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Comment: Metal Meets Drama

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Time and again we are faced with the notion that metal is a genre of music that only Satanists and degenerate people listen to—notwithstanding the fact that groups

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such as [Helloween are composed almost completely by Christians](#) and that others such as Sacred Warrior [describe themselves as Christian metal](#). Such mistakes are rendered even more notorious when they are faced with bands that actually help enlarge their listeners' culture.

Contrary to popular belief, metal music usually has many literary influences and can, thus, serve as a medium for its listeners to get better acquainted with cultural works of great importance. The group I will be discussing today, the Brazilian band Angra, has proven this over and over again. Not only are such concept albums as Temple of Shadows (Angra 2004) worthy of being analysed through literary critic Joseph Campbell's description of the hero's journey (Campbell 2008), from the hero's departure (Spread your Fire), his defiance of the Father (Angels and Demons), with the goddess (Waiting Silence), the boon he brings to the world after his journey (Sprouts of Time) to his death after achieving illumination (Late Redemption)—but also, some of their songs and concept albums reference and take on actual literary works, such as “Wuthering Heights” (Angels Cry, Angra 1993), Aurora Consurgens (Angra 2006, based on the medieval alchemy treatise sometimes attributed to Thomas Aquinas), or, as is the case with the album I'm about to review, even Shakespeare's plays.

Angra's 2010 album Aqua is a beautiful reworking of Shakespeare's The Tempest, not only as an adaptation, but as the kind of transmedia narrative Henry Jenkins has talked about [time](#) and [again](#), the sort that enriches the original work by creating additional content that fills in the gaps left by it and makes it more accessible to another kind of public, better acquainted with their music genre than with Elizabethan theatre. Some of its songs explore the

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character of Prospero from a more energetic point of view than that depicted in the play, as is common in the power metal genre, and so we have strong, upbeat songs like “Arising Thunder” and “Rage of the Waters”, where his anger for the injustice committed by his brother is brought forth in furious lyrics and fast guitar riffs, to culminate in “Hollow”, a dark melody that explores the old man’s rage and his desire for revenge.

Some other characters that had not been explored quite as much in the play have their own songs in Aqua, so that we may know their feelings and thoughts better. Such is the case of the lament of Ariel in “Spirit of the Air”, where she (he?) celebrates the wonders of the island in an exotic and beautiful tune as she serves her master in hopes of regaining her long-denied freedom; or the tragic “A Monster in Her Eyes”, where Caliban tells us of the slavery that Prospero has put him under, of the love he bears for Miranda, and of his hope of regaining the island that had been taken from his mother, the witch Sycorax, as well as his pride, with the underlying hope that, then, Miranda will love him for what he is. In the end, he’s seeking nothing but acceptance and love.

However, the highlights of the album have to be the single “[Lease of Life](#)” that broods over the love of Ferdinand and Miranda; its sweet lyrics explain the impressions the girl has left in the young man’s heart—which then leads to the final piece of the album, “Ashes”, where Prospero, moved by such a love, prefers to lay his revenge aside and instead embrace forgiveness, all of it in a moving melody that takes and reworks the monologue of the old man in the original play. As such, Aqua ends in what many, me included, consider the most beautiful words ever written by Shakespeare, as Prospero, just about to leave the island with newfound

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faith in love and life, asserts that “We are such stuff as dreams are made on...”

-Miguel Bernardo Olmedo Morell

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