

MY EDEN, MY HELL:  
Biblical allusions in the lyrics of Sonata Arctica

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**MY EDEN, MY HELL: Biblical allusions and attitudes in the lyrics of Sonata Arctica**

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Metallimusiikkia on suuresta suosiostaan huolimatta tutkittu melko vähän tieteellisesti. Koska populaarimusiikki, johon metalli Suomessa kuuluu, on olennainen arjen osa etenkin nuorilla, sen tutkiminen voi antaa uusia näkökulmia niin musiikin, kirjallisuuden kuin kulttuurinkin tutkimukseen. Sanoitusten tieteellinen tarkastelu on myös tarpeen vahvistamaan tai kumoamaan ennakkokäsityksiä, joita vahvoja mielipiteitä herättävä metallimusiikki aiheuttaa. Uskonnollisten asenteiden kartoittaminen sekulaarisessa metallimusiikissa mahdollistaa sen, että stereotyyppiset oletukset metallin ja kristillisyyden välisistä suhteista voidaan arvioida uudelleen tutkimustiedon valossa.

Tutkimuksessani metallimusiikin ja kristinuskon suhdetta tutkitaan intertekstuaalisesti, raamatullisten alluusioiden eli viittausten avulla. Tutkimani yhtyeen, Sonata Arctican, sanoituksissa ilmenee runsaasti alluusioita Raamattuun, ja näiden viittausten perusteella on voitu tehdä johtopäätöksiä yhtyeen asenteista tai asenteettomuudesta Raamattua ja kristillisyyttä kohtaan. Carmela Perrin ja Tuomo Lahdelman tutkimusmetodeja avuksi käyttäen allusiot on analyysiosiossa jaettu ryhmiin erilaisten ominaisuuksiensa perusteella. Käsiteltäviä asioita raamatullisissa alluusioissa ovat paitsi niiden välittämät asenteet, myös yleiset linjat sen suhteen, kuinka Sonata Arctica hyödyntää Raamattua ja kristillistä perinnettä sanoituksiensa teknisenä rakennuspuuna.

Asiasanat: heavy metal, Bible, allusions, song lyrics

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most of us have some sort of an idea of the relationship between metal music and Christianity. Some say all heavy metal is Satanic or Anti-Christian, while others might claim that the Bible and the Christian tradition have not had any influence on secular metal music. These views are, however, often only speculations based on prejudices or subjective readings of the lyrics from the reader's own point of view. Actual research on the topic has been very limited. The aim of this study is to increase our understanding of secular metal music's connections to religion by concentrating on the use of biblical allusions in the lyrics of one popular, Finnish metal band, Sonata Arctica.

Allusions are a powerful tool for creating connections between texts. The reader is challenged to recognise the references to an earlier piece of work and figure out how they are relevant in relation to the new text. The systematic study of these allusions can give us a broader view of the connections between the two texts, revealing recurring patterns and themes which could otherwise be lost on the reader. With a careful reading of the allusions together with their context in the lyrics, I will try to gain more understanding of the band's, and to some degree also the heavy metal genre's, connections to the Bible and attitudes towards Christianity.

The structure of the paper is the following. First I will link my study to previous research on the field by presenting some earlier studies, explaining the concepts I use and justifying my interest in studying this. In other words, the next chapter will provide the necessary background information for this study. I will then go on to present my research questions together with elaborating on the data and the study methods I am going to use. The allusions are finally analysed, especially in relation to the attitudes they reveal to Christianity.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The previously very limited study of popular music and lyrics is now a growing field of interest. On the one hand, popular music has been thought of as inferior to classical music and thus not worth examination (Aho & Kärjä 2007: 15). On the other hand, the multi-layered nature of popular music may have discouraged potential researchers. However, now that popular music and culture take up more and more of our everyday lives, the amount of research related to the phenomena has increased steadily. Many researchers compare lyrics to poetry, with the distinction that people nowadays tend to consume significantly more popular music than traditional literature, partly because we are surrounded by it almost wherever we go.

In this section of my thesis I will explain the main concepts I will use in my study and discuss previous research that relates to my topic. I will start by bringing in similar previous studies, move on to what studying lyrics is, define and elaborate on the concepts of intertextuality and allusion and finally briefly introduce some of the strong opinions about the connections between Christianity and heavy metal.

### 2.1 Previous research

Previous studies have found various ways in which biblical themes and elements are used in the lyrics of popular music. In her research on murder ballads and Nick Cave's music, Katri Tenhola found that the mentally unstable murderers in Cave's production often see themselves as God or characters of the Bible (Lahtinen & Lehtimäki 2007: 47). The most important and relevant results by Eeva Leinonen, who has studied Christianity in the lyrics of U2, have to do with Christian imagery. She found two recurring themes, which were apocalyptic imagery and mixing of sexual and spiritual imagery (Leinonen 2003: 94). Some of both Tenhola's and Leinonen's points are likely to be found also in Sonata Arctica's lyrics, because the aforementioned aspects are in general common in the lyrics of metal music.

The study closest to my own is by Laura Hangasmaa (1997). Her MA thesis for the Department of Literature at the University of Jyväskylä deals with biblical allusions in the rock lyrics of Juice Leskinen, a famous Finnish songwriter and musician. Hangasmaa classified the allusions into five different groups: allusions to Jesus, other characters of the Bible, God, creation and the language of the Bible. She discovered that some of the allusions seem to be mere language play, noting that using them can be due to the writers' and readers' mutual joy of creating and recognising allusions (Hangasmaa 1997: 84, 87). There were, however, allusions that conveyed a critical attitude in them. This criticism, for example irony that came from unconventional juxtaposition, was nevertheless seldom directed at Christianity as a belief but rather towards the church, religion and people's narrow interpretation of the Bible. Leskinen's style of alluding to the Bible seems to differ a great deal from Sonata Arctica's, at least on the outside, but I expect to come across some similar findings in their lyrics because the Finnish religious context is more or less the same.

Though metal music is an increasingly popular subject of study, I was not able to find any recent studies on heavy metal lyrics and Christianity. Research on metal music concentrates on themes such as masculinity, femininity and – a central theme in metal music – death. The studies I found on Christianity, however, were conducted on rock music. This indicates that the area of Christianity in the field of metal music is still fairly unexamined, even though heavy metal's relationship with religion is a much debated issue outside the academic context.

As the above studies reveal, my study is not the first of its kind but neither is the area thoroughly explored. Popular music with all its genres and relationships with different dimensions of society and culture is a vast and rapidly changing source of topics. It provides material for linguistics, musicology, economics, sociology and history, to mention just a few examples (Aho & Kärjä 2007: 7-8). I cannot say my research in itself fills a gap but rather that it is one block that takes us closer to understanding the phenomenon of popular music and the narrower genre of metal music.

## 2.2 The study of lyrics

Many current researchers emphasize that the study of music should include all the elements that make a piece of music a unity. This field has started making use of discourse analysis, which sees ‘text’ as broad concept that covers not only words on paper but also images, sounds and other features as long as they have a communicative purpose (Aho & Kärjä 2007: 126). Good examples of this kind of in-depth analysis can be found for instance in the article collection, *Reading Pop. Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, edited by Richard Middleton. I am, despite this, going to take only one aspect of music, namely lyrics, into consideration, mainly because my study is literary analysis but also to avoid expanding the subject too much.

Atte Oksanen points out that studying rock lyrics is multidimensional, being part of the study of music and culture as well as literature (Aho & Kärjä ed. 2007: 160). My perspective is that of literary analysis, but references to the two other dimensions cannot be avoided either. One has to know the musical and cultural context before treating lyrics as a text, in order to avoid misinterpretation (Aho&Kärjä ed. 2007: 160). An example of the influence of the cultural context on our reading of biblical allusions is given by Anna Makkonen in Hangasmaa's thesis (1997: 17). Makkonen points out that biblical references allude not only to the Bible, but also to its interpretation, research and other traditions connected to it. Bearing in mind the possible influence of the other two dimensions, it is possible to study lyrics as one aspect that is involved in creating the interpretation.

One of my motives for choosing this subject is similar to that of other researchers: to show that the study of rock lyrics is worthwhile and actually a useful business. It can be considered a unique way of studying aspects of popular youth culture in the field of literary analysis. In *Roll over Runeberg*, Lehtomäki and Lahtinen state that they aim to promote rock lyrics as one alternative subject in literary studies. While acknowledging the multidimensional nature of lyrics, they believe that a pure textual approach is required as well, to complement other approaches. They make the additional point that despite the common misconception, studying lyrics is not a form of being a devoted, practicing fan but actual academic research with a

purpose and value (Lahtinen&Lehtomäki 2007). The study of lyrics brings to literary studies a new perspective on popular culture and the texts of everyday life.

### 2.3 Intertextuality and allusions

I will now explain and elaborate on the term allusion, which is a key concept in this study, in relation to intertextuality in general. Allusions are a part of the broader concept of intertextuality, that is, the connections between texts and the dialogue between them (Talbot 1995: 59). Intertextuality is always present in texts since they are inevitably influenced by the culture they are created in and likewise affect their surroundings. Whereas intertextuality deals with texts as a whole, allusions concentrate on specific points where the influence of one text, the so called subtext, can be seen in another text. In Mary Talbot's words, "Allusion involves deliberate reference to an earlier text by reusing a fragment of it." (Talbot 1995: 49) The reference can be either implicit or explicit, the latter being a direct quotation sometimes even with quotation marks. Implicit allusions are typically conveyed through verbal similarity or the choice of names or titles (Montgomery et al. 2007: 156-158). I will in my research take into account both forms of allusions.

Using allusions has numerous purposes. On a surface level, they are an easy way of giving cultural value and depth to the text. Their more profound purpose is that the author can make use of the connotations that the text alluded to brings to the reader (Montgomery et al. 2007: 156-157). Allusions invite the reader to compare the two texts and find the similarities or differences the author wants to draw attention to. Alluding to previous literature can thus affect the interpretation of the text by giving a sense of, for instance, parallelism or irony. However, not all allusions are meant to contribute much to the meaning of the text; allusions can just as well be used in the purpose of entertainment. For example, language play that is created based on allusions works as a literary building block, providing the audience with the joy of recognising the allusion and understanding the word play (Hangasmaa 1997: 84, 87).



One of my reasons for studying allusions in particular is that they reveal something about the relationships between texts and the influence they have on each other. The choice of texts the writer has decided to allude to is mostly intentional. The allusions thus reveal something that is relevant to the reader, such as an attitude towards the contents of the source text. Biblical allusions for example can illustrate the band's views on religion, which is especially interesting in heavy metal music, as metal bands are often accused of Anti-Christianity or even Satanism by people unfamiliar with the genre. As Leikola (2009: 7) points out in his BA thesis, much of the previous research on metal music has concentrated on the extreme forms of the genre. Therefore I hope that my thesis will help to clear mainstream metal music's reputation, while showing that the lyrics do in fact have literary value in addition to popular value.

The Bible is perhaps the most popular text in literature, if the number of allusions to it is considered. One can suggest several explanations for this. The Bible is estimated to be the number one world-wide bestseller book of all times, with a rough approximation of six billion copies in over two thousand languages and dialects by the year 1992 (Ash 1996: 112-113). It has affected the Western culture tremendously for centuries. Though the average person might no longer consider the Bible as the basis of life, he or she is nevertheless likely to know the book to some extent at least. Northrop Frye, an expert on the Bible and literature, takes this as far as to state that "a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads". He notes that not understanding the biblical references can even lead to misunderstanding the meaning of the text (Frye 1982: xii).

## 2.4 Heavy metal and religion

The complicated issue of the connections between heavy metal music and Christianity is well exemplified by the heated discussion about the Finnish Metal mass, a Christian service with metal music. The first Metal mass was held at Tuska Open Air Metal Festival in 2006, and though the service was a success from the beginning, the idea of combining metal music and religion caused opposition from both sides. These views are presented, among numerous other

sites, on Maarit Kenttälä's article (Kenttälä 2009) on the conservative webpage *Kristityn Foorumi* and the discussion forum on *Imperiumi.net* (2007), a site concerned with, mainly secular, metal music. It is apparent that many people, both Christians and heavy metal fans, feel deeply offended by the combination. What is ironic is that both extremes on the sites claim that metal music is Satanic: an anonymous commenter says heavy metal "represents anti-Christian values" (Imperiumi.net 2007), and Kenttälä states that the "style and origin of heavy metal music" makes it "spiritually harmful". "In a world of compromise – some don't." is a quotation by Bolt Thrower, used in the discussion on *Imperiumi.net*. Surprisingly, it seems to summarise the opinions on both sides. Although the vast majority accepts the Metal mass, the two extremes want to keep Christianity and heavy metal separate.

The aforementioned extremist attitudes would suggest that the lyrics of Sonata Arctica have a negative attitude towards Christianity, and that the biblical allusions are only used for criticism or even mockery. At its best, the attitude could be neutral. What I expect to find, however, is that the tone of religious discussion in the lyrics is rather respectful and both positive and negative attitudes are expressed discreetly. As a mainstream metal band with a large audience, it has to be careful not to upset its listeners. Therefore, the attitudes are likely to be fairly mild, indirect and covert.

### 3. DATA, METHODS AND AIMS

#### 3.1 Research questions

The two main research questions I aim to be able to answer through my analysis are the following:

1. What kinds of biblical allusions are there in the lyrics of Sonata Arctica?
2. What do the allusions reveal about the band's attitude towards the Bible and Christianity?

In the first question what matters is the style of alluding, in other words the technique of alluding, the functions the allusions have in the lyrics and the themes of the allusions. Though this perspective seems superficial, it contributes to the second question. For example, in the case of technique, some types of allusions are easier to find than others, but even the subtler ones have functions and carry meaning. This is why it is important to be aware of the variety of allusions, taking all of them into consideration and not allowing the most obvious ones to dominate the subtler ones.

The second question is designed to bring to light some general ideas about how Sonata Arctica's lyrics relate to the Bible and Christianity in general, but one has to bear in mind that as this is qualitative research, interpretation plays an important role in answering this question. The results do, hopefully, still reveal something of a popular heavy metal band's views on and attitudes to Christianity. They can either confirm or confront the common conceptions of religious attitudes in metal music. The results are not to be extended to the whole genre, but they provide a basis for further research and comparison.

### 3.2 Data

The topic of my study is in its most general sense the study of lyrics and it is narrowed down to the lyrics of one band, intertextuality, allusions and finally biblical allusions in the lyrics together with the attitudes they reveal. The final data set is formed from the biblical allusions identified in the lyrics and their immediate surroundings in the songs. I will go through the material and mark the parts which I interpret to include biblical allusions. They are then classified according to their relevance for each research question. More about the categories is explained in the section on research methods. The next paragraphs elaborate on my choice of band and the data for this study.

Sonata Arctica is one of the leading heavy metal bands in Finland. It was formed in the northern town of Kemi in 1996, and their first full-length album, *Ecliptica*, was released in 1999. Apart from singles and live albums they have now released six albums, the last of them being *The Last Amazing Grays*, which was released in September 2009. Sonata Arctica has toured in North and South America, Europe and Asia, and is a big name especially in Japan. They have been awarded with four gold discs. (Sonata Arctica 2009)

In my study, I use Sonata Arctica as a representative of the metal genre mainly for three reasons. Firstly, the epic lyrics of Sonata Arctica adapt themselves well to literary analysis. Melodic metal lyrics in general tend to be rich in narrative and poetic features, and Sonata Arctica provides plenty of material with their six albums. Secondly, the band is known to large audiences as a mainstream band with no particular religious connections. This is especially important in my research in order for the results to represent secular metal music to some extent. Thirdly, Sonata Arctica has gained ground around the world, which makes my research useful to some degree also outside the Finnish context.

In order to obtain a broad selection of lyrics as study material, I decided to take the lyrics from all of the band's full-length albums, excluding live albums and collections. This left me with material consisting of six albums and roughly 70 songs. Though the number seems large,

one has to keep in mind that the number of allusions varies from one album to another, and not all the songs include biblical allusions. Furthermore, the allusions are scattered all through the lyrics, and therefore not analysing some albums or songs could result in missing points that are relevant in the band's production as a whole.

The lyrics are taken from Sonata Arctica's own website for several reasons. First of all, the risk in taking lyrics from websites dedicated for lyrics is that misheard lyrics are not uncommon on those sites. Some aptly misheard words might change the meaning and make us lose an allusion or create one by accident. On the band's own site the lyrics are accurate enough for them and therefore should be accurate enough for us too. The second reason is a practical one: the lyrics on the site are neatly arranged by albums and thus easily accessible for anyone who wishes to take a look at them, since there is simply too much material to be added as an appendix.

### 3.3 Methods

I have chosen two different analytic approaches to analysing the data. The first way of categorising the data is originally by Carmela Perri (Hangasmaa 1997). This approach concerns the technique of writing and thus answers one aspect of the first research question about the types of biblical allusions in the lyrics. The second approach is Tuomo Lahdelma's classification according to attitudes expressed in the allusions.

In her Master's Thesis, Hangasmaa (1997) presents Carmela Perri's idea about the four main groups of allusions according to their technique and form. The first group is direct citations and names, the second one is exact descriptions either in form or contents, the third is paraphrasing and the last one is conventions. (Hangasmaa 1997: 10) Perri's categories as such were, however, occasionally overlapping or neglecting some aspects I found especially interesting, so I have made some changes to the scheme to make it fit my data better. Here, I present the four categories with the amendments I have made, giving examples from the data.

The first group, direct citations and names, is rather unambiguous, especially since it includes only names and established phrases. “*Children of Abel, children of Cain*” and “*The Sacred Land*” could be mentioned as examples of the former and the latter. The second and third groups, which are exact descriptions and paraphrasing, proved somewhat overlapping. The problem was, however, solved by adding to the third group a frequent phenomenon of references with subtle changes that make a change in the original meaning. The difference between the two is that exact descriptions, such as “*I turn another cheek*”, follow the original text, whereas representatives of the third group, as it is now, take another perspective, for instance “*Forgive me, Father, my daily sin*”. The first part of the citation is a clear reference to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5: 39, the second is a mixture between “*Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts...*” from the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6: 11-12.

The last, largest and most ambiguous of the categories is conventions of the genre, which I have taken to include also biblical vocabulary and imagery. The difficulty with this group of allusions is defining what actually counts as an allusion. As Oksanen points out, some biblical allusions have become so established that they are used as features of speech instead of references to their origin. He mentions the example of the number 666, which can be seen as a reference to the Book of Revelation or a cliché typical for the black metal genre (Aho & Kärjä ed. 2007: 160). This is the case with many phrases and originally biblical vocabulary. I have, nevertheless, decided to include even those allusions, although the division is ambiguous. An example of this is the word *Hell*, which is used on the one hand as a swear word and on the other hand as a reference to God’s final punishment in the Bible.

As a basis for examining the attitudes in the lyrics, I will make use of Tuomo Lahdelma’s interpretation of Carmela Perri’s classification of allusions (Lahdelma 1983: 18-19). He divides allusions first into allusions with and without attitudes, and then the former into commenting and metaphorical allusions. The allusions that comment on the subtext require comparing the allusions and the subtext, and they are typically critical. According to Lahdelma, metaphorical allusions accept and appreciate the subtext and imitate its values. The

allusions without attitude are mainly language play and building blocks, and their use is discussed in the section about the functions of allusions. The problem with this classification is that the attitudes are not always black-and-white, in this case clearly either negatively or positively charged. Instead, they can be even intentionally ambiguous.

In addition to these two methods, I will use two categorisations of my own in order to find relevant, recurring features in the allusions in the lyrics. These are the functions of the allusions and biblical themes in the lyrics. Although there are no ready schemes available, these points can provide important information about the use of biblical allusions in the lyrics. Furthermore, the categorisations are drawn from the texts themselves, and thus work on the conditions of the lyrics. The categories are created based on the allusions found in these exact pieces of writing instead of putting the allusions into more general categories.

#### 4. ANALYSIS

The following analysis is discussing what I found relevant in the Biblical allusions and the way they are used in the lyrics. I will start with the practical side of alluding and explore how the allusions have been made technically. I will then discuss the different functions the allusions have, and finally present some themes that are characteristic of the lyrics. Throughout the analysis, I will explore the band's attitudes towards the Bible and Christianity, based on what has been found in the lyrics. The three sections deal with my first study question in that they reveal what kinds of biblical allusions are typical in the lyrics. The second question is answered by applying to the lyrics Lahdelma's (1983) scheme for analysing attitude in allusions.

#### 4.1 The practice of alluding

Carmela Perri's categories of the technical side of allusions, which are presented in detail in the methods, are citations and names, exact descriptions, paraphrasing and conventions (Lahdelma 1983). Sonata Arctica makes use of all these categories in its lyrics. The fourth group is clearly used the most but the first three groups are present as well. Generally, it seems that in the lyrics, there are few allusions with attitude in the first two groups, in which the allusions are quite direct and overt. The lack of attitude together with directness of the allusions may suggest that the band is careful not to make the attitudes too visible. The third category, on the other hand, includes several allusions with attitude. Unlike the first two groups, this one allows the author to manipulate the reference, for example using juxtaposition as in "*take your daily overdose*". In these allusions, even criticism can be presented rather indirectly, keeping the focus on the often innovative form of the allusion. Therefore, the critical attitude does not seem to be too closely related to the subtext. The fourth group, conventions, is the most heterogeneous of Perri's groups and perhaps therefore covers the largest part of the allusions in Sonata Arctica's lyrics. The attitudes in this category vary a great deal from allusions that are there purely for textual reasons to allusions with a clear attitude. In conclusion, there is more attitude shown in the allusions that allow manipulation than in the first two categories, in which the allusions follow the subtext. The more direct and unchanged the references are, the less attitude they generally show.

Although the allusions are in Perri's categories taken to examination separately, many of them make more sense in their context, in the web of allusions. Therefore, this categorisation does not necessarily give full justice to separate allusions, some of which are meant to be analysed in their context. Two more wholesome techniques of alluding that can be named are firstly, series of similar allusions and secondly, using a commonly known pattern of a certain Bible passage as the basis for the whole piece of lyrics. For instance the lyrics of the song *Destruction preventer* reveal by close observation a series of allusions to the Book of Revelation and its apocalyptic scenes. This song about fearing the future has environmental references as well, but the readers of the lyrics cannot miss the continuous alluding to the Biblical point of view. *Mary-Lou* is an example of the latter technique. It is not until the



chorus it becomes apparent that the song is a modernised version of the story with the Prodigal Son. The allusion is not clearly stated anywhere, but the feeling of familiarity causes the readers to think about where they have heard the story before. The theme itself is a large allusion.

## 4.2 Functions

In the next paragraphs I will present and analyse some of the functions I have found the allusions have in the lyrics. Listed from linguistic to more semantic functions, the functions are the following: symbols, setting scenes, confirming and contrasting rules, and guidelines for interpretation. However, the functions are here in an order according to how much attitude the allusions with different functions tend to carry. This is because not all functions have the same number of allusions with attitude, and the discussion about the attitudes can thus be placed straight after presenting the functions that show most attitudes. I will start with the allusions whose primary purpose is not to convey any attitudes and gradually move on to the ones that comment on the subtext the most. Towards the end of this section, the attitudes that are common in relation to different functions are explored.

*8<sup>th</sup> Commandment* is a good example for the first function of allusions as guidelines for interpretation. In *8<sup>th</sup> Commandment*, the title directs the reader's attention to lying, which is forbidden in this one of the Ten Commandments. This allusion not only defines the overall theme of the song, but also suggests that the other allusions in the song should be interpreted in biblical terms. The title guides the reader to interpret that the lines "*He will treat us all equally. Can you feel the fire burning*" refer to Christ and hell, because this interpretation is closely related to the title of the song. However, the allusion does not have to be in the title of the song in order to guide the reader's interpretation. Even the name *Judas* used twice in *Wolf & Raven* makes the reader link the narrator to Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Christ. The purpose of the allusion is to make the reader to compare the narrator to Judas in the situation described in the song. In both cases the purpose of the direct allusions is to reinforce the biblical perspective of the songs. This function could also be effectively used for bringing

a certain attitude to the lyrics, but Sonata Arctica, nevertheless, keeps the allusions with this function rather neutral, as is the case with all rather direct references to the Bible in the lyrics.

In many of Sonata Arctica's songs the events take place in the past and sometimes in another circumstance such as the war. In these lyrics biblical allusions are used for setting a scene. Christianity and the Bible have had a greater influence on people's lives then, which is in the lyrics shown as unquestioned expressions of belief. *The Ruins of My Life* tells a story of a war. The very beginning gives a reference to a Christian ideal: "*The Land was then young, I was fighting for it like everyone/ Ready to die for the cause, for my King, for my Lord*". Near the end the disappointed narrator states: "*I know my Lord betrayed me, my reason to live was taken away*". In the narrator's view of the world, God is an essential character, in good and in bad, and His presence and His effect on life are not questioned. This view is far from the common way of thinking in our society and this allusion therefore makes us think of the past. The author does not take a stance at the religious beliefs in the lyrics – the allusions are there to illustrate the characters' religious view of the world, which is left uncommented.

The language of the Bible provides the reader with huge numbers of symbols, metaphors and parables which are known where ever the Bible is read. Because of their familiarity, these symbols can be transferred to other contexts, perhaps with an expanded meaning but a hint of the subtext left. Sonata Arctica makes use of biblical symbols in this way, and symbols are, in fact, the most common function of allusions in the lyrics. In the song *My Land*, the opening line "*My own land has closed its gates on me*" is a reference to Genesis, in which Adam and Eve had to leave Paradise. The implied author uses the reference as a metaphor for his loneliness after a relationship. Another example of an extended, metaphorical allusion is the imperative command "*Kneel down and wash my feet*" in *Champagne Bath*. The interpretation of the allusion is not as concrete as in the Bible – it takes the symbolic sides of the meaning, in other words the idea of serving someone, power-relations and adds even a sexual connotation in the context it appears in. As can be seen from the two examples, the real issue is in the symbolic and metaphoric function viewed through the allusion, which brings out the similarities in the two texts. As the previous function, the allusions with this function are there

to construct the lyrics, taking the widely known symbols and metaphors while not commenting on the subtext in most cases.

Sonata Arctica alludes several times to rules or set ideas presented in the Bible. These are used as a basis for discussion, either confirming or contrasting the Christian views. In contrast to the category of setting the scene, in this one the implied author takes a stance towards the alluded passage. A confirming example is found in the song *8<sup>th</sup> Commandment* that uses one of the Ten Commandments to support the narrator's accusations: "*When you're done with him, you know where you have been, He will treat us all equally. Can you feel the fire burning*". In this example, the narrator refers to Christ, His final judgement and hell, using Bible as the moral basis to back up his claims. In a contrasting example in *Wrecking the Sphere* we are told not to pray but to take responsibility for our actions instead. The song thus opposes to the biblical view of effective prayer: "*Pray no, you should not pray now/ Must believe in yourself*". Sonata Arctica takes the convention of praying, to which people are often encouraged in religious contexts, and by strongly opposing to it, uses it as an effective rhetorical device in order to get the environmental message through. This is the function in which the attitudes, especially the most critical ones, come forth the strongest.

The number and quality of biblical allusions with attitude varies significantly from one function to another. Allusions that guide the interpretation or set the scene seldom carry any attitudes, whereas symbols and especially the fourth function, confirming or contrasting rules often do. In the first two functions, allusions are used mainly because they are convenient and the religious content plays a minor role. For example in setting the scene, it is more important to be familiar with the historical and cultural roles of the Bible and Christianity than with their content. Metaphorical allusions are used for practical reasons, but Sonata Arctica uses them to convey attitudes as well. The attitudes in the third and fourth categories are explored in the next paragraphs.

Some of the metaphorical allusions in the lyrics might also be interpreted as criticism, but these allusions are highly ambiguous. The basic message of the Bible is contradicted only in the allusions of three songs. This looks like either provocation or plainly metaphorical use, since the overall tone of religious discussion in the lyrics is respectful. It is often difficult to draw a line between straightforward criticism and metaphorical use. Some of the possibly critical allusions are in the song *Kingdom For A Heart*. “*Waiting my savior*” in the first stanza is continued in the second one: “*What the hell am I waiting here for, expecting you to come and give away your life*”. This expression of doubt includes several biblical allusions: dying for someone, the word “savior”, which usually refers to Jesus, and also the biblical word “hell” used as a swear word in contrast to the references to Christianity. It is not clear from the context whether or not the saviour should be a religious one, but the critical tone and the allusion to Jesus remain the same even if the actual use of the allusion is metaphorical. Another use of biblical vocabulary is in *The Dead Skin*, in which the critical expression “*no real salvation*” is likely to refer primarily to the relationship theme in the song, because the other biblical allusions in the song are clearly metaphorical as well. In general, biblical vocabulary and imagery seem to be rather common metaphors for different relationships, especially romantic ones, as in the previous example.

The fourth function, confirming and contrasting Christian ideas provides most critical attitudes towards Christianity. The biggest criticism shown by the biblical allusions in Sonata Arctica’s lyrics seems to be directed towards the church and believers. This is a similar result to Laura Hangasmaa’s finding about the biblical allusions in the lyrics of Juice Leskinen (Hangasmaa 1997: 84). With the juxtaposition of typical Christian beliefs with, for example, environmental issues, Sonata Arctica criticises Christians for hiding behind their religion and not doing enough in practice. The irony in *Abandoned, Pleased, Brainwashed, Exploited* speaks for itself: there is a seemingly peaceful allusion “*The Grave is open, let us pray without remorse*” followed soon by “*Your own blood will clean the blood, for now the glory days are gone*”. In the chorus Christians are encouraged to “*open our eyes and see, it’s not a dream...If only we could wake up soon and scream*”. The first line about the grave is a reference to Christ’s resurrection, and the purpose of this ironical allusion is probably to criticise people who ignore environmental issues because religion gives them a false sense of

security. However, even if individual Christians and perhaps also churches are accused of hypocrisy, Christianity as a religion is not criticised.

Even though there are some allusions that function as a basis for discussion with attitude, most allusions are there for other reasons. There are a few allusions that seem to be important primarily because of their religious content. In the majority of functions presented here, biblical allusions are mostly used as a means to convey a meaning that is separate from the subtext, for instance using the allusion as a metaphor. This seems to follow the common reason for using allusions because of the connotations they bring (Montgomery et al. 2007: 156-157).

### 4.3 Themes

In this section, I am going to present and discuss some of the recurring themes that are found in the Biblical allusions in the lyrics. There are several words or groups of words that are repeated throughout the material. These form central themes in the lyrics, and therefore they are relevant in finding out which Biblical elements are emphasised in the lyrics and how they relate to the band's religious attitudes. The allusions I found in the lyrics can be divided into two overall themes: the first section concentrates on the theme of judgement and the second on caretaking.

#### 4.3.1 Judgement

One of the least surprising elements to be found in the lyrics of the band is the aspect of sin, which comes forth both as the word and as an attitude between the lines. When morality is discussed in Sonata Arctica's lyrics, the narrator often alludes to the Bible as a moral guide. The basic message is that sin should not –and never will- be left unpunished: "*The liar must always die*". These allusions confirm the moral guidelines and the sense of justice in the Bible, though the strictness of the interpretation occasionally turns the perspective into slight irony. The message often has a hint of exaggerating in it, probably to make it sound more

convincing in the genre. For instance in 8<sup>th</sup> *Commandment*, the Commandment is the accepted basis of the lyrics, but there still needs to be a critical point in it: “*Remember to pray, and what the Bible says and you will live thru eternity You haven’t heard of this? / There is something you missed – it will cost you so heavily*”. The interpretation is so strict and simplified that it sounds like moralising, even though the biblical allusions in the song are otherwise only positive. In other songs, the implied author tells others off for not obeying the commandments, which seems to be self-irony, since many of the references to sin are about the narrator’s own life. He talks about “*diving in the seas of sin*” and “*living his life in sin*”, to mention some examples. The way sinning is described in the lyrics is quite straightforward and emphasises the aspect of moral judgement, as for instance in *Letter to Dana*: “*Your father disowned you because you have sinned*”. In this song the sins were eventually forgiven but forgiveness is otherwise rarely mentioned in the lyrics. Although forgiveness is not stressed as much as in the Bible, the views of sin in the lyrics seem to be well in accordance with the Christian views, and the attitude is, therefore, a positive one.

One recurring theme closely related to sin is hell. This word and the theme are used mainly in three different ways. The first, and perhaps the most common use of the word, is not very allusive by meaning but rather an example of a Biblical term turned into an element of secular language. This is found in idiomatic expressions such as “hurt like hell” or “what the hell”. The second use of the word is as a metaphor of messy situations, ranging from personal “*I cry in my own Hell*” to global “*On the eve of Hell on Earth*”. The third use of the theme describes hell as punishment for bad actions. In this use the exact word is often replaced with a euphemism of some kind, such as “*the fire burning*” or “*eternal night*”. It seems that the author becomes more careful in his choice of words the closer the meaning gets to the original one. This may be connected to the fact that the attitude to the original meaning confirms the Biblical view of hell. The first two uses of hell are not connected to any attitudes, and the word is therefore used more freely as well.

If hell is a common concept in the lyrics, so are its counterparts Eden and heaven. Both two can also occur in the same personal, symbolic meaning than hell, for instance in “*This could*

*be... heaven*” and in the sentence “*I have to find my Eden now, the gates I left behind*”. In the first example, heaven is a symbol for something extraordinarily good and Eden is a state in which things are well. Especially the image of the closed gates of Eden is repeated several times. Unlike hell, heaven does not appear in its biblical sense almost at all, but seems to be a fairly common metaphor for other meanings. “*This could be... heaven*” in *Tallulah* is an example of heaven as a metaphor in a relationship theme: it is the ideal state the narrator wants to go back to but which is out of reach. Using this allusion, the author draws the audience’s attention to the similarities of the metaphorical heaven and the original one, in other words the state of perfection and remoteness from reality. The allusions to Eden and heaven do not carry practically any attitudes but they are common as metaphors.

What is noticeable about the use of both heaven and hell is the use of possessive pronouns before them. In approximately half of these the words heaven, Eden and hell are in form such as “*My Hell*” or “*your own heavens*”. This would suggest that these words are only representatives for the joy or suffering of an individual in this life. If this is the case, the examples could be translated for example as “my hellish conditions” and “your own ideals”, but the author has chosen to use the biblical metaphors. Though the individualistic view is common, there are still some passages where the words appear without the possessive pronouns, and seem to have a general or religious meaning. The individualism in religion is also expressed in a quotation from the song *Broken*: “*Burning feathers, not an Angel, Heaven’s closed, Hell’s soldout/ So I walk on the Earth...*” In this example, the implied author clearly makes use of biblical imagery, but instead of accepting the Christian views, presents his own interpretation. This manifestation suggests on the one hand that the narrator feels the traditional Christian moral divisions are too strict and limiting, and on the other hand that he wants to concentrate on secular issues instead of spiritual ones.

As Leinonen (2003: 94) found from the lyrics of U2, also the lyrics of Sonata Arctica include some apocalyptic imagery. This is, more often than not, linked to environmental issues and fear of the future. The use of these allusions serves several purposes. First of all, describing the mysterious events linked to the end of the world in the Book of Revelation brings a

dramatic effect. For instance in *Destruction Preventer*, there are several references to apocalyptic events, such as “*Yesterday I saw a light, moving fast across the sky/ Now I see a glow, left and right,/ Stars are falling down tonight, I fear...*”. This is an exact description of the prophecies about the end of the world in, among others, Matthew 24:29 and Luke 17:24. Secondly, the Western audience is probably already familiar with this biblical imagery, which gives the author a possibility to use allusions instead of stating his meaning straight, for example by alluding to the apocalyptic phenomena in the Bible as in the previous example. The biblical allusions combined with the environmental observations in the songs result in multi-layered texts that sound neither like preaches nor environmental protests. The attitude to the Bible varies from one song to another. In some lyrics, such as the aforementioned *Destruction Preventer*, the biblical end of the world is an accepted idea, whereas in others, the church is held partially responsible for not acting enough in practice: “*Pray no, you should not pray now/ Must believe in yourself/ All the choices you make/ Will define you in the end*”.

#### 4.3.2 Caretaking

One of the most interesting and unexpected findings in the lyrics was that the implied author directs his words to “*mother*” or “*father*” in about five of the songs. For example in the song *The Power of One* the narrator shares his introspection with this unidentified parental figure, who seems to be one character, though addressed by both titles. The parent figure is often linked to righteousness, as in *The Power of One*, in which the implied author apologises to the parents for his deeds. Since the song includes a great deal of other biblical vocabulary and allusions, and the confession in the form of a monologue is left unanswered, it is possible to interpret that the one addressed is perhaps not a real person at all. The author is probably taking advantage of the Christian connotations of the word Father, used for God. This is reinforced by using the words “angel”, “forgive”, and “Eden” in the immediate presence of the words mother and father. For instance the song begins “*Father I have killed many angels, I think.*” and continues a line later with “*I hope you will someday forgive me*”. Although there are possibly intended Christian connotations to the word Father, one has to remember that this does not necessarily mean the word refers to God; it can just as well mean the narrator’s consciousness or simply an undefined power. The meaning is left intentionally ambiguous,



perhaps in order to keep the tone reasonably neutral. Addressing God in the song brings depth to the lyrics, but the reader can also ignore these careful allusions if they do not fit into his or her view of the world. Assuming that the parental figure is God, an interpretation supported by the vocabulary in the context, the attitude in these allusions is a clearly positive one.

A less ambiguous and less debatable Biblical allusion to do with parents is the theme of the Prodigal Son. This famous parable in the Gospel of Luke (15:11-32) is about a son who leaves his home and spends the heritage he gets from his father in advance. When the world treats him badly, he finally returns home to become a servant, but receives the warmest of welcomes as the lost son who is now found. The same idea is found in the song *Mary-Lou*, only with the difference that we have a mother instead of a father and the son is replaced by a daughter crying “*Despite all the papers been signed, mama take me back be so kind.*” She is given the same advice in the chorus: “*Only a child, reckless and wild, needs to come home again*”. *Mary-Lou* is the only song that includes the whole story as such but the same, loving and forgiving parent can be found in the lyrics of other songs as well.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Biblical allusions are in themselves one recurring theme in Sonata Arctica’s lyrics. However, the reason for using them seems to be mainly a practical one. The Bible is perhaps the best-known subtext available to guarantee that the audience understands the allusions, and alluding to it is an effective textual device. The mystique that comes with the religion brings a hint of drama to the epic atmosphere of the lyrics. The Bible is probably alluded to because it is convenient for the purpose, rather than because the band would want to make religious statements. However, on the whole the attitude is not negative. Sonata Arctica acknowledges the effect of the Bible has had on our culture and handles it with respect.

The overall tone of the biblical allusions and the whole religious discussion in Sonata Arctica's lyrics remains fairly neutral despite of a few minor critical points. There are surprisingly few allusions with attitude in the lyrics, and even those are ambiguous. The critique and acceptance are shown in very mild forms. There can be several different reasons for this. The band is perhaps careful in order to avoid offending in any way, or they do not necessarily have much to say about religious issues. It might also be an intentional decision not to discuss religion in the lyrics.

One of the gravest limitations of my study lies in the importance of interpretation. As with any literature, the understanding of lyrics relies heavily on the reader's interpretation of the text. In this case, it was not easy to decide on which allusions actually referred to religion and which ones were, say, metaphors. When my job as a researcher was to find biblical allusions, I might even have found some allusions that actually were not there on purpose. Although I tried to be careful about my results, I was well aware of the ambiguity of interpretation affecting the findings. Another difficulty was finding relevant previous research on a topic that has not as such been studied before. Both Christianity and heavy metal proved to be quite rare in the study of popular music.

There are numerous possibilities for further research in the field. In general, the study of metal music is a fairly new subject, and the musical, cultural and linguistic aspects provide the researcher with plenty of material choose from. My study of the Christian influence on the lyrics of one band covers only a small proportion of the situation of the whole genre in Finland, not to mention internationally. One example of a culturally interesting aspect would be to compare the influence of the Bible, Christianity or religion in general in the work of bands from different countries and backgrounds. The small number of previous studies combined with the vast and growing amount of material leave room for imagination; in the research on the lyrics of popular music, only the sky is the limit.

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Ecliptica (1999)

Silence (2001)

Winterheart's guild (2003)

Reckoning night (2004)

Unia (2007)

The Last Amazing Grays (2009)