



Dealing with the Diabolical

The genre 'Black Metal' has been a highly debated subject in the media, most notably in the 1990's. Artists aligned with the Norwegian Black Metal scene are often type casted as 'Satanist' and the Black Metal imagery that was used by the artists would provide evidence for this statement. However, this is not always the case, when a closer look is granted to the Norwegian Black Metal scene.

In the end of the 1980's, the Heavy Metal genre branched yet another subgenre, this time in Norway, which would be at the centre of attention the following decade in many Norwegian and international newspapers. This genre is called 'Black Metal', and is the most extreme form of Metal created thus far, at least in its effects on Western societies. Artists aligned with the Norwegian Black Metal scene are often type casted as 'Satanist' and looking at Black Metal imagery would provide evidence for this statement. This is however not always the case, when a closer look is granted to the Norwegian Black Metal scene. Instead, what is found is a distinct form of anti-Christianity, based on longings for a pre-Christian or Viking past, extreme individualism, masculinity and ideas of mythology, nationalism and even fascism. This revolt against modernity is fuelled by 'true' or 'authentic' Black Metal (as opposed to commercial (Black) Metal) and *vice versa*. In doing so, a new (extreme) spiritual outlook called Radical Heathenism has developed, based on a form of popular culture that has many ties to – but is distinctly different from – modern Satanism.

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Church of Satan

In social scientific and journalistic literature, a plurality of definitions of Satanism is given. Most commonly accepted is the form of Satanism that exists within the boundaries of the Church of Satan (CoS), founded by Anton LaVey (1930-1997) in 1966. A brief examination of this kind of Satanism exposes the fact that LaVeyan Satanism is a form

of 'secular' Satanism, that does not relate to other forms of religion or spirituality in contemporary society since it lacks the vital aspect of spiritual transcendence. This is made clear in *The Satanic Bible*, where LaVey explains the key element to modern Satanism as a denial of the existence of any supernatural phenomenon since these are all man-made: 'Just because he [man] has had to externalize it into some great spiritual device which he calls "God" [...] therefore, he is worshipping by proxy the man that invented God.' So LaVey suggests that this veiled link is removed from the theodicy, resulting in humans being gods themselves. Furthermore, this form of Satanism is opposed against authority, stating that there is but one authority, the self. Paradoxically, this is also the reason that people who align with this form of Satanism do not always join the associated CoS, since a form of authority or organizational force is not necessary to perform this highly individualistic worldview.

Satanism, qué?

Satanism is commonly *non-spiritual*, insofar that forms of supernatural beings, spiritual or embodied in nature, do not exist in Satanism. The forms of ritual that are available in rationalist Satanism serve exclusively as a form of mediation and reflection on the self and do not hold distinct spiritual characteristics (although this might seem different for the outsider). LaVey has also clearly stated this as being the fictitious part of the *Satanic Bible*. Also, the application of Satan as the main symbol of Satanism directly opposes more positive worldviews by thriving on that which is essentially frowned upon in contemporary society (mainly presented by the active appropriation of the Biblical seven sins). Satan is thus a symbol or a force which is used to guide the Satanist through life. This does not suggest however, that ra-

tionalist Satanism is free of any set of moral values. LaVey was very clear in stating that any form of physical or emotional abuse or anything that can be considered as criminal behaviour within state-borders should be condemned. In fact, rationalist Satanism can be seen as a peculiar form of Humanism, which embraces secular, capitalistic modernity and acts upon the pessimistic (Nietzschean) outlook posed by Max Weber and his secularization theory. Satanists even embrace modernity and capitalism as the ideal situation for them to thrive in. The key argument not yet dealt with though, is Satanism's direct opposition against Christianity. This opposition against Christianity is also the central element as to why artists in the Norwegian Black Metal scene applied Satanism as its core worldview.

Church Burnings

When the first Black Metal bands started in Norway in the beginning of the 1990's, all bands in the genre (primarily *Mayhem*, *Burzum*, *Emporor* and *Darkthrone*) applied images in their artwork of Satan or Satanism. Immediately, a direct link between this extreme branch of Heavy Metal and Satanism was established. It should be noted that this happened at the height of the so-called 'Satanism Scare', a moral panic which lasted roughly two decades. The sudden rise of Satanic Black Metal, as it came to be known, had a major part in strengthening and feeding this moral panic extensively. Media fed on cases of church burnings and a few extreme cases of manslaughter and suicide, which the so-called 'Black Circle' (the core of Norwegian Black Metal in the 1990's) was responsible for. However, this media-frenzy has obscured the actual worldviews that Norwegian Black Metal fans and artists uphold, which cannot accurately be described as Satanism. By this is meant that the main actors in the Norwegian Black Metal scene of the 1990's neither applied the LaVeyan form of modern Satanism or Occult beliefs that align with New Age spirituality. The use of satanic imagery and symbolism was a crucial aspect of the first bands of the Black Metal scene. This was however not a celebration of Satanism and its core aspects, but a distinct performance of anti-Christian sentiments. All in their mid-twenties, the core members (white, male & working-class) of the group displayed a disapproval of the Protestant Christian foundation on which the Norwegian state rests. Ideas of individualism instead of herd-mentality,

nature instead of modernity, and traditionalism instead of industrial progression, posed as fuel to display their discontent. Imagery and symbols of Satanism helped to strengthen the message. However, the appropriated spirituality turns out to be distinctly different from modern or LaVeyan Satanism.

Although the Black Metal scene lives on, it has lost its initial provocativeness

Mythology & Modernism

What is found instead can be called 'Radical Heathenism.' Radical Heathenism is the appreciation of the old-European mythologies often found in the heritage of the Northern Vikings. This is visible in a clear admiration of nature and the holistic idea that all 'power' can be found in nature and not in supernatural phenomena. The rough and cold Norwegian landscape served well as a basis for these ideas. The mythology attached to nature is all derived from ideas about a pre-Christian past which is now lost and should be regained. In this mythology, old European gods such as *Odin* or *Wodan* are celebrated for their might and lust for battle. These gods have been retrieved by artists of the second wave of Black Metal and applied in their music and/or artwork.

Attention should especially be paid to the term '*pre-Christian*', as it is believed by many in the Black Metal scene that the Christians destroyed a once beautiful world of natural tribes. This is also the reason for most of the arsonists to burn churches. Controversial Black Metal 'prophet' Varg Vikernes explained that his reason for torching churches was not his profound hatred against Christianity, but the fact that the Christian churches were all built on sacred land which belonged to those that appreciated nature. In other words, the burning of churches was part of a 'reversed crusade.' Nevertheless, Satan is still very much part of the symbolism applied in true Black Metal and thus also in the Radical Heathenism that it is informed by. The first Black Metal bands (*Venom*, *Bathory*, *Hellhammer*) all started with the application of an overly satanic image and this was continued by the bands of the second wave of Black Metal. This changed substantially when satanic images made way for photographs of nature,

paintings and images of Norse mythology on the album covers. Some bands like *Burzum* and *Ulver* abandoned all use of satanic symbolism, whilst most artists continued using the different symbols together. In most cases, the application of satanic imagery should mainly be observed as a form of provocation, a way to receive attention from the broader public.

Individualism & Masculinity

The most important figure in Satanism is the individual. This sacralisation of the self is most apparent in Satanism's most important day: one's birthday. All that is done by a Satanist should be in accordance with or for the gain of the individual, hence is why the Biblical seven deadly sins are accepted as common values to Satanists. The individualism of CoS is criticized in Black Metal culture for its herd mentality (for joining the overlapping satanic institution in the form of CoS) and its lack of 'honour', because following the seven sins supports treachery and backstabbing. Honour, pride and strength are all highly acclaimed characteristics, all taken from mythological creatures. These characteristics are all very masculine, which leads to the celebration of masculinity. This is chiefly shown in the evident disapproval of the 'feminization of man' in the form of the metrosexual man that contemporary Western society has brought forth. As a form of rebellion against the metrosexual man, Radical Heathens apply a method of anti-aesthetics, in which it is tried to look as repulsive and unfashionable as possible. Paradoxically, key values of modern Western society are intense individualism and a focus on freedom. In Radical Heathenism this is however condemned as herd-mentality, as this type of individual is fuelled by mass-consumerism.

What's next?

Although the Black Metal scene lives on, it has lost its initial provocativeness. Black Metal bands and fans are often ridiculed, especially on the internet. This is mainly due to the decay of church burnings and the demystification of high-profile Black Metal actors (some whom turned out to be gay, a deadly 'sin' in the overt masculine Black Metal scene). It still exists however, just as Satanism does. But in order to shock as much as it has once done, new – even more radical – ideas would have to suffice. And that might prove difficult for a new generation of provocateurs. ■