



## That's *Professor Ozzy Osbourne* To You ...

By R. J. Stove – November 7, 2009

It's been a while since any of us Russell Kirk types could work up much interest in the heavy metal genre's subtler nuances. (Admittedly, a Google search for "Russell Kirk + heavy metal" does reveal 191 web pages.) As Australian journalist Keith Dunstan once observed, "Something very strange happens to the eardrums at the age of about 30." Moreover, we still need more research into how much, if at all, the *Takimag*-addicted demographic overlaps the metal-head demographic.

Nevertheless, any readers who might belong to both these groups – and who continue cherishing the old adolescent thrill of having been able to blast into eternity the speaker cones of their parents' stereo systems with repeated Sunday morning renditions of "Beer Drinkers and Hell Raisers" – may now utter a heartfelt *nunc dimittis*. Because Ashgate Publishing, of Aldershot, Hampshire, England, has catered for their nostalgic yearnings with a learned tome called [\*Heavy Metal Music in Britain\*](#).

How many would have thought, when AC/DC reinterpreted Robert Frost's road less traveled as a "highway to hell", and when Black Sabbath imperiously demanded medical attention unavailable on England's National Health Service ("Gotta see my rock'n'roll doctor"), that there was an academic, from Germany no less, taking notes? But it's true. Step forward, Dr. Gerd Bayer, from the Department of English at the University of Erlangen in Bavaria.

With an analytical relentlessness that might seem a tad excessive even if applied to [Johannes Ockeghem](#)'s counterpoint or [Anton Webern](#)'s dodecaphony –

never mind *Finnegans Wake* – Dr. Bayer and his contributors are at pains to assure us that:

*“heavy metal tried from the beginning to locate itself in a liminal space between pedestrian mass culture and a rather elitist adherence to complexity and musical craftsmanship, speaking from a subaltern position against the hegemonic discourse.”*

Who knew? Who would even have guessed, except perhaps the occasional *Onion* devotee suspecting a hoax?

Here the rest of us were, thinking (circa 1975) that heavy metal’s whole purpose lay in its being loud, repetitive, foot-stomping, fascist, racist, macho, free from Girl Germs, able to shut down frontal-lobe cognition faster than a bottle of Stoly, and generally as dumb as three boxes of rocks. Turns out that according to Dr. Bayer’s think-tank, heavy metal was actually ... loud, repetitive, foot-stomping, fascist, racist, macho, free from Girl Germs, able to shut down frontal-lobe cognition faster than a bottle of Stoly, generally as dumb as three boxes of rocks, *and at the same time* a valid subject for musicological discourse. As respectable as, say, Schoenberg.

Not that I’ve read the whole book yet, you understand – my hands keep trembling too much every time I try to get it off the local library’s shelf – but I am already in a position to announce that its essays include “The brutal truth: grindcore as the extreme realism of British heavy metal”; “From Achilles to Alexander: the classical world and the world of metal”; and “No class?: Class in Motorhead lyrics.” There is also extended treatment of demons, Gothic literature, “reification” (presumably the purveyor of that noun had overdosed on the celebrated Hungarian Marxist thrash-artiste Georg Lukacs) and “empowering masculinity.” All of which should keep Ph.D. candidates going for a few decades more, at least.

Oh yes, in case you wondered, that roaring noise in the background isn’t bass guitar feedback. It’s T. W. Adorno spinning in his grave.

Of Herr Doktor Bayer’s achievement in this regard, we mere dilettantes can only echo the words of Ozzy Osbourne: “He gonna blow me away.” What will his next scholarly feat be entitled? *The Cambridge Companion to Britney?* *Metanarratives of Miley Cyrus?* As they say in Bavaria, *warum nichts?*