



CHAPTER 10

*Emocosms: Mind-Forg'd Realities  
in Emo(tional) Rock Music*

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*"Emo's Just Another Name for Romanticism"  
—The Danburrys*

On their first and last EP—*All the Good Ones Go for Jerks* (2003)—The Danburrys named one of their songs “Emo’s Just Another Name For Romanticism.” The equation of Romanticism with emo music put forward by this band is problematic and oversimplifies more complicated matters, yet it has some legitimacy. It is problematic because both terms resist concise definition. If Sayre and Löwy referred to Romanticism as a “*coincidentia oppositorum*” highlighting its “extraordinarily contradictory character,”<sup>1</sup> Andy Greenwald claimed in a similar vein that “Emo seems solely to mean different things to different people.”<sup>2</sup> In addition, neither British Romanticists nor contemporary emo bands labeled themselves as such. Andy Greenwald stated that “there is not now, nor has there ever been, a single major band that admits to being emo. Not one.”<sup>3</sup> This interesting refusal of bands to be labeled “emo” is a curious case, yet it is understandable due to the pejorative connotation of the word. For this reason, I will consider bands as being emo that have been labeled as such by critics or by fans. Despite the difficulties in defining Romanticism and

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emo music, certain characteristics are regularly brought up, which at least partially seem to hold true for both the literary and the musical "genres."

In their Marxist interpretation of European Romanticism, Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy define Romanticism as a *Weltanschauung* that has one central characteristic: "At the root of the Romantic worldview is a hostility towards present reality, a rejection of the present that is often quasi-total and heavily charged with emotion."<sup>4</sup> Their theoretical approach assumes that it is an emerging capitalist society with which many a Romantic artist is dissatisfied, albeit in very different ways.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, Romanticism can be regarded as a reaction to some sort of perceived crisis to which the individual reacts emotionally. These crises might range from personal disappointment with current political developments, as was the case with William Wordsworth, or with drug addiction, from which Samuel Taylor Coleridge notoriously suffered, up to a somewhat problematic Romantic ideal of masculinity struggling to free itself from accusations of emasculation, as Ina Schabert pointed out.<sup>6</sup>

These manifold problems found expression in the respective artists' output and mirror their dissatisfaction with current reality. The same seems to hold true for emo music. Despite all possible difficulties in defining this musical genre, one characteristic is usually agreed upon: "emos are typically constructed as reveling in their emotions."<sup>7</sup> For the most part, these emotions are negative rather than positive, even though exceptions do, of course, occur. Emo bands take names such as My Chemical Romance, All Time Low, or The Used, and their songs are titled "Our Lady of Sorrows," "Kids in the Dark," or "Bulimic." Many an emo frontman, rarely frontwoman—Paramore and Evanescence being two of the few well-known, commercially successful examples of emo bands with female singers—yells or screams his lyrics into the microphone, creating an atmosphere of despair, sadness, or anger that is supported by the distinct musicality of the emo genre that is described as follows: "Emo music has a similar sound [to Punk] but makes use of minor chords and major ninths, which tend to create a somber, pensive mood rather than an adrenaline rush."<sup>8</sup> What all of these bands have in common are emotion-laden lyrics, usually reflecting some sort of perceived crisis.

In this respect, emo resembles British Romanticism very much indeed but with one major difference, namely that the former is an initially apolitical movement.<sup>9</sup> The majority of emo lyrics are less concerned with politics than with the self, which might be traced back to the psychological functioning of the genre. Aaron P. Anastasi argues that emo music helps

mostly adolescent men deal with strong negative feelings by articulating these feelings and therefore providing an outlet for them. Emo also provides a sense of belonging—to the emo community in this case—and it does so by resorting to the one acceptable societally approved emotion for young men: anger.<sup>10</sup> Despite rendering this form of lamentation as a possibly religious endeavor, Anastasi highlights the importance of emo as one step in coming to terms with problems, which is the articulation of something being wrong.

The fundamental importance of the self is another point of intersection between Romanticism and emo music. Disregarding the academic preference for caution in defining Romanticism, the online *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes this *Weltanschauung* as emphasizing, among others, "the individual, the subjective ... the personal."<sup>11</sup> This development in literary history finds expression in many ways, but most prominently in the omnipresent "I" of Romantic poetry, as in John Keats's "O Solitude! If I Must With Thee Dwell" (1817), to name only one example. Morse Peckham observed a link in the Romantic poet's self-centeredness and their dissatisfaction with the *status quo*. He assumed that this "intense preoccupation with the self" was the natural outcome of being at odds with given reality and a society apparently corrupted in so many ways.<sup>12</sup> The same "preoccupation" is to be found in emo music. It becomes evident in some of the bands' names: AFI (A Fire Inside), for example; it is hinted at in album titles like *Diary* (1994) by Sunny Day Real Estate, or in the lyrics of songs like "Miss You Love" by Silverchair, in which frontman Daniel John declares: "I love the way you love but I hate the way I'm supposed to love you back."<sup>13</sup>

Peckham's defense of the Romantic poet's preoccupation with the self as not being "by any means a simple narcissism"<sup>14</sup> is directed against frequent criticism that similarly seems to be applied to emo in general. Emo is regularly equated with whining, cheesy lyrics and with an immature self-centeredness. Emo fans dress in a distinct, often androgynous way, wear their hearts on their sleeves, displayed with a certain theatricality, and post threads like, "What songs made you wanna cry?"<sup>15</sup> on websites such as emopuddle.com. Despite offering the genre's possibility for progressive and subversive gender re-constructions, Emily Ryalls criticized emo music and culture for eventually re-establishing heteronormative gender norms.<sup>16</sup> In the androgynous and emotionally expressive lifestyle of emo boys particularly, she observed a "supposed crisis of masculinity, one that relies on relatively minor problems (with girls, for example)."<sup>17</sup> Despite

Ryalls making an important point, it should be highlighted that emo does not only deal with a “crisis of masculinity” but rather with all sorts of personal crises and that those can be of central importance to the individual’s psychic reality.

This dissatisfaction/disillusionment might not have the historical importance of a French Revolution, but for the respective individual they might be an all-encompassing center of attention. This is at least what many emo songs seem to imply, and they do so in sometimes convincing, lyrical ways. They point towards a great discrepancy between reality and an imagined ideal world, a *Weltschmerz* that literally creates a cosmos of pain in lyrical form, and this feeling necessitates an initial introspection and confrontation with the self in order to eventually overcome these negative feelings. Yet some emo lyrics convey the impression of the author being caught up in a state of melancholia described as follows by Sean Homer: “In melancholia the act of mourning is narcissistically turned back upon the self and the subject identifies his/her own ego with the lost object.”<sup>18</sup>

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Oscar Wilde

This famous quotation from Oscar Wilde’s preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) points toward two central concepts of Romantic criticism: the pathetic fallacy, as described by John Ruskin, and poetry as a heterocosm, named by Alexander Baumgarten and elaborated on by M. H. Abrams. The former term describes a special kind of personification that attributes human emotions to inanimate objects. John Ruskin observed this falseness in the perception of artists who found themselves in an intensely emotional state or, at least, in such a state that this seemed excusable to him. In *Modern Painters III* (1856), he stated that “All violent feelings have the same effect. They produce in us a falseness in all our impressions of external things, which I would generally characterize as the ‘pathetic fallacy’.”<sup>19</sup> Ruskin is imprecise in his definition of the pathetic fallacy, but all the examples he gives do include some sort of personification which therefore has to be regarded as an essential characteristic of it. In his prescriptively moralizing art theory, such a putative mistake, sullyng objectivity, may occur if the emotions of the artist are true, by which he most likely means “authentic.”

Artists project their feelings onto the outside world, creating untrue yet pleasurable lines of poetry. They incorporate the described scenery, and their imagination produces an output that has mingled with their very

personal state of mind. What is crucial to Ruskin’s definition of the pathetic fallacy is that it ascribes “characters of a living creature” to inanimate objects.<sup>20</sup> Ruskin makes his definition of the pathetic fallacy crystal clear in the following example: “Homer *had* some feeling about the sea; a faith in the animation of it much stronger than Keats’s. But all this sense of something living in it he separates in his mind into a great abstract image of a Sea Power. He never says the waves rage, or the waves are idle. But he says there is somewhat in, and greater than, the waves, which rages, and is idle, and *that* he calls a god.”<sup>21</sup> Neither is the symbol “another version”<sup>22</sup> of the pathetic fallacy as Michael Sprinker argued; a symbol can be a subliminal relative, a non-personified version of the aforementioned phenomenon, but strictly speaking, the pathetic fallacy is the attribution of human emotions to inanimate objects by an artist who is in a state of emotional arousal. Ruskin’s theory epitomizes an artist’s emotional involvement in the imagined outside world, an emotional addition to reality.

In British Romanticism, however, this animation of nature and the outside world is more than just a personal admixture of feelings. Many Romantic poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed in “a divine presence in nature” called “*sensus numinis*.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, animating such objects in their poems is more than just an emotional investment in their artwork. It is an expression of their understanding of the world, and it relates to another central project of Romantic poetry: “An important aspect of Romanticism, then, is the *re-enchantment* of the world through imagination.”<sup>24</sup> Such an understanding of the world is not likely to be found in modern emo rock. Their worldview seems to be governed by a skepticism towards religious beliefs and the presence of a benevolent deity.<sup>25</sup> Emo might rather be labeled as a complete *dis-enchantment* of the world heightening the sense of being lost.

The personal admixture in the creation of poetry and lyrics leads us to the second concept mentioned above, which is the poem as a heterocosm: “In Romanticism emerges the modern idea of the artist ... as a unique and driven individual who creates new realities as well as reflecting existing ones.”<sup>26</sup> This idea is diametrically opposed to Ruskin’s understanding of the ideal artist as presenting nature the way it “objectively” is. Contemporary artists are instead praised for their creativity, for their innovations, for opening up new perspectives, and for inventing alternative realities.<sup>27</sup> Such new realities had been labeled heterocosms by Baumgarten in 1735.<sup>28</sup> M. H. Abrams described the term as follows: “The key event in this development was the replacement of the metaphor of the poem as

imitation, a 'mirror of nature,' by that of the poem as heterocosm, 'a second nature,' created by the poet in an act analogous to God's creation of the world."<sup>29</sup>

The artist is the creator of new worlds which are certainly inspired by whatever he or she may perceive as an objective reality, but it is exactly what the individual might add to this perceived reality that makes it all the more interesting and maybe even fascinating. In our case, many a Romantic poem is expressive of the poet's feelings, interests, and intentions. This emphasis is even more so the case with emo rock lyrics. If Abrams describes the heterocosm as a poem that is a "disguised self-revelation,"<sup>30</sup> the same does not hold true for emo lyrics and culture. It is quintessential to this subculture that self-revelation is made explicit. Apart from dark clothing, hair, and makeup, the habitual cutting of one's arm and "emorexia" are frequently appearing occurrences among emo kids identifying as such.<sup>31</sup> Emos openly display their suffering. The same is evident in emo lyrics, and they might be labeled as "undisguised self-revelations."<sup>32</sup> These songs either straightforwardly express some sort of perceived crisis or they create a mood that can hardly be interpreted in more than one way. The former is the case in songs like "Screaming Infidelities" by Dashboard Confessional. Examples of the latter kind of song lyrics leave more room for interpretation, but the mood they create is usually fairly straightforward. These kinds of lyrics will be examined in some more detail in the following.

#### "MISERIA CANTARE" (AFI)

As has been stated above, recalling a certain "hostility towards present reality," a "rejection of the present," is the defining characteristic of the Romantic *Weltanschauung* according to Sayre and Löwy. They grouped "Romantic anti-capitalism" into six major categories that they define according to "their relationship to capitalism," and labeled them as follows: (1) Restitutionist, (2) Conservative, (3) Fascist, (4) Resigned, (5) Liberal, and (6) Revolutionary and/or Utopian.<sup>33</sup> According to these two authors, "Restitutionist" Romanticism makes up the vast majority of European Romanticisms,<sup>34</sup> whereas, on the other hand, it seems legitimate to assume—according to what has been stated so far—that most of the emo genre could be classified as "Resigned" Romanticism, for it is predominantly apolitical and almost exclusively introspective in nature, which implies a certain degree of resignation, a melancholia, a loss that is narcissistically turned upon the self.

The rejection of present reality is expressed in manifold manner in Romantic poetry. It appears in escapist phantasies of perfectly harmonious nature, as in Percy Bysshe Shelley's "The Invitation" (1824). It is expressed in the Romantic poet's idealization of the "primitive" lifestyles exemplified by William Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers" (1798). Finally, this dissatisfaction with present reality is uttered straightforwardly, as is the case in William Blake's "London" (1794). In this Romantic heterocosm, Blake paints a desolate picture of living conditions in eighteenth-century London. People are weak and suffering, children are crying in fear, there is blood running down the palace walls, and the "marriage-hearse" (4.4)<sup>35</sup> is befouled by prostitutes. But, most importantly for the purpose of this chapter, it is the "mind-forg'd manacles" (2.4)<sup>36</sup> that the lyrical "I" hears in the people's cries. In this "mind-forg'd reality," objectivity can hardly be expected. Blake heightens the desolation of living in England's capital, yet he gives an accurate account of his "hostility towards present reality." He is the god-like creator of this heterocosm, and it mirrors his state of mind commingled with perceived reality. Despite this poem expressing some resignation, William Blake's oeuvre can certainly not be classified as belonging to that particular category of Romantic anti-capitalism. His *Songs of Innocence* (1789) at least partially prove that he did not consider all hope to be lost, and his visions clearly show his belief in a benevolent deity. Criticism and lamenting of perceived reality is also to be found in emo lyrics, yet it differs from Blake's criticism substantially.

Allmusic.com describes the band Finch as a "California-based emo quintet" that "combines Deftones' heaviness with pop-punk of the Jimmy Eat World variety."<sup>37</sup> Despite all other possible labels that could be applied, tracing some sort of emo vibe in their music is certainly justifiable. Their music incorporates post-hardcore elements such as screaming and yelling, and their lyrics are intensely emotional, either pensive or aggressive in nature, and, most importantly perhaps, the mood created by the less explicit lyrics frequently paints a picture of a suffering individual in a hostile world. "What It Is to Burn" (2002) creates a nebulous heterocosm of fire and pain. The exact subject of the song remains opaque. On lyricinterpretations.com many—mostly anonymous—users speculate on the meaning of this song. These interpretations range from dealing with suicide, finding comfort in an empathic partner, to being about "the goddess of fire."<sup>38</sup>

Irrespective of the actual topic of the song, the mood created by it is explicit. The lyrical I claims to feel sick and defiled, suffering from blisters

because the sun apparently keeps searing mercilessly.<sup>39</sup> The sun, which is usually understood to be a source of life, light, and warmth, is portrayed here in the worst possible way. Yet, burning is ambiguously referred to as something negative (“blistered”) but also positive, for “She’s the only one who knows what it is to burn,” and the lyrical I keeps “falling faster down to her.”<sup>40</sup> In the chorus, the lyrical I describes him/herself as a “bad star”<sup>41</sup> by making use of a simile. He or she is a falling star, a “broken” star that is incapable of remaining in the night sky, burning up in the atmosphere as it is falling. This bad star has a clearly negative connotation, conveying the idea of having fallen from grace, but yet there remains an unknown refuge from the outside world.<sup>42</sup>

These lyrics convey the idea of being attracted to something dangerous. They form an emotionally charged heterocosm, a “mind-forg’d reality” of pain for which the mood is set in line three at the very latest: “The sky is bleeding above me.”<sup>43</sup> This pathetic fallacy ascribing human emotions (pain through being wounded, referred to by the “bleeding”) to an inanimate object (the “sky”) is the outcome of a process in writing that is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s description of his work as a poet, often cited in academic work on Romanticism, as “emotion recollected in tranquility.”<sup>44</sup> The bleeding of the sky is a personification of a perceived reality of danger, threat, and pain that yet offers some pleasure/refuge. Accompanied by the recurring reference to “burning” and “fire,” the author of these lines gives the audience a glimpse into his psychic reality, but not reality as it “really” is. This heterocosm and the manifold interpretations found online that are enabled by the opacity of the lyrics are closely linked to Oscar Wilde’s understanding of art quoted above. The spectator he was referring to can be both the artist, as the spectator of reality, and the spectator, as the recipient of art. The lyrics are therefore revealing of the psychic reality of the author, and the various interpretations of the lyrics offer a glimpse into their reception and resonance with emo fans. The world outside (capitalist/consumerist / mainstream?) is described by Nate Barcalow as posing a seemingly harmful symbiosis with that nebulous, burning entity (a similarly self-destructive person feeling out of place?). It seems as if this song could arguably be classified as “Resigned” Romanticism, even if there remains a glimpse of hope, but then again, this glimpse of hope exists in an apparently harmful alliance that bears traces of Sayre’s and Löwy’s category six, but instead of being Utopian Romanticism, we ought to label this as almost “dystopian” Romanticism.

AFI is a band that is particularly hard to categorize, partially due to the immense range of musical genres they have been associated with. Lead singer Davey Havok certainly embodies the well-known emo look. Allmusic.com describes them as a “Long-running California band whose music has encompassed goth rock, hardcore punk, and skatepunk.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, certain emo elements are discernible and quite certainly the emotion-laden lyrics suggest a proximity to this genre. The song “Death of Seasons,” released on the 2003 album *Sing the Sorrow*—which is an “emo” album title—is an emotional heterocosm of literally cosmic dimensions of hatred and sadness. The lyrical I is painfully sick and filled with hatred, knowing that the comforting words uttered by others are merely empty phrases. The exact subject of the song remains, once again, opaque, but it is very expressive emotionally and paints the picture of an apocalyptic scenario, of floating either in a universe or emotional state of hatred, ennui, and despair.

The sense of an emotional apocalypse already arises from the title “Death of Seasons”; it is also hinted at in the description of ominous tribes juxtaposed with the extinction of the human race, reminiscent of the Gog and Magog, the infernal people associated with the end of the world, and it is referred to by the falling of the stars.<sup>46</sup> The feeling of ennui is expressed by the lyrical I characterizing the world as being banal, by the indifference towards mortality, and by the scorn for the world apparent from the last line of the song, in which he or she expresses the hope to cast a shadow onto the world while disintegrating.<sup>47</sup> While the verses are being screamed by the lead singer, the chorus is sung melodiously, conveying a sense of anger in the former and vulnerability, pathos, maybe even tenderness in the latter. In the chorus, an emo heterocosm, an “emocosm,” a “second nature” of sadness and despair is created by making use of a pathetic fallacy: “I watch the stars as they fall from the sky / I held a fallen star and it wept for me, dyin’ / I feel the fallen stars encircle me, now as they cry.”<sup>48</sup>

The whole universe participates in the author’s mourning; all the weeping stars gather around him. These inanimate objects are characterized by the emotion of sadness, creating a universe that has been completely absorbed by the author’s own emotional state. This sense of being lost in a universe of sadness while being in the process of decaying and disintegrating is heightened in the final seconds of the song, as the screaming voice of the frontman becomes incomprehensible as he keeps on screaming while accompanied by the tender sounds of strings. This “emocosm” has completely been taken over by the artist’s feelings, which is reflected in the

use of the pathetic fallacy and the cosmic dimension of the lyrics. Resignation edging on disgust and repugnance could hardly be expressed more clearly. There is not the slightest bit of hope for this world/society, for the people of our time, as the only way out seems to be complete extinction, in the shading of the world and its despicable ways. Again, a dystopian solution to the ills of the world—which ought to be read as a sign of resignation—is all that seems to be left in this “*emocasm*.”

La Dispute, the third and final band of interest here, is probably the hardest to classify. They have been labeled post-hardcore, screamo, and experimental. The last label deserves to be highlighted, for they almost completely resist the use of choruses, and in their vocals they regularly diverge from traditional pop/rock song structures. On Allmusic.com, Fred Thomas describes the lead singer’s lyrics and vocal style as leaning “toward the spoken word style of his written poetry and prose, finding a space between stream-of-consciousness fluidity and imagery of everyday life.”<sup>49</sup> If the lyrics of the first two songs resembled lyrical poetry, the next song is closer to narrative poetry. Yet while many of La Dispute’s songs tell stories that at first glance seem to be less self-centered than many an emo song, they are emotionally very expressive, and despite their seemingly objective descriptions they convey manifold but mostly negative emotions, challenging the Ruskinian understanding of objectivity.

The song “Hudsonville, MI 1956” from the album *Rooms of the House* (2014) tells the story of a woman visiting her parents while waiting for her husband to come home from work as a storm hits the town. In the lyrics, everyday family life is constantly interrupted by the approaching threat of the storm and the anxiety inflicted by it.<sup>50</sup> Throughout the song, the protagonist tries to reach her husband on the phone. When she finally does get through, her mother says: “I swear I saw lightning in your eyes / When that call got through to the other side.”<sup>51</sup> She is metaphorically thunderstruck, and the lead singer’s yelling implies that a tragedy may have occurred. The lyrics are based on true events, referring to a series of tornadoes that ravaged in Michigan in April 1956. Despite being a song with a clearly discernible subject, the approaching storm ought to be read as a symbol rather than an objective description of historical events.

The storm gives insight into its creator’s state of mind and view of the world, which is put forward in the second and last line of the lyrics, thereby framing the song: “There are moments of collapse.”<sup>52</sup> If Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” weaved “around the central image of the destroying and preserving wind, the full cycle of the myths of death and regeneration,

vegetational, human, and divine,”<sup>53</sup> La Dispute lead singer Jordan Dreyer’s “Hudsonville, MI 1956” focuses on the storm as a completely random threat to seemingly idyllic family life. It lingers outside the family home, howling and bending in the window glass. Focusing on such a natural phenomenon, as opposed to man-made misery, highlights the complete randomness of misery inflicted by natural catastrophes or other. The tornadoes that occurred in Michigan in 1956 were a natural disaster against which the people were completely defenseless. Situated in a seemingly idyllic family setting—someone’s making coffee, thanksgiving is referred to, affectionate kisses are being exchanged<sup>54</sup>—the force of the wind approaches “victims” who are totally ignorant of its danger. The storm embodies the momentariness of harmony, the fragility of happiness, the constant threat that seems to be an inevitable part of life.<sup>55</sup> Coincidence alone may or may not change everything, as is the case with a woman and her baby mentioned in the lyrics, who, by chance and chance alone, survives a car crash despite being thrown into a barbed wire fence.<sup>56</sup> The storm is a non-personified symbol resembling the Ruskinian pathetic fallacy insofar as it is fairly expressive of its creator’s state of mind and a natural phenomenon is presented as “moody.” The god-like artist having created this heterocosm seems to be engaged in contemplating random misery, vulnerability in a familiar and presumably safe setting. Family tragedies or other “moments of collapse” may occur at any time. Despite being objectively descriptive, “Hudsonville, MI 1956” conveys a feeling of vulnerability by making use of a “non-personified pathetic fallacy.” It resembles “Resigned” Romanticism insofar as it portrays life itself as threatening and happiness as fleeting irrespective of societal, political, or any other possible sources of misfortune. If life itself is the root of the problem, resignation can be the only logical consequence.

We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War’s a spiritual war ... our Great Depression is our lives.<sup>57</sup>

David Fincher’s *Fight Club* (1999) presents contemporary consumerist society as devoid of meaning and spiritual fulfillment. The movie is about people—almost exclusively men—trying to find purpose and meaning in a senseless and hostile world. The protagonist (perf. Edward Norton), an unnamed white collar employee suffering from insomnia, is a member of this system who “frees” himself from these “mind-forg’d manacles” through a process that culminates in insanity, terrorism, and attempted

suicide. The above quoted lines uttered by Tyler Durden (perf. Brad Pitt), the protagonist's anarchic alter ego, very much resemble the emotionally pessimistic than that of the Romantic poets, despite the absence of life-threatening wars or severe economic depressions. Space does not permit a comparison of the emo *Weltanschauung* and the Byronic hero, which might prove to be a revealing endeavor, but their affiliation seems to be more than obvious: "the Byronic hero is always a figure 'antithetically mixt,' a man of extraordinary but self-confounding energy whose personal wholeness has been shattered by some dark action in the past."<sup>68</sup> If William Blake was still able to identify societal ills in his poem "London" (e.g. the ruling system, symbolically hinted at in the blood running down the palace walls, etc.), and if he therefore was capable of imagining change for the better, life itself is the emo tragedy, at least according to the songs analyzed here. If the Romantics were at least partially preoccupied with the re-enchantment of the world, believing in benevolent deities, seeing beauty in the simplest things, cherishing "primitive" lifestyles, most emo lyrics epitomize a complete *dis*-enchantment of it. The sun, the stars, and the wind are malignant forces or they mirror the artist's deep-seated feelings of ennui and sadness. If the Romantic poets were increasingly interested in the self, subjectivity has become the all-encompassing center of attention in emo music, resembling Homer's definition of melancholia. Accordingly, what Ruskin regarded to be a flaw seems to have become a virtue in emo lyrics. Many emo lyrics recklessly "subdue" nature to their manifold perceived crises, which has led to an almost complete introspection.

This strategy seems to function as a way of coming to terms with problems; it is a step in the process of mourning, but it is only the first step. This first step of articulation needs to be followed by identifying and naming what is wrong, otherwise change for the better cannot possibly be achieved, which seems to be part of the "emo dilemma." These three "*emocosms*," "What it is to Burn," "Death of Seasons," and "Hudsonville, MI 1956," accordingly reflect a heightened self-centeredness that is less tangible because it involves an all-encompassing rejection of current reality, possibly arising from an increased complexity of the world. They express a perceived helplessness regarding the manifold societal and personal crises, resulting in resignation. Sometimes dystopian glimpses of putative "hope" are uttered in these songs, as opposed to a predominantly "Restitutionist" Romanticism, which, according to Sayre and Löwy, was preoccupied with the re-establishment and refinement of a former, better system, but these imagined perspectives seem little promising.

## NOTES

1. Robert Sayre and Michael Löwy, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* 32 (1984): 43.
2. Andy Greenwald, *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers, and Emo* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 2.
4. Sayre and Löwy, "Figures of Romantic Anti-Capitalism," 54.
5. *Ibid.*, 60ff.
6. See Ina Schabert, *Englische Literaturgeschichte: Eine neue Darstellung aus der Sicht der Geschlechterforschung* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1997), 381ff.
7. Emily Ryalls, "Emo Angst, Masochism, and Masculinity in Crisis," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2013): 87.
8. Aaron P. Anastasi, "Adolescent Boys' Use of Emo Music as Their Healing Lament," *Journal of Religion and Health* 44, no. 3 (2005): 313.
9. "Originally, emo was short for 'emocore', a strain of hardcore punk that was notable for its obsession with feelings (as opposed to politics, anger, and smashing stuff up)." Greenwald, *Nothing Feels Good*, 2.
10. See Anastasi, "Adolescent Boys' Use of Emo Music as Their Healing Lament," 303–19.
11. "Romanticism," last modified Oct. 31, 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism>. Accessed Jan. 5, 2017.
12. See Morse Peckham, *The Birth of Romanticism: 1790–1815* (Greenwood, FL: Penkevill, 1986), 67ff.
13. Silverchair. *Neon Ballroom*. Sony/Murmur MATTCD084, 1999, compact disc.
14. Peckham, *The Birth of Romanticism: 1790–1815*, 67.
15. Dark555, March 13, 2013 (12:22 a.m.), blog entry on [emopuddle.com/](http://emopuddle.com/), "What songs made you wanna cry?," <http://www.emopuddle.com/topic/10532-what-songs-made-you-wanna-cry/>. Accessed Jan. 5, 2017.
16. See Ryalls, "Emo Angst, Masochism, and Masculinity in Crisis," 83–97.
17. *Ibid.*, 85.
18. Sean Homer, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005), 78.
19. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters: Volume III* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1904), 205.
20. *Ibid.*, 205.
21. *Ibid.*, 223.
22. Michael Sprinker, "Ruskin on the Imagination," *Studies in Romanticism* 18, no. 1 (1979): 134.
23. Stefano Evangelista, "'Outward Nature and the Moods of Men': Romantic Mythology in Pater's Essays on Dionysus and Demeter," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake et al. (Greensboro: ELT Press 2002), 114.