“I Worship Death, Evil, and All Darkness”: Black Metal and Satanism
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1. Music for Satan?

On November 13, 2015, terrorists associated with ISIS attacked the Bataclan theatre in Paris and started killing those attending a concert there. Before the French police entered the theatre, 89 were dead. Playing at the Bataclan that day was a band called Eagles of Death Metal. One of their songs was called Kiss the Devil, and proclaimed “I will love the Devil” and “I will kiss the Devil on his tongue.” Both Muslim and Christian fundamentalists around the world commented that “Satanists” had been punished, and connected the band with Satanism and “Satanic” Heavy Metal music. In fact, this was a misunderstanding. The members of Eagles of Death Metal have no connection with Satanism, their references to the Devil notwithstanding. Neither are they part of Heavy Metal or its subgenre Death Metal. Their genre is rock rather than metal, and the name “Eagles of Death Metal” came from a conversation with a drunken man in a bar, which led the band to wonder how a cross between the well-known American rock band Eagles and Death Metal would look like.¹ The Paris tragedy, however, generated a new interest on the connection between rock music and Satanism.

Legends of talented musicians who had sold their souls to the Devil are as old as music itself, but it was in the 1960s that Satan started being consistently mentioned in rock music. Sympathy for the Devil, a 1968 song by the Rolling Stones where the Devil tells his story in the first person as a “man of wealth and taste” is just one among many examples. Music critic Peter Bebergal argued that occult and Satanic themes in fact revitalized rock music in the late 1960s and early 1970s, offering the Rolling Stones as an example.²

Within the so called Gothic milieu, a literary and musical scene privileging dark atmospheres and the theme of death, almost simultaneously, the most ancient musical references to Satan were introduced by Coven, an American psychedelic

La Rosa di Paracelso

rock band founded in Chicago in 1967, which explicitly sought the patronage of the Church of Satan, and Black Widow, a British group in the progressive rock current that debuted in Leicester in 1970 as the new version of a band active from 1966 under the name Pesky Gee. At the end of their first album, *Witchcraft Destroys Minds & Reaps Soul* (1969), Coven included thirteen minutes of a spoken word ritual they called a “Satanic Mass,” largely derived from popular novels. Coven may also have been the first band to routinely “throw horns,” i.e. salute its audience with the two-finger sign of the horns, although the sign already appeared in The Beatles’ movie *Yellow Submarine* (1968).

Black Widow came into contact with the flamboyant Alex Sanders (1926-1988), the controversial self-styled “King of the Witches” who started the Alexandrian tradition within the neo-witchcraft movement known as Wicca. Sanders even “loaned” his high priestess, and later wife, Maxine Morris, for two Black Widow ritualistic live shows. While Christian critics later mentioned the Sanders connection as evidence of Black Widow’s Satanism, in fact in Sanders’ magical system satanic elements were conspicuous only for their absence.

2. The First Wave of Black Metal

“Heavy Metal” (or simply “Metal”) originated as a label for a distinctive kind of music, characterized by heavy drums and bass, distorted guitars, and a macabre and transgressive vocal style including screams and growls. In fact, within the general category of Heavy Metal, several violent subgenres appeared such as Speed Metal, Thrash Metal, Doom Metal, and Death Metal, some of them mentioned together as Extreme Metal, and it is often difficult even for the specialist to classify each band in the appropriate category.

The group more often credited with creating, or at least defining, the earlier incarnation of Heavy Metal, Black Sabbath, included mentions of Satan in its songs since the foundation of the band in Birmingham around Ozzy Osbourne in 1968. Its vocalist Ronnie James Dio (Ronnie James Padavona, 1942-2010) popularized the gesture of “throwing horns,” which had already been adopted by Coven, in the international Heavy Metal culture. Dio, however, maintained that the gesture was not satanic and was an old Italian protection against the evil eye. Black Sabbath’s bassist Terence Michael Joseph “Geezer” Butler and lead

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3 Benjamin Hedge Olson, “I am the Black Wizards: Multiplicity, Mysticism and Identity in Black Metal Music and Culture” (M.A. Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2008), 11.
guitarist Anthony Frank “Tony” Jommi were raised Catholics, and maintained that their worldview always remained Christian. They mentioned Satan and evil in their songs as part of a grim and pessimistic vision of the world, but their lyrics ultimately affirmed God’s power over Satan.

In the mid-1970s, the so-called “British New Wave of Heavy Metal” (BNWHM) emerged, defined by bands such as Iron Maiden and Motörhead. The BNWHM in turn influenced the first American Heavy Metal groups and the birth of Extreme Metal. The latter became popular with two American bands that debuted in 1983, Metallica and Slayer. The subgenre, in this case, was Thrash Metal, but Death Metal, Speed Metal, and Doom Metal followed in the mid- and late 1980s. Slayer “emphasized a ‘Satanic’ image from the start,”10 as did three German Thrash Metal groups created in the same year, 1982: Kreator, Sodom, and Destruction. It has been argued, however, that Slayer’s “Satanism was almost exclusively for show and provocation. Singer Tom Araya is, in fact, a professed Catholic and his explanations of his musical forays into Satanism are confusing at best.”11 Indeed, not all Metal groups are against Christianity. Christian Metal has emerged as a subgenre involving hundreds of bands and thousands of fans in different countries.

Death Metal was the most radical form of Extreme Metal available before Black Metal was born. Several leading Death Metal bands had satanic lyrics, including American group Morbid Angel, which contributed to make Tampa, Florida, a world capital of the subgenre between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s.12 Another American Death Metal band, Deicide, had a singer, Glen Benton, whom Swedish scholar Per Faxneld described as “the most vocal and fanatical Satanist in music, before being surpassed by Nordic radicals.”13 Entombed, a prominent group within the Scandinavian branch of Death Metal, debuted in 1990 and stated that it had found inspiration for its lyrics in The Satanic Bible, the textbook written by the founder of modern Satanism, Anton Szandor LaVey (1930-1997).14

Benton, according to Faxneld, also performed acts of self-injury and was the first to frame “self-injury as an act of Satanic devotion.”15 Self-injury, both

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11 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards,” 17.
12 Kahn-Harris, Extreme Metal, 103-104.
onstage and off-stage, would become an important part of Black Metal, together with “corpsepaint,” a black-and-white makeup making the musicians appear corpse-like and demonic. Both practices were not invented by Black Metal, nor by Metal in general, but Black Metal was the first subgenre that converted them into ritualistic homages and sacrifices to Satan. In fact, some Black Metal musicians even argued that corpsepaint and similar practices were “ritualistic means of inviting the deity, or ‘inner demons,’ to inhabit the participant and manifest itself/themselves on stage.”

There was a clear difference, however, between Death Metal and Black Metal. “Insofar as death metal was interested in Satanism, Olson argued, it was an interest based on provocation and rebellion rather than spirituality. The gore-oriented death metal bands were discussing death and horror as a means of confronting and overcoming them. Satan, zombies and serial killers are all lumped into the same category in death metal.” With Black Metal, Satan moved to the center stage. At least for some groups, “black metal songs are meant to be like Calvinist sermons; deadly serious attempts to unite the true believers under the twin banners of Satan and misanthropy.”

Black Metal emerged in the 1980s as the most extreme subgenre of Metal. The relation of Black Metal with the other subgenres is not one of total discontinuity. However, although occasional mentions of Satan and occult interests may be found in all the subgenres of Heavy Metal, the focus on Satanism became a trademark feature of Black Metal. Generally credited with starting Black Metal is a British band, Venom. Formed in 1979 in Newcastle by members of previously existing bands, including Guillotine and Oberon, Venom introduced Satanism as a main Heavy Metal theme. Venom’s *Welcome to Hell* (1981) was the first Black Metal album.

There was something new with respect to groups like Black Sabbath. The latter merely described scenes of Satanism and witchcraft. Venom wanted to move from the third to the first person and proclaim to the world that the band’s musicians were actually Satanists. As one of them explained, “I’m not gonna sing about Satanism in the third party. I’m going to fucking speak about it as if I’m the demon, or I’m Satan.” Guitarist Conrad Lant (Cronos) explained that two other members of Venom, Tony Bray and Jeff Dunn, took their stage names Abaddon and Mantas “from [LaVey’s] *The Satanic Bible.*” The cover art of their albums was also often borrowed from publications of LaVey’s Church of Satan.

Not everybody took all this seriously. In his fieldwork among Black Metal fans, Kahn-Harris found “a clear consensus that the band were not ‘really’

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16 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards,” 48.
17 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards,” 25.
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Satanists and that their attitude to Satanism was tongue-in-check.”

Certainly, Venom’s satanic references were different from those of later Norwegian bands. They were to LaVey, who always included in his Satanism a note of parody. Later Norwegian Black Metal bands took their grim Satanism so seriously that they “claimed never to laugh.”

Venom started what is often called the first wave of Black Metal. In Kennet Granholm’s opinion, Satanism is normally more connected with the second wave, but this is only partially true. If anything, “the ‘first wave of Black Metal’ was far more explicitly Satanic when it comes to lyrical content.” On the other hand, one can ask whether the first wave bands really took Satanism seriously. There was, also, an ideological difference. The first wave was characterized by frequent references to LaVeyan Satanism, while the second wave was critical of LaVey. After Venom, the most important groups of the first wave were Mercyful Fate, Bathory, and Hellhammer. Mercyful Fate was formed in 1981 in Denmark around Kim Bendix Petersen, who had already performed with other bands under the name King Diamond. Besides using on stage a microphone stand made of human bones, Diamond was the first Black Metal musician who actually joined the Church of Satan.

When LaVey learned that one of his Danish followers was a well-known musician, he invited him to San Francisco. “I was so fortunate, Diamond later recalled, to be invited to the Church of Satan in San Francisco and spend the whole night there with Anton LaVey.” The musician “spent two hours in the ritual chamber with him at a time when it had not been open to anyone but him. It was reenergizing energy and I believe I was the only one who had been there in the last year and half at that time. It was very interesting and we became… I can’t say close friends, but friends who had a high respect for each other.” “If you’re referring to the philosophy that LaVey has in his book [The Satanic Bible], yes, I lived by that philosophy even before I read that book, if that makes me a Satanist, then yes I am.”

Bathory took its name from the infamous Hungarian countess Elizabeth Báthory (1560-1614), who killed hundreds of girls to bathe in their blood, persuaded this would make her younger. The band was started in Sweden in 1983 by Thomas Börje Forsberg (“Quorthon,” 1966-2004), and was very much influenced by Venom. Violent anti-Christian polemics and provocation were always a trademark feature of Bathory, but it was by listening to Venom that they “deepen[ed]” the Satanic aspect,” as Quorthon reported. Members of the band, however, “were not serious

20 Kahn-Harris, Extreme Metal, 150.
21 Ibid.
23 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 19-20.
24 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 30.
The Swiss group Hellhammer, founded by Tom Gabriel Fischer, aka Tom G. Warrior, was in existence with this name only between 1982 and 1984 but was one of the bands that defined Black Metal. Their second demo, dated 1983, was called *Satanic Rites*. A decisive influence on Hellhammer was the Swiss surrealist painter Hans Ruedi Giger (1940-2014). Images of Satan and Baphomet often appeared in his paintings, including in the celebrated *Satan I*, where the Devil is holding the crucified Jesus in one hand and a string with a Catholic host wafer in the other. Although Giger gave a Jungian interpretation of Satan, as the shadow we need to embrace in order to complete our spiritual evolution, in late 1983 he answered a letter from Fischer and granted to Hellhammer the right to use *Satan I* in their shows and covers. According to Fischer, Giger “could indeed see parallels between our music and his work” and became “a mentor” to the band.

Hellhammer was renamed Celtic Frost in 1984 and its music evolved outside of Black Metal proper, while satanic themes continued to be present. Fischer, however, insisted that he hated all organized forms of religion, “including Satanism.” “At one time, he reported, we had problems with a local grotto of Satanists that tried to infiltrate Hellhammer to convey their message. Since they also had National Socialist tendencies, Martin [Eric Stricker, aka Martin Eric Ain, Hellhammer’s bass player, 1967-2017] and I completely blocked them off.” Later, however, they became friends with the “grotto” (a term used only in the Church of Satan) and “Martin was briefly involved with a female member of that grotto, she was his first girlfriend.”

Ain later recalled his first meeting with this girl, Lilith Wehrli, “a true Satanic witch” who “had long, straight black hair and wore leather booths with high heels, skintight black spandex, a tightly strung black corset that accentuated her breasts, and occult jewelry.” She was eighteen, and sixteen-year old Ain lost his virginity with her. It came out, however, that Lilith’s main purpose was to persuade Hellhammer to include her brother Markus Wehrli, who went under the nickname Baphomet, in the band. When Fischer refused, “Baphomet prophesized that we would never get a painting from HR Giger. He said that Giger was one of the true adepts who would recognize that we weren’t willing to support the cause of Satanism.” This prophecy, and another by Baphomet that Hellhammer “would not attain any success,” did not come true. When Lilith tried to introduce Nazi references in the Hellhammer imagery, Fischer refused, and in the end Ain reluctantly ended the relationship.

Markus Wehrli, under the name Frater Sartorius, went on to establish an independent Satanist organization, the Schwarzen Orden von

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28 Fischer and Ain, *Only Death is Real*, 161.
Luzifer (Black Order of Lucifer). Fischer also claimed that in the world of Black Metal “all basically believed in Satan,” but there were several competing understandings of both Satan and Satanism. For Fischer, it was “infinite hatred for mankind [...]. The misanthropic angle is very legitimate to me.”

What was Satanism for the first wave of Black Metal? A certain ambiguity was a distinctive feature of the movement. The bands that defined the first wave were all exposed to LaVeyan “rationalist” Satanism, where Satan was more metaphor than reality. King Diamond even joined the Church of Satan and met LaVey personally. Despite these contacts, the Satan they were singing about had all the attributes of the traditional Christian figure and did not resemble the rationalist liberator portrayed by LaVey. Satanism, in Black Metal lyrics, was not LaVey’s human potential movement but a dark, terrifying, and nocturnal affair. Perhaps this was what the audiences expected. After all, as Venom’s Cronos put it, “we’re entertainers. This isn’t Anton LaVey’s Church of Satan, this is a rock band.”

The contradiction, however, would explode with the second wave.

3. The Second Wave

Gradually, Black Metal became a globalized phenomenon, with several bands beyond the Iron Curtain and groups as far as Nepal and Japan. According to the recollections of the co-founder of the Czech Black Metal band Master’s Hammer, František Štorm, the founder of another Czech group, Root, Jiří Valter (“Big Boss”), “became a local leader of The Church of Satan.” Štorm himself illustrated The Satanic Bible for his diploma work at the Art Academy in Prague. Canadian group Blasphemy hinted at its participation in Satanic rituals.

The Finnish band Beherit, although often considered part and parcel of the second wave of Black Metal, maintained in its first years a distinctly LaVeyan orientation. Or at least this was the position of the leader, Marko Laiho, also known as Nuclear Holocausto Vengeance or simply Holocausto. Bass player Jari Vaarala (“Demon Fornication”) told a Norwegian fanzine in 1991 that he was becoming a Satanist priest with New Zealand’s Order of the Left Hand Path, whose Satanism, was somewhat different from LaVey’s.

However, neither the Church of Satan nor the Order of the Left Hand Path were acceptable forms of Satanism for the group of Black Metal musicians, primarily Norwegian, who came to dominate the movement as it evolved from the first to the second wave. Varg Vikernes, a leading second waver, wrote that the “so-called Church of Satan is not in my view a church of Satan... It’s rather

29 Fischer and Ain, Only Death is Real, 57.
30 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 14.
31 Dayal Patterson, Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult (London: Cult Never Dies, 2013), 100-102.
32 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 70.
33 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 120.
a humanistic individualistic organization that worships happiness and life … I worship death, evil, and all darkness.” Another leader of the Norwegian second wave, Euronymous (Øystein Aarseth, 1968-1993), criticized Beherit by stating: “I believe in [a] horned devil, a personified Satan. In my opinion, all other forms of Satanism are bullshit.” Not only did the Norwegians believe in Satan as a personal being rather than a simple metaphor, as it was for LaVey. Unlike the great majority of modern Satanists, they worshipped Satan as the God of evil and darkness, not as a humanistic liberator of men and women.

The readers of LaVey’s *The Satanic Bible* aspired to happiness, and were told that the Satanist is a good citizen who tries not to violate any laws. But this, the second wave of Black Metal objected, was only “idiotic humanism.” Real Satanism does not create a climate of happiness but of despair and terror, of crime and suicide, is proud to violate the laws, and wants above all that whoever would meet a Satanist would be “really afraid.” With the second wave, opposing LaVey and promoting a much less respectable Satanism became a trademark feature of Black Metal. In fact, some musicians preferred to call their approach “Devil Worship” rather than “Satanism,” because the word “Satanism” had become more or less synonymous with the ideology of LaVey.

The musician who largely defined the second wave, Euronymous, explained that “the Church of Satan call themselves Satanists because they think it’s funny and provoking. They are really atheists and are against the [Christian] church because it has caused too much evil upon the time. They predicate that the Christians are evil and themself [sic] are good ones. We are against the Church of Satan because we are against goodness”.

The second wave of Black Metal was born in Norway, and spread to Sweden, Finland, and Poland as well as to other countries. Its center was a music shop in Oslo called Helvete (“Hell” in Norwegian), where in 1991 musicians from various Black Metal groups began to meet. The owner of the shop was Euronymous, the founder of Mayhem in 1984, and the main owner of the music company Deathlike Silent Productions. Mayhem came gradually to embrace its hard form of Devil Worship. Early members of the band, including Eirik Nordheim (“Messiah”) and Kjetil Manheim, later told the story of how at age 16-17 they had started by mail-ordering *The Satanic Bible* from the United States. Originally, “this was what Satanism was: do what you want.” Later, however, things changed.

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34 Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult*, 121-122.
37 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards.”
38 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards,” 54-55.
39 Pål Aasdal and Martin Ledang (dirs.), *Once Upon a Time in Norway* (video documentary, Oslo: Grenzelos Productions, 2007).
On April 8, 1991, Per Yngve Ohlin (1969-1991), better known as “Dead,” Swedish-born Mayhem’s vocalist, killed himself by cutting his wrists and shooting himself in the head. Dead had been largely instrumental in propagating in the Black Metal scene the practice of musicians cutting themselves on stage as a sacrifice to Satan. This practice has been studied by Faxneld as a real Satanic ritual, not to be reduced to simple entertainment or artistic performance, at least in certain Black Metal groups. Upon discovering his colleague dead, before calling the police, Euronymous took a series of gruesome pictures of him, one of which will later be used as a cover for a Mayhem bootleg (i.e. a non-official recording of a live performance). It was said that he also ate a part of the brain of Dead, although this was later denied by him and his friends, and it seems certain that he gathered fragments of Dead’s skull to make necklaces for Mayhem and other Black Metal groups of the Helvete shop entourage.

Taking macabre souvenirs from a corpse might have been against the law, but, starting in 1992, more serious crimes were committed. Members of Black Metal bands set fire to ancient wooden churches, and between 1992 and 1996 deprived Norway of around fifty ancient religious buildings, often of great artistic value. The musicians of the Helvete shop, where a mysterious Black Circle or Inner Circle met, more directly connected to Satanism, preached an anti-aesthetic of hate, in which Christianity was compared to an infection, a plague, a form of spiritual AIDS that must be eradicated. Satan was seen as the force capable of liberating from the Christian religion, Jesus Christ, God himself.

What distinguished the second wave of Black Metal, at least in Norway, was its stated need of “passing into action.” As opposed to LaVey, and also to the earlier generations of “satanic” musicians, they believed that talking, or singing, was not enough. It was a question of acting to spread death, destruction and terror, all in the name of Satan and against Christianity. Some musicians took their knives and started to stab imaginary or real enemies. On August 21, 1992, Norwegian drummer Bård G. Eithun, “Faust,” killed a gay man who had tried to seduce him in a park in Lillehammer. The following day he went to Oslo and told Euronymous and Vikernes that he planned to turn himself on to the police. Instead, the two Black Metal leaders took Faust with them to burn the historical Holmenkollen Chapel in Oslo. Soon, Black Metal musicians started killing each other as well.

At the time of Dead’s suicide, Mayhem was preparing an album, De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas, whose long gestation went from 1987 to 1994. They enlisted the co-operation of a young bassist, Kristian Larssøn “Varg” Vikernes, born in 1973, who also had his own project, Burzum, and a strong interest in Satanism. In 1993, Vikernes was among the musicians who talked a bit too much with the journalists about the attacks against the wooden churches. He ended up in jail, and Euronymous closed the Helvete shop as a precaution. This was the beginning

40 Faxneld, “Bleed for the Devil.”
41 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 167.
of a series of quarrels between Vikernes and Euronymous, which had different sources: competition for the role of prima donna on the Black Metal scene, issues of money and women, and a different use of political symbols. Euronymous was a self-styled communist, while Vikernes preferred Nazi references.

On August 10, 1993, Vikernes, accompanied by another musician, Snorre Westvold Ruch (“Blackthorn”), who will later be sentenced to eight years in prison as an accomplice, went to the apartment of Euronymous in Oslo and killed him with twenty-three stabs. Arrested, Vikernes was sentenced in 1994 to twenty-one years of incarceration, both for the murder and for setting fire to four churches. In the same year, over the objections of Euronymous’ relatives, the album *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas*, where the murderer and the victim sang and played together, was released. Vikernes remained until 2009 in jail, where his ideology evolved from Satanism to Nordic neo-paganism.

As for Euronymous, he always advocated “a genuine theistic approach, literal devil worship, as opposed to the approach of organizations such as the Church of Satan.” He told the *Orcustus* magazine that in his opinion this kind of Satanism defined the very concept of Black Metal: “If a band cultivates and worships Satan, it’s black metal.” If musicians “are not Satanists,” theirs “is NOT a black metal band.” For Euronymous, Black Metal was not defined by the sound: “black metal has nothing to do with the music itself (…). It’s the LYRICS, and they must be SATANIC.”

4. Black Metal after Euronymous

In 1992, the two leading protagonists of the second wave of Black Metal left the scene, Euronymous definitively and Vikernes for the following seventeen years, when he will be able to make his voice heard from jail only. This did deliver a hard blow to the movement and represented the end of the Black Circle, but the second wave of Black Metal did not stop. Mayhem replaced Euronymous and continued. Other groups who claimed the heritage of the Norwegian bands, continued to declare themselves “misanthropic” Satanists, and criticizing LaVey was still regarded as de rigueur.

Norwegian bands such as Thorn, Darkthrone, Gehenna, Trelldom, and Emperor kept Euronymous’ ideas alive. Drummer and lyricist Gylve Nagell (“Fenriz”) of Darkthrone maintained that “a belief in the Christian conception of Satan and hell was an integral part of the genre.” “That’s a good part of Black Metal, Fenriz stated. If we didn’t have *any* sort of belief in that, a lot of it would feel wasted. Certainly that belief in a *real* hell and a *real* devil would be one of the things that pushed back Black Metal to become what it became, and make it

42 Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult*, 151.
43 Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult*, 151-152.
worshipped.”44 Emperor’s Terje Vik Schei, “Tchort,” told about the musicians’ background that “we were into self-made rituals, sacrificing animals, going into trances, drinking blood. It evolved into violent assaults against the Christians,” and became a more conscious Satanism through contacts with the Helvete store and Euronymous.45 Emperor’s co-founder Tomas Thormodsæter Haugen (“Samoth”) ended up marrying Andrea Meyer, from the British band Cradle of Filth, who was herself a self-styled satanic priestess.


The greatest scandal created by Gorgoroth was the so-called “Black Mass of Krakow” of 2004. In Poland, activities offensive to the Catholic religion are considered illegal. Gorgoroth selected Krakow to record a DVD that showed the Norwegian musicians while they played on a stage full of Satanic symbols, blood, decapitated sheep, and crucified naked models. Gorgoroth, unlike other Black Metal bands, forbids reproduction of its lyrics, on the Web or elsewhere. They are, at any rate, full of references to Satan and celebrate the musicians who burned wooden churches in Norway. “The Satanic ethics of the band is the bottom layer, Gorgoroth proclaimed in 2006, and the most important thing to build the music upon.”46

As Vikernes and Euronymous would have said in their heydays, however, Gorgoroth musicians talked a lot, but they did not “take action.” Infernus was not exactly a model citizen and between 2006 and 2007, he spent four and a half months in prison for sexual abuse during a turbulent party in 2004 in Bergen. Other members of Gorgoroth ended up in jail as well. But there was never a plan to unleash anti-Christian terror by burning churches and stabbing enemies. Some churches have still been burned in the 21st century, not only in Scandinavia, and arsonists left writings celebrating Vikernes, but these were copycat crimes rather than manifestation of a new Black Metal organized anti-Christian campaign.

In the words of a critic, the second wave of Black Metal ended up like the first, producing what “Euronymous most of all dreaded: a rather acceptable, decent, commercial, standardized, mainstream and trendy music culture – although there still are musicians, bands and fans who scorn this development.”47

45 Aasdal and Ledang, *Once Upon a Time in Norway*.
46 Patterson, *Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult*, 7.
47 Mørk, “‘With My Art I Am the Fist in the Face of god [sic],’” 196.
On the other hand, there were also Black Metal groups that adopted an uncompromising anti-commercial attitude, to the point of selling their music only within an underground circuit. Around 2000, Taake and other groups created the “True Norwegian Black Metal” logo, identifying those who wanted to “keep it as it was in the old days.” The attitude of Taake’s frontman, Ørjan Stedjeberg (“Hoest”), towards Satanism was different from Euronymous’. He stated that he did not believe in the existence of supernatural beings, and “wouldn’t use the word ‘Satanic’, because too many people who call themselves Satanists have a totally different opinion of what it’s all about.” “But I have sold my soul to the devil,” he added.48

Other uncompromisingly Satanist Black Metal groups joined in France to form Les Légions Noires. They were a unique attempt to create a communal Satanist movement within the Black Metal milieu. In 1991, a group of young Black Metal musicians decided to “live in a forest, away from modern society.”49 They adopted a secret language known as “Gloatre,” and swore “pledges of loyalty to the Satanic Black Metal cause.”50 Their leader was one “Vólbd Dréagvor Úezréèvb,” whose real name was probably Stéphane Zarratin. Living conditions in the forest were too harsh for the young musicians, and the experiment quickly collapsed. By 1993, all members had left the forest. They continued to produce Satanist music for several years, distributing it in limited editions only to “friends,” and even issuing death threats against those who tried to bring their records to a larger audience.51

Another post-Euronymous development was the increasing interest of Black Metal group for Nazism. It developed particularly in Poland as NSBM (National Socialist Black Metal), although not all Polish Black Metal bands were Nazi and not all Nazi Black Metal bands were Polish. Polish Black Metal musicians of different bands created in 1993 a secret Satanist organization modeled after Norway’s Black Circle, known as The Temple of Infernal Fire. Rob Fudali (“Darken”) of the band Graveland described it as “a Satanist lodge opposing LaVey philosophy” and verging towards a more theistic Satanism. Later, he and others “changed the character of The Temple, placing emphasis on political issues.” Reportedly, the name was later changed into The Temple of the Fullmoon,52 but the organization collapsed because of controversies between Nazis and anti-Nazis. Some condemned Nazism for reasons that “had nothing to do with notions of a universal humanity or a rejection of hate.” It was the other way round. Nazism was dismissed because “its hatred is too specific and exclusive.” Black Metal Satanists claimed to hate human beings in general, not just non-Aryans and Jews.53 Nazism was regarded as a life-loving

48 Patterson, Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult, 42.
50 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 324.
51 See AA. VV., Les Légions Noires.
53 Benjamin Hedge Olson, “Voice of Our Blood: National Socialist Discourses in Black Metal,” in
ideology (at least loving the life of Aryans), incompatible with the Black Metal cult of evil, death, and chaos.

Others went in the opposite direction. Confronted with the problem that coexistence between Satanism and right wing politics was somewhat difficult, Polish bands such as Graveland abandoned Satanism in favor of a vitalistic pagan ideology. The most famous such group in Poland was Behemoth, which maintained however some references to La Vey’s Satanism. Behemoth’s evolution anticipated a 21st century development that took place also in Norway: a “third wave” of Black Metal abandoned Satanism and substituted it with Nordic forms of neo-Paganism.

Exceptions, however, existed, particularly in Sweden. In the second half of the 1990s, Sweden was perhaps the most important country where a “religious” and actively Satanist Black Metal was created. A 1995 album of Marduk, evolving from an already notorious 1991 demo, was called *Fuck Me Jesus*, and its cover showed a young girl masturbating with a crucifix. Founder Morgan Håkansson (“Evil”) insisted on “Satanic philosophy and belief” as a defining feature of Black Metal.55 Daniel Rostén (“Mortuus”), who joined Marduk in 2004, expressed a position similar to Euronymous’: “If it’s not about devil worship, or destructive Satanism, I couldn’t call it black metal (…). If it’s not Satanic, it’s not black metal.”56

As it happened in Poland, Swedish groups formed a secret organization modeled after Norway’s Black Circle, called the True Satanist Horde and originally founded by Tony Särkkä of Abruptum. A key player in the Horde was Dissection, a Death Metal band (with some Black Metal features) founded in 1989 around Jon Nödtveidt (1975-2006). In 1995, Nödtveidt and another member of Dissection, Johan Norman, joined The Misanthropic Luciferian Order (MLO), later renamed Temple of the Black Light, a “theistic” (i.e. believing in the real existence of Satan as a dark god) part of the Swedish small Satanist scene. Norman left the MLO in 1997, but Nödtveidt remained. For the Order, Satan was one of the eleven gods and was about to unleash chaos in our world. Nödtveidt described Dissection as the “sonic propaganda unit” of MLO. In 1995, he had left the True Satanist Horde to concentrate only on MLO’s peculiar brand of Satanism. Dissection’s brand of Metal music had a phenomenal success in the early 2000s, with some 200,000 copies of their albums sold internationally. This success spread the fame of MLO, although it always remained a small and secretive organization.

In 1997, Nödtveidt and “Vlad” killed a randomly selected gay man, the Algerian immigrant Josef Ben Meddour (1960-1997), in what became known

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57 Patterson, *Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult*, 344.
as the Keillers Park murder in Göteborg. The story was later told in the movie *Keillers Park* by Susanna Edwards, released in 2006. “Vlad,” or “Nemesis,” remains to this day a mysterious character. He is from an Iranian immigrant family and was aged 20 at the time of the murder. His real name was Amir (Shain) Khoshnood-Sharis and he might have been the founder of the MLO, and the same person who signed the Order’s main books as “Frater Nemidial” and later “N.A.-A.218.”

Nödtveidt and Vlad, in whose homes the police found altars and paraphernalia of the Misanthropic Luciferian Order, confessed they had intended to sacrifice Ben Meddour to Satan, also honoring Bård Eithun, who had committed a similar crime against a gay man in Norway. Nödtveidt received a ten-year sentence but was released in 2004 and Dissection started again its musical activities.

In 2006, however, Nödtveidt committed suicide. He was found with a book in front of him. The media reported that it was LaVey’s *The Satanic Bible* but, after the Church of Satan protested, they admitted it had nothing to do with LaVey and was in fact a text of the MLO, probably its sacred scripture published in 2002 and known as *Liber Azarate*. It was a ritual suicide. The musician had told the Norwegian fanzine *Slayer* that “the Satanist decides over his own life and death and prefers to go with a smile on his lips when he has reached his peak in life, when he has accomplished everything and aim[s] to transcend his earthly existence.”

As a result of Nödtveidt’s suicide, Dissection disbanded and the MLO was reduced to a handful of members. It changed its name into the Temple of the Black Light, in order to distance itself from the Black Metal past and the related murders and suicides. After 2006, while the Temple of the Black Light tried to stay away from Black Metal, other Swedish bands saw themselves as the heirs of Dissection. The most well-known group that evolved towards anti-cosmic Satanism was Watain. This band managed to enter the mainstream, winning musical awards and being featured in programs of the national Swedish television, while at the same time maintaining its emphasis on Satanism. In 2013, Watain’s frontman Erik Danielsson told a Phoenix online newspaper that “strong religious connections” were crucial for the band. Not only its members practiced “summoning rituals,” but they remained convinced that church burning and other crimes might actually have served as evocations of demonic beings.

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59 Patterson, Black Metal: Evolution of the Cult, 346.

5. Black Metal and Satanism: Some Final Remarks

Criticizing Granholm’s claims that Black Metal as a whole, not only the so-called third wave, “has always been more pagan than Satanic,” Faxneld insisted that “the explicit ideological core of the 1990s Black Metal was consistently adherence to Satanism, and it largely remains so today.” This is not the position of all Black Metal bands, but corresponds to some authoritative statements. Infernus of Gorgoroth claimed in 2006 that in Black Metal Satanism is “the most important thing, the fundament. The music is merely of secondary importance.” Gorgoroth’s Gaahl, who perhaps later changed his mind, was persuaded that “Black metal is Satanism…there is no other answer. My only goal is to procreate Satan. The main goal in the world, you’d have to be able to remove the word Satan from every man’s tongue and simply become it.” A veteran of the Black Metal scene in Finland, Kai Puolakanaho (“Ritual Butcherer”), concurred. “The whole meaning of black metal, he said, [is] based upon death and destruction as well as on Satanism”: it is “a Satanic death cult,” “a musical Black Mass.” Another Finnish well known Black Metal musician, Ville Pystynen (“Shatraug”), added that “Finnish black metal is not a business for anyone – it’s a cult of worship, practised by Satanic peers.”

From these statements, some scholars derive the radical conclusion that Black Metal goes well beyond music and should be rather interpreted as a satanic new religious movement. According to Benjamin Hedge Olson, “while black metal’s musical roots are undoubtedly to be found in the genealogy of heavy metal music, it has moved beyond the confines of metal culture into the realm of religious sects and millenarian cults.” Black Metal concerts, Olson argues, are much more than concerts, and cannot be compared to similar events organized by Death Metal bands. “Death metal concerts are designed to be, first and foremost, fun. Black metal concerts are religious rituals designed to achieve mystical transcendence of the mundane and physical worlds; having fun is often seen by participants as being negative.”

There are, of course, also those who disagree. Drummer Kjetil-Vidar Haraldstad (“Frost”), who was a member of a Satanist band par excellence, Gorgoroth, in 1994-1995, stated that “there’s this misconception that black metal has anything to do with Satanic philosophy, which it hasn’t, it really hasn’t. The music should have a dark character and atmosphere, no doubt, but I think darkness can be expressed in many different ways (…). Satanism is just one of a billion possible directions.” These seem, however, to be late afterthoughts of musicians who had long proclaimed themselves Satanists and later started claiming that what

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62 Patterson, Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult, 8.
63 Peter Beste (dir.), True Norwegian Black Metal (video documentary, New York: VBS TV, 2007).
64 Patterson, Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult, 11-12.
65 Patterson, Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult, 26.
66 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards,” 51.
67 Olson, “I am the Black Wizards,” 33.
they had called Satanism was, in fact, Neopaganism, which also allowed for the introduction of folk Nordic elements in their music.

Perhaps the question of whether Satanism is essential to Black Metal may receive different answers for different regional scenes and periods of time. Finland’s Mikko Aspa stated in an interview: “Most of my favorite black metal bands are not explicitly Satanic. At least not in modern standards. I have respect for the Satanic bands with insight, dedication etc. obviously, but I have no time for the hordes of weak and lame copycats and posers.” He added that, with respect to the question of Satanism, “one can’t assume that a band from UK in ’80 would be like band [sic] in Norway ’92. Or 1996 in Poland. Or 1997 in France. Or 2000 in Finland. And so on.”

The online *Encyclopaedia Metallum* includes, under the genre Black Metal, listings for more than 30,000 currently active and defunct bands from all over the world, and the number is constantly growing. Not all the Black Metal, and certain not all Heavy Metal, celebrated Satan. Nor were all musicians who referred to Satanism part of the various Metal currents. Only a small percentage of those who attended Black Metal concerts or bought the bands’ albums were really interested in Satanism. However, a significant number of Black Metal musicians developed a serious interest in Satanism. While some read LaVey and a few had some contacts with the Church of Satan, a larger number was more oriented toward an occult or theistic Satanism. In fact, some Black Metal musicians were among the few Satanists who really accepted the Christian theology depicting Satan as evil, and worshipped him as such.

In its later incarnations, Black Metal evolved from Satanism to different forms of Neopaganism. Satanic references, however, were never entirely dropped. As for the millions who listened to Black Metal music, few of them joined a Satanist organization. A higher percentage, however, became part of a larger “satanic culture” and “satanic milieu,” which should be regarded as a larger circle with respect to the small number of actual members of Satanist churches and orders.

Bibliography


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68 Patterson, *Black Metal: Prelude to the Cult*, 53.


“I Worship Death, Evil, and All Darkness”: Black Metal and Satanism
