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Aesthetic Heathenism: Pagan Revival in Extreme Metal Music

Abstract: Neopaganism, briefly defined as the attempt to reconstruct and reinterpret pre-Christian heritage, is not confined to purely religious movements. A romanticized view of ancestral religion particularly expressed through an extensive use of mythological elements adapted to a contemporary context now represents a fundamental part of certain scenes that utilize them to construct a primordialist view of the past. Pagan metal makes use of religion and mythology as a form of cultural capital to suggest cultural distinctiveness in order to create an alternative antimodern, conservative discourse to mainstream culture. Artists attempt to forge and empower a new identity shaped by language, music, style, behavior and values when they, for instance, dwell on old myths which they recontextualize according to their own agenda. Starting from an exploration of American and European pagan revivalist movements, this paper pinpoints the main characteristics of the relationship between Neopaganism and musical expression by evoking and commenting on textual and non-textual evidence in an attempt to offer a paradigm for understanding the intersections between spirituality and popular culture.

Keywords: metal music, identity, Paganism, mythology, heritage.