is Icumen In', and the Scottish Child Ballad 'Fause Foodrage' (Buchan 1972). Tunes and themes from the English folk traditions are used throughout the soundtrack's incidental music, in the 'Procession', and in the Giovanni original compositions. The arrangements and instrumentation are typical of the English folk rock of the period, with a strong use of recorders and pipes to evoke the uncanny and the numinous (Burns 2012; Sweers 2005), combined with the more traditional folk instruments such as the violin, the concertina and acoustic guitars. The recorder-dominated pagan folk arrangements, as used by Magnet in *The Wicker Man*, sounds very similar to the

folk rock of the Leeds-based band Mr Fox (1970, 1971) on their albums *Mr Fox* and *The Gypsy*, who were attempting to create what they thought was 'authentic' music of the Yorkshire Dales, with a strong pre-Christian flavour in the lyrics. More obviously, the music on the soundtrack is influenced by the use of the recorder on 'Stairway To Heaven' (on Led Zeppelin's *Four Symbols*, 1971).

On one level, then, the music is merely representative of other English folk-rock of its time such as Fairport Convention or Pentangle. But there are a number of things that combine to make the soundtrack feel weirder than its folk-rock influences. Firstly, Giovanni's lyrics, and the choices of verses from the traditional balladry, all explicitly make our experience of Summerisle to be as frightening as that of Howie. In 'Willow's Song', for example, we hear references to the White Goddess even as Howie rejects her:

> Would you have a wond'rous sight
> The midday sun at midnight?
> Fair maid, white and red,
> Comb you smooth and stroke your head

The lyrics are bawdy, and the scene is exploitative, but we get the sense of wild excitement offered by the goddess in the form of Willow: this is the bacchanalian worship described in Frazer and Graves. Throughout the film, the soundtrack reminds us the pagan themes of the cycle of the seasons, the need to make sacrifices to bring in the new summer, or the New Year. So, for example, we see the islanders joyfully singing 'Sumer Is A-cumen In' (as it is spelled on Magnet 2002) right in the final minutes, when the Wicker Man is burning and Howie's sacrifice inside it is certain. But earlier, when the solemn nature of the ritual is

recognised in the capture of Howie, and sacrifice is yet to take place, the music is slow and portentous: the plaintive horns sampled by Atlantean Kodex, and the beat of a marching drum.

The second way in which the soundtrack is uncanny is its inappropriate nature. Most of the music is English, or influenced by English folk, as I have already shown. But Summerisle is an island in the North-West of Scotland. It is an island in the Hebrides, where Scottish Gaelic is spoken, and where Scottish folk music meets Irish music. We can see that the locations are typically Hebridean (even if they are actually filmed near Dumfries): we see beaches, bays, seaweed and rocky shorelines, as well as rough-grassed paddocks and cliff-tops; and as mentioned, we are shown actual places in Skye. But the music, while including some themes that are Scottish (Carpenter 2002), unsettles us because much of it is so English, the music of Morris dancing and fashionable English folk-rock scenes. 'Sumer Is Icumen In', again, serves this locative dissonance very well, being a very English song sung on the actual location near Whithorn in Scotland that was standing in for Summerisle when they shot the burning of the Wicker Man (Brown 2010; Wells 2002). And the dissonance is amplified by the fact this myth of May Day sacrifice, with its songs of lust and summer, was actually filmed at the beginning of the year.

The music of the film, then, has left a profound impression. But before I come to the influence of the film on popular music, in the final two sections of the paper, I need to put the film in the wider context of modern paganism, and paganism in popular culture. This is the topic of the next section.

The Wicker Man (1973), the Wicker Man and invented traditions

In other work about the film, the ending is cited as one of the crucial narrative moments that transform the film into a cult film: it shows us a pagan victory, in which the Christians lose (Brown 2010; Murray, Franks, Harper and Stevenson 2005; Murray and Rolston 2017).

Popular culture in the global North in the fifties and sixties generally played safe with narratives of redemption, and clearly delineated the goodies in white hats, and the baddies in black hats (Athanasourelis 2003). Christianity, and God and Jesus, were obviously on the side of the goodies in films, as the people buying the cinema tickets in America and Europe were Christians (Marsland 2001). By the 1970s the Christian audience had diminished in the rise of New Age spirituality and secularism in the 1960s, but the self-styled moral majority still had enormous influence in the grading, licensing, distribution and marketing of movies (ibid.). And although The Wicker Man was a horror movie, the genre of anti-establishmentarianism and transgression, the complete failure of the Christian god against the pagan gods in *The Wicker Man* make it incredible for its time and place. It is no surprise that the movie has been strongly influential in spreading the ideas of modern paganism through popular culture, and around the world (Murray and Rolston 2017).

The film, however, also captures the growth of modern paganism, which had been nurtured by the New Age movement. Pagan revivals were already taking place through the twentieth century, connected to a rejection of Christianity and other forms of received religion in favour of the spiritual and nature. For some this rejection of Christianity associated it with patriarchy, science and modernity. Some individuals in the West expressed dissatisfaction at all manner of received wisdom, and searched for authenticity and truth in all manner of places: in music, in popular culture in the countryside, in politics (Partridge 2014). For some people, this involved a retreat into fundamentalism and nationalism, rejecting the liberal order of capitalism, and some nationalists and racists embraced paganism because it was associated with pre-Christian, European peoples such as the Celts and the Germans. For other people, however, the modern pagan revival allowed them to find a space to perform a more progressive politics. Hutton (2001) explores the growth of neo-paganism and Wiccan beliefs. He shows that modern paganism has a clear link to the Frazerian re-invention and the quest to find true

meaning and purpose lost under the power of the Church, but he also demonstrates the clear link to alternative cultures and progressive politics of feminists, greens, and anarchists. The combination of progressive politics and invented traditions or myth-making means that it has become common place to believe this pagan practice with its attendant knowledge (this ancient *gnosis*) happened, that there is a hidden story about the past and a sympathetic magic that is pre-Christian and true (Partridge 2005, 2006). In the 1980s, for example, the British comic *2000AD* included the story of the Celtic hero Slaine, a warrior who according to the account agreed by the editors of Wikipedia:

> …explored the Land of the Young (Irish Tír na nÓg) in the company of an unscrupulous dwarf called Ukko (Finnish for "old man", and the name of the Finnish Thunder god), fighting monsters and mercenaries in the fantasy tradition. In one early adventure he rescued a maiden, Medb (named after the Irish mythological queen Medb) from being sacrificed in a Wicker Man, only to earn her enmity – she was a devotee of Crom Cruach, the god to whom she was to be sacrificed, and was looking forward to the experience. Her master and mentor, the ancient, rotting and insane Lord Weird Slough Feg, became the series' main villain.
>
> (Wikipedia, 2017b)

Condis (2010) has explored in detail the adoption of these tales in the Slaine comics and shows how the original sources have been transformed by the comic. Slaine was a devotee of the Earth Goddess, and later became the Horned God. In this story there is a rich understanding of sympathetic magic, and of the ideas in *The Golden Bough* and *The White Goddess*. The story reflects the impact of these texts and *The Wicker Man* film on popular culture in Britain in the1980s: their creator Pat Mills is tapping into the paganism around him,

and also popularising and legitimising the myths of modern paganism by telling them in the trope of fantasy. This is one example that serves to make the point: the myth of the ritual of the Wicker Man and the sympathetic magic associated with the performance and sacrifice, then, has become part of everyday belief, modern paganism, and our contemporary popular culture (Hutton 2001; Partridge 2005 2006). But, of course, another example of the influence is the continued interest in the idea of the Wicker Man, and the film, in popular music in its broadest sense: from folk music through to the alternative and goth scenes; and to metal music, where this paper began with Atlantean Kodex. I will sketch out these influences in the next section.

The Wicker Man in folk music, alternative music and heavy metal

The myth of the Wicker Man, and the film, have had a significant influence on the new wave of English and – to an extent – American folk music. The soundtrack has created a sonic template for the sub-genre variously referred to as 'weird' folk (sometimes referred to as 'freak' folk, with bands and musicians consciously trying to capture the sound, as well as the imagery and, in some instances, the pagan themes of *The Golden Bough* and *The White Goddess*). For example, the entire output of the small label Folk Police Recordings[4] is influenced by the design of the film, and the sonic template of the soundtrack, and it is clear that most of the artists and bands signed to the label address dark, weird, or psychedelic themes. The first (and unsurpassed) album of the psych-folk rock band Circulus, *The Lick on the Tip of an Envelope Yet to Be Sent* (Circulus 2005) demonstrates this almost over-powering obsession with the Wicker Man and pagan myths in the weird folk scene. Songwriter, singer and guitarist Michael Tyack brings together a rock band supplemented by haunting female vocals, weird keyboards and suitably spooky and pagan flutes and recorders. On one song, 'Swallow', Marianne Segal of 1970s folk-rock band Jade appears as a guest vocalist. The first song of the album. 'Miri It

[4] https://www.discogs.com/label/254164-Folk-Police-Recordings.

Is' is a medieval English song that is referenced in the instrumental sections of the Wicker Man soundtrack (Carpenter 2002; Wells 2002). If this is not enough, there are songs that could be references to the notion of sympathetic magic and interconnectivity ('My Body Is Made Of Sunlight'), to the idea of sacrifice trough fire ('The Scarecrow'), and an instrumental that references one of the key myth of classical Greece discussed in *The Golden Bough* ('Orpheus').

More mainstream English folk music has embraced the Wicker Man, too. The idea of death and resurrection, the return of summer, and of rituals to celebrate and ensure the cycle of the seasons, continues to be recognised in successful acts such as different as The Unthanks and Jim Causley (Partridge 2014; Weston and Bennett 2014). The invented traditions of the film's rituals and performances continue to influence the design of English folk festivals, and to influence the evolution of morris dancing, sword dancing and other traditional English folk dance. For example, the invented traditions may have influenced fashions in morris dancing, such as the rise in the north of England of Border over Cotswolds because Border sides look 'darker' or 'spookier'; and there is some evidence from respondents in a fairly recent research project (Spracklen and Henderson 2013) that some people at least are attracted to morris explicitly because of the pagan 'feel', and their own pagan beliefs.

Neo-folk or dark folk is situated on the border between traditional folk music and alternative music, and comes out of the latter scene. Alternative music and alternative sub-cultures have turned to folk as a way of defining their alternative nature, dissenting from the mainstream, as well as turning to folk because it is perceived to be more 'authentic'. Some neo-folk is elitist, but much of it is driven by anti-modern ideologies (Spracklen 2013). Neo-folk is considered in some countries to be part of the alternative or gothic scene, as many of the individuals in neo-folk have come from the goth scene (Shekhovstov 2009). Neo-folk crosses over into a whole sub-genre that calls itself pagan folk, which obviously explicitly references the Wicker Man myth and the sonic template of the soundtrack. Neo-folk is dominated by

bands that explicitly sing about pagan themes, or who have pagan names, such as the infamous Sol Invictus. Sol Invictus play on the Cold Spring Records' 2007 *John Barleycorn Reborn* collection (Various Artists 2007), which also includes a track called 'The Wicker Man' by The Story. Cold Spring Records is a key label in the industrial, noise and neo-folk scene (Spracklen 2013), and its collections of dark folk deliberately evoke the imagery of the Wicker Man, as well as providing a space for artists and bands to sing songs influenced by the myth and the soundtrack.

The Wicker Man is also evident in the wider goth scene, which itself has taken a pagan turn since the 1990s. Inkubus Sukkubus have a long recording career dominated by songs with pagan themes and references to Frazerian sympathetic magic, such as the song 'Corn King' on the album *Heartbeat of the Earth* (Inkubus Sukkubus 1995). A more direct reference in goth music is Midnight Configuration's use of the dramatic image from the film of the Wicker Man burning on the cliff top for the cover of their 1997 album *Funeral Nation* (Midnight Configuration 1997). Finally, there is the cover version of 'Willow's Song' from the soundtrack recorded by American pagan goth band Faith and the Muse on their early 2000s album *The Burning Season* (Faith and the Muse 2003). These examples show there is a clear relationship, through music and sub-cultural beliefs and performances, between modern paganism and what could be called alternativity. In his exploration of the reaction against the secularization if the West, and the on-going re-enchantment of Western culture, Partridge (2005, 2006) argues alternative religions and alternative cultures and music are linked. He claims that they fulfil a need for the numinous lacking in modern society He returns to this theme in his recent exploration of the idea of transgression and alternativity in music (Partridge 2014). Goths, neo-folkies, mainstream folkies and weird folkies all find meaning and purpose in the performance of rituals associated with modern paganism, with Frazer, and with the Wicker Man, because this performance provides a sense of the sacred and the profane.

If the idea of performativity and sacred transgression can make sense of the influence of the Wicker Man on folk and alternative music artists and fans, what can be said for the embrace of the Wicker Man myth by heavy metal artists and fans? The pagans who perform pagan folk sincerely believe in the importance and sacred nature of their performance (Hutton 2001). For heavy metal artists and fans, the meaning of the Wicker Man, and the myths that underpin it, is more ambiguous. This is because metal is at the same time more extreme and marginal, yet more mainstream and commercial, than folk music or goth music. Apart from Atlantean Kodex, there are few other bands and sub-genres that have used the Wicker Man. According to metal-archives.com as of 17 December 2016, there are 36 songs named after the Wicker Man in its database, a small but significant number nonetheless. The aesthetics and the invented traditions of the Wicker Man and the film have had a strong influence on doom metal beyond Atlantean Kodex. Electric Wizard's horror-film vibe is influenced by key songwriter Jus Osborn's love of horror films, and for a time *The Wicker Man* was listed on the band's MySpace page as one of Osborn's favourite horrors, even though the themes and myths have not appeared on any album. There are, though, at least two other doom metal bands that cite the film and the myths of the Wicker Man directly as key themes in their music and songs: Wyrd, and The Moon Mistress.

Beyond doom metal, in the sub-genre described variously as classic heavy metal, or traditional heavy meal, the reasonably well-known American band Slough Feg (named after the character in the Slaine stories in 2000AD comic) have a song called 'The Wickerman' on their album *Twilight of the Idols* (Slough Feg 1999). But the most iconic and famous use of the Wicker Man is by Iron Maiden in the song of the same name, and the striking art of its single release ('The Wicker Man', also released on the album Iron Maiden 2000). The imagery on the single (or inside it, depending on the versions) is obviously inspired by the film: people in

animal masks are dancing around the bottom of a burning Wicker Man, only the head of Iron Maiden's Eddie mascot is seen as the Wicker Man's head. The lyrics are more ambiguous:

> The piper at the gates of dawn is calling you his way
> You watch the world exploding every single night
> Dancing in the sun a newborn in the light
> Say goodbye to gravity and say goodbye to death
> Hello to eternity and live for every breath
> Your time will come, your time will come
> Your time will come, your time will come

'Piper at the gates of dawn is calling you this way' is a possible reference to the pagan god Pan and his presence in a chapter of that name in the children's book *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame 1908), and the verse that follows appears to be about death and re=birth into eternal life. The time that comes for us may be our time to be sacrificed, at dawn in the Wicker Man, but the verse that follows seems less sure of its belief in sympathetic magic, referencing the ferryman (presumably Charon on the River Styx, in Greek mythology) but seemingly concerned more with telling the listener that everything changes.

Away from the mainstream of metal exemplified by Iron Maiden, there is a strong confluence of modern paganism in extreme metal music (Kahn-Harris 2006). Paganism is one of the ideologies associated with black metal, where it often called heathenism and presented as a natural extension of the elitism and extremity of black metal's so-called second wave (Spracklen 2013, 2014), though it has roots in 1980s black-metal bands such as Bathory. Paganism is a lyrical and musical theme in modern folk metal, which takes elements of folk music and transplants them into extreme metal to construct songs about Vikings, Saxons, and

other heroic warriors (Spracklen 2015). Paganism – its northern forms associated with the Norse Gods – is explicitly evoked and celebrated by black-metal bands from northern Europe, such as Enslaved, who have retained their interest in Norse paganism even as they have expanded their musical template to include progressive rock and post-rock. Some black-metal musicians have even become 'serious' folk musicians playing with northern heathen themes and music: Warduna, for example, founded by a musician from the black-metal band Gorgoroth, now play their dark Nordic/Viking folk in sedate concert halls, and have their albums reviewed in folk and world music magazines, as well as in the metal music press. I have found no direct link between Enslaved, Wardruna and the Wicker Man, but the musicians in the Norwegian black-metal scene were growing up watching the same horror movies late at night as millions of other teenagers at school in the 1980s - the films that influenced others in the extreme metal tape-trading scene to write songs about gore and zombies. It is conceivable the musicians know of the film.

But paganism in metal is not just being an authentic pagan, or performing sacred pagan rituals as a way of re-enchanting the profane. Metal has always had a strong ideological distaste or hatred of Christianity – despite the presence of many Christian musicians, fans and bands (Moberg 2015). For many in metal, especially black metal but also in the mainstream where Iron Maiden are situated, metal is against Christianity because Christianity is associated with families, school, nation-states and weakness – against which metal stands with its strong individualism and contrarianism (Kahn-Harris 2006). Paganism in metal culture is seen as a way of rejecting all these norms of society, retreating from modernity and the global to the pre-modern and the local. But paganism may also be seen in metal as a way of subverting and mocking the mainstream Christianity of the countries in which these metallers live. Like horror films and violent computer games, these pagan myths in metal can be and are condemned by Christian moralists (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine 2012; Moberg 2015). In turn, this makes

metallers more pagan as a way of transgressing Christian morality, and provoking the Christians. Paganism, for metallers, then, is a rejection of Christianity – and that rejection can be real, or it can be performative, or it can playfully ironic.

Conclusion

The shadow cast by the Wicker Man is long and enduring one. The film continues to shape the beliefs and practices of modern pagans, as well as the performances of English morris dancers. It has made folk music a space for the exploration of pagan rituals, and the sonic template of the film's soundtrack has shaped an entire alternative sub-genre of weird folk, neo-folk and pagan folk. *The Wicker Man* film's status as cult horror film, combined with the strange feeling of its music and its own invented traditions, have led to its adoption as a symbol of elitism, heathenism and anti-modernity; others have used the film and its music and its traditions as markers of more progressive politics. Many modern pagans have obviously adopted this extreme folk music, and the extreme music of the alternative and underground sub-cultures of goth and metal (and hence the myths of Frazer and Graves, and the creators of The Wicker Man) into their world-views – as we can see in the music of Faith and The Muse, or Sol Invictus, or Atlantean Kodex. But the myth of the Wicker Man is also used as a playful rejection of Christianity and its authority by those of a secular or humanist persuasion. When Iron Maiden invite us as metal fans to see the Wicker Man burning on the cliff-top, we see the failure of the Christian God, the failure of Christianity, and the triumph of an older tradition, an older truth. Instead of being shocked at Howie's death, we think it is cool, and revel as he dies, thinking he deserves to die because he is *not like us*.

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