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Chapter 12

"With my Art I am the Fist in the Face of god": On Old-School Black Metal¹

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For many people in different parts of the world the concept of Black Metal evokes images of long-haired, corpse-painted young males dressed in spikes and black clothing, churches on fire and vandalized graveyards, disharmonious and noisy music and Satanic symbols like inverted crosses and pentagrams – at least if we look back to the time when the Black Metal movement figured most strongly in the mass media, i.e. from 1993 and a few years onwards. Now it has obtained a reputation as quite acceptable quality music made by serious and hard-working musicians that most of all – or solely – are into this for the sake of the music, and where the aggression, the dark image and the sinister symbols mainly are part of a larger artistic totality. Nonetheless, there are still some musicians and bands that in part pass on old-school Black Metal, whose development and peak can be put approximately to the period 1990–1994 and is connected with Norway in particular.² It is the indistinct "Satanism" of this kind of Black Metal that I propose to analyze in the following.

"Kampen Mot Gud og Kvitekrist er i Gang"³

Black Metal was a music culture that originated and got known as a Satanic movement. The word *Black* was meant to point out as Satanic the self-image of a fairly select circle of like-minded male individuals. But what does this mean? After having pored over empirical material related to old-school Black Metal,

¹ Quote taken from Darkthrone's "To Walk the Infernal Fields" on *Under a Funeral Moon* (1992).

² The Black Metal that arose in Norway around 1990 are often categorized as the second phase or wave of Black Metal, because it in different ways continues the legacy of certain metal bands from the eighties, e.g. Bathory, Celtic Frost, Venom, Sodom, Hellhammer, Kreator. I nevertheless speak of it as "old-school" because it was not until 1990 that Black Metal as a term denominating a relatively well-defined musical, lyrical and visual style came into being.

³ "The Fight against God and Christ has begun." From the album *The Shadowthrone* (1994) by Satyricon.

such as CDs and fanzines, it has become clear to me that not only are the concepts of Satan, Satanism and the Satanic of great importance within the scene; they also come across as ambiguous, flexible and vague.

The abundant and partly explicit references to the domain of Satanism neither point to any cultic, sacrificial form of theistic Satanism, to a limitation of one's area of interest to Satanism in a narrow sense (although such a cult or cultivation of interest cannot be ruled out completely on the individual level), nor to any coherent ideology, faith or philosophy of life with a concept of, or symbol of, Satan at its core. Both visually and lyrically Satanic imagery and concepts invariably coexist with elements from other contexts, such as Scandinavian folklore and ancient, heathen history, the medieval era, witch lore, forms of art such as fantasy literature and gothic fiction, horror, splatter and snuff movies, occultism, role-playing games, and of course, metal music. The so-called "Satanism" of Black Metal rather points to a general attraction towards occultism, dark and evil urges, forces and powers within the universe, as well as other hidden and repressed parts of man, culture and history. In 1993, Varg Vikernes, also known as "Graven" ("the Count") or "Count Grishnackh", stated that Black Metal's (as well as his own) "Satanic ideology" was about creating a dark and gloomy atmosphere both within and around oneself through the music (Grude 2007). The ideology furthermore aimed at the destruction of kindness and light. Vikernes, one of the most prominent contributors to the founding of the Norwegian Black Metal scene, was sentenced to 21 years in prison for willful murder, church arson, having illegal weapons in his possession and desecration of graves.

How are we to understand this apparent worship of "darkness" for the sake of "darkness"? Is it really nothing but a sign of (result of and/or source to) nihilism, confusion, destruction and illness? Is it possible to discern any deeper concerns behind this black, severe and uncompromising façade of contempt and hatred? The Norwegian philosopher Knut Kolnar's understanding of violence is very useful when approaching these questions. In his doctoral dissertation *Det ambisiøse selv* (*The Ambitious Self*, 2003), Kolnar introduces the concept of *creative violence* which, especially in relation to his analysis of the violence in the movie *Fight Club*, enables new and enlightening perspectives on Black Metal's worship of darkness. If we assume the point of view of the aggressor every act of violence is said to hold some kind of meaning. Its meaning resides in its "intentional" character (Kolnar 2003: 18). The formative, healing, structuring, centripetal and/or balancing functions that violence has for the individual, especially the male subject, who is situated in an alienating contemporary Western world, are revealed by the concept of *creative violence*. The aggressive attitude of the Black Metal scene is tightly interwoven with a range of existential issues, such as alienation, pain, thirst for vigor, force and self-fulfillment, while simultaneously launching critical perspectives on Western civilization. The construction and shaping of masculine identity is also one of the most distinctive features of this particular subculture and its worship of darkness. The creative violence that we are being

confronted with in Black Metal is the subgroup labeled *progressive violence*. This kind of violence is

... knit to the masculine self, as part of a project of authenticity. It points forward. It has a constructive purpose beyond the immediate rooting of the self. (...) It ... aims at stopping the manner in which consumer culture waters down and undermines the male. It seeks a platform, and displays a will to establish routes towards a more worthy and authentic sense of reality.⁴ (Ibid.: 20)

In other words, through the overturning potential and goal of progressive violence, it carries a "dimension of revolution and hope" (ibid.: 231).

A complete list of empirical material that my analysis rests upon is provided at the end of this chapter. It comprises CDs, fanzines and other interview-related material. Due to practical reasons, as well as the fact that these two were among the first within the scene, I have focused on the Norwegian Black Metal bands Darkthrone and Burzum. They also proved to be two of the most influential bands regarding Black Metal's stylistic as well as philosophical or ideological dimension.

Black Metal Satanism as Worship of "Darkness"

When the Sun has Died / When the Angels are Blind / When the Fog Lies Thick
/ Over the Palace of god // When the Fullmoon Lights the Earth / When the
Wolves Gather in the Open / When Blood rains from Heaven High / and from the
pearly Gates // When Jehovas Hordes are slaughtered / When Disciples Twelve
are Dead / When Beliefs of Easter lands / are Raped and Raped again // When
the Whore of Babylon Rides / When Pity turns to Hate / When All Sons of Satan
/ Sodomise the Lambs of christ // When the Gates have all been opened / When
the Funerals Never End / When Satans Power Paint our Hearts / and Satisfies our
Souls // When Witches Burn the Priests / When the Ancient Ones Return / When
the Demons Ride the Nuns / with their Horns of Dark Desire ("Unholy Black
Metal" (lyrics: 1992), *Under a Funeral Moon*)

The brutal and ruthless attack on all things precious and revered within the Jewish-Christian tradition that is conveyed by these lyrics of Darkthrone, is supported by the Black Metal scene in general. The hatred towards Christianity is fiercely stated through an abundance of anti-Christian symbols and metaphors, anti-Christian slogans and values, visions of violent effacement of Christians, Christianity and everything related to or reminiscent of this tradition, such as the above-mentioned "Beliefs of Easter lands". The well-known "Drep de kristne" ("Kill the Christians") t-shirt that was being sold by the historic shop *Helvete*

⁴ My translation.

(*Hell*), exemplifies this.⁵ So do the church arsons, vandalization of graveyards and use of inverted crosses in logos and sleeves as do records carrying titles with explicit Satanic references, such as Mayhem's, *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas*, Immortal's, *Diabolical Fullmoon Mysticism* and Gorgoroth's, *Under the Sign of Hell* and *Antichrist*, along with countless anti-Christian song titles and lyrics.

De(con)struction and (Re)creation

On a basic level, Black Metal's criticism of Christianity deals with the conflict between the individual and the system. Christianity is in different ways and for different reasons regarded as blocking a progressive process of individuation and creation of meaning. Its substantial, regulating and juridical hold in a number of (originally) Heathen/Pagan Western countries is seen as highly unnatural and illegitimate. The multifaceted and uncompromising aggression leveled at Christianity from within the Black Metal scene can be seen as creative in the sense that it is a response to what is being conceived as this tradition's oppressive, hypocritical and alienating character. "Daimonion" from Enslaved describes society as Christian and hypocritical and the governmental socialization of the Norwegian population as force-feeding (Mørk 2002: 61).

That Christianity for some is experienced as a strait jacket, is scathingly depicted in the title track *Hvis lyset tar oss* (*If the light catches us*, 1992) by Burzum, where "the light" and "the Sun" symbolically refers to "god's goodness" or to the Christian dualistic view of life in general:

A clearing in the forest / where the sun is shining / Obstructed by the trees we are caught / in this clearing of god // It burns it scorches / when the light is licking our flesh / up towards the clouds a smoke / a cloud of our shape // Trapped by the funeral / we are being tormented by the goodness of god / no flames no hatred / they were right came to hell.

The lyrical subjects are caught in a sunny glade in the wood. The surrounding trees shut the way out, and they are being scorched, tortured, to death. The Sun is thus put before us as a destructive force. As I see it, this song depicts how Christianity's cultural dominion may affect the lives of marginalized people. Just like "the Sun" is all-encompassing and merciless in this glade, Christianity by dint of its intolerance and greed for power oppresses and obliterates those who refuse to adjust or submit to it. In this clearing there is no room for diversity, for people of a different and unfamiliar "shape". The experience of painful, even extinguishing entrapment is dramatically underlined by the desperate, the claustrophobic,

⁵ *Helvete* was a shop established and run by the underground Metal guru "Euronymous" (Øystein Aarseth), specializing in Black and Death Metal music and artifacts.

disharmonious and monotonous, character of the song. As the torment gets worse and death draws near, there is an increase in the songs musical vehemence.⁶

The privileged position of the Christian religion is strongly criticized by Black Metal. Specifically Christian norms and values are continually being dispersed outside the strictly religious domain through the state church system in Norway. This formative, Christianizing process already starts from the cradle, through nursery and the official school system which are placed under a Christian objects clause. For most people it even symbolically begins by the baptismal font. In the sleeves of the albums *Under the Sign of Hell* and *Destroyer*, Gorgoroth calls on people to resign their membership in the State church. The latter album moreover characterizes Christianity as a "sexist, racist ... monster" that suppresses the individual, as "misanthropic and ugly", "disgustingly welcoming the tall poppy syndrome" and "mad men's ideas of monopoly regarding the salvation of the human soul".⁷ "C", who has served a sentence for church arson, spoke of his motives for doing this as follows:

Norway has to be moral all the time. The Christian moral has always to be followed in Norway, rules, laws, everything has to be religious, and the more you think about Norway being Christian, the more you hate it. The more you realize that Norway never should have been Christian. It should have been dechristianized a long time ago.⁸ (Grude 2007)

"C" added that the main point was to make a symbolic statement against the institutionalization of religion and a consequent religious concentration of power. "A" similarly claimed that his motive for church arson partly was "to get rid of that kind of institution [the State church]", but also that it reflected an attempt to make Norway a Heathen country again (ibid.).⁹

That the church arsons has to do with revenge is quite obvious. Many of the members of the Black Metal scene are provoked by the unscrupulous manner in which the Christians obliterated the Heathen way of life and thinking and forced their own unnatural and alien religion on the indigenous, Heathen population of Norway, who to a certain degree are conceived of as ancestors. Or as Vikernes puts it: "Norway was Christianized by the sword, so we shall make it Heathen again by means of flames and machine guns" (Vikernes 1995).¹⁰ The dismay and critique

⁶ At the time of the writing of these lyrics, Burzum had quit using Satanic concepts and symbols in any positive manner, which may be viewed as a total rejection of Christian interpretations of life. However, the discarding of the concept of Hell did not really signal any significant change as regards the content of Burzum's experience of living in a modern Christian society.

⁷ My translation.

⁸ My translation.

⁹ My translation.

¹⁰ My translation.

that the church arsons provoked is bluntly rejected as just another expression of Christian manipulation, their double set of morals and lust for power:

And their saying that it was a thousand years ago, and that times are changed now – that is just another way of stating that ‘It is allowed to kill, as long as we are the ones who does the killing, but as soon as we have killed the ones we want to kill, it is not allowed to kill anymore’. (Vikernes, *ibid.*)

The violent attitude towards Christianity, here exemplified through church arson, is a creative and revengeful violence, in the sense that it at least partly can be seen as a reaction towards the Christians’ illegitimate, violent display of power throughout history in order to seize control of people of other beliefs and practices. As Gorgoroth states in the cover of *Destroyer*: “The sight of burning churches, it fills our heart with joy / The fanfares are resounding – the earth is booming of sound / We are marching through the streets in step / The Plague is cast back by force ...”¹¹ In other words, for some people, the churches, chapels and cathedrals stand as provocative, manifest and constant reminders of the Christian tradition’s illegitimate fortification, centuries long presence and deep cultural and societal influence in Norway and other countries around the world. Kolnar refers to the philosopher Frantz Fanon’s reflections on violence as a primary strategy for people who seek liberation from oppressive forces. The cleansing and resetting potential of violence gives it a crucial function in the eradication of the marks that the oppressors have impressed in people’s body and mind, so that the rebuilding of the pride, dignity and independence of the self can take place (Kolnar 2003: 80). Church arson is probably connected with extraordinary states of mind and sensational experiences before, during and/or after the act. Experiential descriptions of this type of act reveal a need to express and bale out anger and hatred. Fire has throughout history also worked as a symbol of purification and pain. A church being devoured by flames might on many levels serve as a powerful symbol of destruction and regeneration:

The first church burned on the 6th of June [1992], with the intention probably to light a flame, to put dried grass and branches on that, to light it up on the coal and the fire to make it big. It’s a psychological picture – an almost dead fire, a symbol of our heathen consciousness. The point was to throw dry wood and branches on that, to light it up and reach toward the sky again, as a growing force. That was the point, and it worked. (Varg Vikernes in Moynihan and Söderlind 1998: 89)

Fire in other words does not only imply sheer destruction, but is also a source of regeneration, growth, as in the case of forest fires, where the forest floor some time after the desolating fire starts to sprout again. The very dark, aggressive and deconstructive art of Burzum similarly aims at “reconstruction”:

¹¹ My translation.

In the beginning I made music, I think, because I did not want to do anything at all. I had resigned and wished to pull as far away from the modern world as I possibly could. One could say that I did not want to participate. The music was a sort of escape and an attempt to create something new; to recreate the past, a past that may not at all have existed and that I did not know that much about. All I knew was that I preferred this past to the modern world.¹² (Vikernes, letter dated 29.02.2002)

Darkthrone is another band which in a very succinct manner exemplifies the connection between violence, emancipation of the individual, courage, lust and sense of power, often in combination with traditionally Satanic elements. According to the last half of the song, “To Walk the Infernal Fields” (lyrics: 1992) on *Under a Funeral Moon*:

I am Your Disciple / and therefore my own. / Your Weapon I Will Be / with the Demons that Possess me. / We’ll Ride the seven Sins of Death / that takes me to Katharsis. // The sign of Your Horns / is My Dearest Vision. / They Impale all holy and Weak // You watch me face the Mirror / and see Desecration. / With my Art I am the Fist / in the face of god.

Satan is portrayed as source as well as symbol of the enlightened, self-willed, masterful individual who goes his own way, indomitable in his self-assertion and the making of his own life-world.¹³ This crucial theme is also illustrated by the following extract from Darkthrone’s “Paragon Belial” (1991) on *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*:

The Ancient White light writings / were just lying men and their Pens / You are the same, only in Black. / Return with the knowledge / of making your own god // Dreaming of the Tombworld: / I Enter Into an Eternal Oath / Creating my Paragon Belial.

Belial seems to endow the lyrical subject with the following insight and commission: That there is no absolute truth, no interpretation of life that might apply to all people independent of their personal, cultural, societal and temporal background. Given this, it is a matter of finding one’s own life truths, of creating one’s own “God”, that may not exist anywhere but in one’s own heart, in one’s own dreams and visions, but nevertheless has the power of committing and directing the individual.

¹² My translation.

¹³ See also: “Summer of the Diabolical Holocaust” (music: 1992/lyrics: 1990), “The Dance of Eternal Shadows (m.: 1992/l.: 1990), and “Crossing the Triangle of Flames” (m.: 1991/l.: 1990), all on *Under a Funeral Moon*.

Christianity's concern with the communal and "the weak", i.e. exposed and vulnerable human beings, is taken as just another expression of its underestimation of and hostility towards the individual and individuality. It is perceived as holding down human beings' self-empowering qualities and drives. Black Metal is on the contrary a celebration of the "strong", meaning the proud, ambitious, excellent, self-centered and self-reliant individual. The Christian tradition is seen as forcing bad conscience, low self-esteem and feelings of guilt and shame upon people. Besides holding views reminiscent of social Darwinism, Black Metal individualism finds expression in the (in)famous Crowleyan Law of Thelema, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law", which was widely accepted within the scene (at least theoretically).

*"A gate out of hell into the void of death"*¹⁴

Black Metal is not least a criticism of the dualistic aspect of the Jewish-Christian tradition, what the Black Metal guitarist "Tormentor" in an interview with a more general term called the "metaphysics of light", which is any religion, ideology and philosophy that sees "darkness" and "light" as contrasting and incompatible principles – and favors "the light". Black Metal rather reflects alternative experiences and judgments of darkness, of what its absence as well as presence means for the development and quality of life of people, sometimes even the human race. This topic is clearly present in the lyrics of "Snu mikrokosmos tegn" ("Turn the sign of the microcosmos", 1992) on the Burzum album, *Det som engang var* (*What once were*):

No silence out here - / a dream / Here where the moon reigns - / a dream // I hate
this wood / where no danger threatens / No wolf / no bear / no troll / is breathing
/ No evil spirits / nothing / is breathing // Only the night and I - / only the night
and I // One night I will go to Hell.

As the title and the lyrical content of this song indicate, a overturning of the civilized contemporary world is wished for. The Black Metal progressive worship of darkness often takes the form of violent lyrical visions of a cosmic or apocalyptic nature.¹⁵ The longing for "Hell" in this song, which clearly displays the influence of the fantasy genre on the world of Burzum, is brought to life or accentuated within the framework of safe and empty nightly nature. Thus "Hell" represents a vibrant and dynamic existence, seething from the interplay between contrasting forces, where vigilance, pulse and immediate self- and life-presence is made possible by its unpredictable, challenging and hazardous nature. At the end of the song "What once were" (1992) on the album carrying the truly expressive

¹⁴ Quote taken from the Burzum-track "A Lost Forgotten Sad Spirit" on *Aske* (1991).

¹⁵ For instance, the frequent and extensive use of inverted crosses and pentagrams can be viewed in light of this.

title *Hvis lyset tar oss* (*If the light catches us*, 1992), "Count Grishnackh" (or one of the lyrical subjects?) in seemingly desperate agony screams: "We did not die....we have never lived", as a consequence of acknowledging that the magical, vivacious world which alone is imagined capable of reviving the ability to fully feel and feel really alive, is gone forever. They are doomed to live in this world as living dead, for all eternity. The peculiar Black Metal image may in the light of this be interpreted as a way of presenting oneself as alienated creatures, not quite of this world, neither dead nor alive. This world, these times, this society seems to be experienced as nothing but desert and death, "a gate out of hell into the void of death". A fulfilling existence is conditioned by the inclusion of darkness in the life-world of humans, which is very clearly depicted in the Burzum song "Decrepitude" (1992) on *Filosofem*: "When night falls / she cloaks the world / in impenetrable darkness. / A chill rises / from the soil / and contaminates the air / suddenly... / life has new meaning." The darkness and shuddering chill of the night revitalizes life. The following extract from the lyrics of "The Dance of Eternal Shadows" (lyrics: 1990) by Darkthrone suggests darkness as a form of possession and a satisfactory sensation of power and desecration that somehow is attached to a desert-like experience of life: "I must Embrace Visual Hell / to Satisfy Us / Rape the Whores in Blasphemy / I am Him while I Feast upon Your Flesh // Glance into My Eyes / and see the Darkest Shadows Dancing / Playing in the Desert of My Life / Burning ..."

The understanding of darkness as powerful and the attached contemptuous attitude towards the so-called "weak" light or any metaphysics of light, must have received nourishment from the characteristic Black Metal image. Its main ingredients were black clothing, and long, straight hair dyed raven black and preferably a little greasy. More or less outrageous spikes, nails and other metal equipment were also very popular within the scene, as well as cartridge belts around the hips and sometimes even across the chest and shoulders, often together with a variety of occult symbols and (band-) t-shirts/-sweaters with blasphemous and spiteful "messages" printed on its front, back and/or sleeves. And last but not least the well-known wearing of corpse-paint, the demoniac death mask.

This image was partly designed to spread fear and terror. As Norway is a country with small urban environments where flamboyant behavior and looks are easily noticed and often scorned, the sight of Black Metal "uniformed" young males, seemingly hostile and unapproachable, "marching" up and down the streets must at the least have caused insecurity and skepticism among people,¹⁶ especially when we remember that Black Metal was a completely unknown phenomenon to most people in the beginning of the nineties. Thus the power of darkness could literally be incorporated, absorbed by the bodily senses, as the ability to cause fear often is linked to experiences of power.

¹⁶ It was not common to wear corpse-paint during daily activities, as it was neither to become trivial nor habitual. It was usually reserved for special occasions, such as photo sessions, walks in the wood and live-shows.

The darkness worship in Black Metal does not in my opinion signal any metaphysics of darkness, i.e. an "inverted" metaphysics of light. The idea is that humans need darkness *too*, and they need to learn to *appreciate* it, that there is no real "light" without "darkness" and vice versa, or according to the Albert Camus quotation in *Slayer* (1995: 9): "There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night." The interaction of "darkness" and "light" is seen as a necessary condition for gaining a vital and developing life.

Natural Darkness

A lot of Black Metal bands have been influenced by Burzum's judgment of the Jewish-Christian tradition as a spiritual plague or in other words as a warping and mentally deranging view of life. "Kristen manns blod" ("Christian man's blood") is similarly described as "igler på Våre Hjerter" ("Leeches on Our Hearts") in Darkthrone's song "En vind av sorg" ("A Wind of Sorrow", 1994) on *Panzerfaust*.¹⁷ This also implies an understanding of the metaphysics of light in general and Christianity in particular as *unnatural*. Nature plays a prominent part within the Black Metal scene. "Snu mikrokosmos tegn" ("Turn the sign of the microcosmos") exemplifies a typical Black Metal-pattern: A visual and lyrical representation of a vital connection between the power- and energy-giving qualities of darkness and nature. A fairly direct depiction of such a connection, although *ad via negativa*, is found in the lyrics of the song "Jesu død" ("Jesus' death", 1993) on Burzum's *Filosofem*:

A figure was lying on the ground / so evil that the flowers about withered / a gloomy soul was laying on the ground / so cold that all the water turned to ice / Then a shadow dropped over the wood // when the soul of the figure faded away / 'cause the soul of the figure was a shadow / a shadow of the force of evil.¹⁸

Jesus is here portrayed as dark, cold and life-extinguishing figure, irreconcilable with vitality and natural life. This alludes to a broader conviction in Black Metal, that the main cause of man having been disrupted and alienated from his natural state of being and natural wholesomeness is the Jewish-Christian tradition's dualism. The stigmatization, tabooing and discrediting of man's dark sides is regarded as having made him into a divided being, a stranger to himself. The Black Metal worship of darkness has as a goal to make man whole again, restore man's kinship with – his tie to – nature, in other words to return him to his natural "Satanic" state of being. The Satanic self-image that is operative implies a focus on humans primarily as beings of nature, as Satan often is conceived as a dark force or symbol of nature. At times the lyrical subjects are more or less depicted as incarnations of natural forces, often hunting or battling Christians. Darkthrone portrays the subjects as a

¹⁷ My translations.

¹⁸ My translation.

Northern storm's pride in the song "A Blaze in the Northern Sky" with the lines, "a Triumphant sight on a Northern Sky" and "a Blaze in the Northern Sky". Another Black Metal band that has been greatly influenced by the mighty and inhospitable aspects of the Norwegian scenery is Immortal. One might say that besides lyrical and visual elements, this inspiration is reflected through its distinctly clear and cold, fast, fresh and fierce music style. Nature also serves as a major source of inspiration when it comes to choosing artistic names for oneself or a name for the band, as "Frost", "Zephyrous", "Fenriz", Ulver ("Wolves"), Ravn ("Raven") and In the Woods amply illustrates. "Satyr" from Satyricon has said:

I feel very close to the woods. I feel like a part of it. You know....Satyr.... God of the woods, a demon of nature. As I said, this is where I get inspiration from. Feelings are stronger when you are part of them. Walking in the woods changes my personality. I sometimes feel the presence of evil, at such times I enjoy existing. (*Slayer* 1995: 31)

Besides the extensive use of pure landscape pictures, it is also very common to do photo shootings in natural environments, which contributes to making the individual band member or the band as a whole seem as if inserted or immersed in, or even as extensions of nature. I am thinking of the grim, gloomy and theatrical pictures of often wild and proud-looking band members posing in their Black Metal outfit, preferably in the wood at night, sometimes in the winter. Weapons of some old-fashioned and primitive kind, such as swords, daggers, maces, axes and scythes¹⁹, are often carried and correspond with the type of scenery that is being worshipped and furthermore reveals the prevailing view of what it means for humans to be in a "natural state". But what do people that seek authentic existence, that want to become whole, reunited with its natural self, have to do in order to accomplish this? The majestic, harsh and willful character of nature is taken as a model of authentic being. Hence emotions and traits such as hatred, contempt, selfishness, arrogance, and revengefulness are to be cultivated. During a police interrogation an infamous member of the Black Metal scene explained that the waging of war is natural and great and that the feelings of hatred, jealousy and wickedness are natural, innate, and ought to be released through aggression.²⁰ The primitivistic musical expression, the style of singing included, can also be

¹⁹ The Black Metal worship of darkness also covers a strong fascination for weapons, primitive and medieval-looking ones in particular. Potential buyers could get hold of such weapons – for example "around 60 cm. long maces with 3,5 cm. long spikes" from Euronymous' shop (*Heivete* 1992: 2). People were encouraged to buy these kind of weapons before it was too late, that is, while it was still legal to sell them (*ibid.*). Some individuals made weapons for themselves and for sale and/or stole them. An acquaintance of "Greven" said that he was obsessed with weapons and even collected them (Grude 2007).

²⁰ This process of masculine identity formation reflects an understanding of masculinity reminiscent of the one advocated by the mythopoetic men's movement, as it embarks on a

understood in view of this way of thinking within the subcultural scene (see the section "Attacking the Mainstreams or 'No Trend'" below).

As we have seen above, Black Metal's focus on nature is clearly related to a process of self-becoming. The perception of self is fundamentally tied to Norwegian climate and scenery. This confirms the claims made by the cultural historian Nina Witoszecz regarding the relation between Norwegians and the Norwegian landscape. She says that Norway's natural heritage has for centuries served as a very strong symbol of identity for Norwegians, sometimes to the degree that the images of nature and "Norwegian-ness" appear as nearly one and the same thing (Witoszecz 1998: 17). According to Witoszecz, there is a tradition for this type of identification in Norway, a tradition that has only grown stronger over the years.

The Restoration and Framing of Authentic Manhood

The destructive effect that Judeo-Christian dualism is thought to have on male individuals is harshly suggested in the piece "Musstad" on Burzum's *Filosofem*:

With the spiritual plague [the light] from the south came also that which killed courage and honour. ... Men that could have won glory and honour by dying a worthy death on the battlefield were forced to die in bed. The forces of darkness were to be weeded out, war was a sin and no man was ever to kill another. Peace prevailed, but no true peace, 'cause the peace depleted people's powers more than any war might have depleted them, for eternal peace is no peace, it is the differences that create energy. The light did not warm them, but burnt them, the light did not let them see, it bedazzled them, the light sucked out all their energy, and they died in bed after a long, honourless life. The light brought them peace, Gods peace, true Hell.

From the standpoint of Black Metal, the Christian tradition(s) has gone a long way to banish and demonize darkness and stigmatize violence as a means of expression. This is understood as making redundant the male subject's specifically masculine resources, as choking his natural drive towards masculine fullness and dignity. In other words, Christianity seems in other words to offer an effeminizing view and way of life.

The worship of darkness and critical existential experiences that Black Metal imparts can fruitfully be viewed as a response to serious challenges that contemporary, Western males are being confronted with in regard to the formation of masculine identity and existential meaning. It is quite possible to interpret the scenario in "Snu mikrokosmos tegn" ("Turn the sign of the microcosmos") as a young man's visions of what it takes to get his masculine potential fully realized, but still has to live in a world where this – the release of violent and virile energy

search for natural, authentic manhood. Both movements think that revival of man's wilder sides is necessary in order to achieve true manliness.

– is illegitimate. The obsession with weapons as well as the pictures in sleeve photos illustrates the conception of authentic manhood and aggression as somehow connected to each other.

A fact that underlines the fruitfulness of a gendered perspective in the analysis of this particular subcultural music scene, is that it is undeniably a male community. It was developed *by* young men *for* themselves and for likeminded people of the same sex, in a phase of life where freeing oneself from parents and other authorities, finding and realizing oneself, one's own identity, one's place in society, one's own life for many is of utmost importance (see also Bossius 2003). Members of the Black Metal scene were almost desperate in their effort to distance themselves from "the kids" within the underground as well as more mainstream metal scene (see section below), which to a certain degree proves my point: That we are dealing with young men on the way from childhood into the adult world with its many laws, commitments and responsibilities as well as liberties and rights, in a global society where manliness has become something opaque, fragmented and in motion. My understanding of Black Metal as some sort of cult of masculinity is strengthened by its sometimes patronizing view on women, its traditional view on gender, its rejection of "feminine" values, together with the nearly non-existing possibility for girls to be seen as equal members of a scene swelling with traditionally masculine identity markers. The Black Metal scene is furthermore hostile towards homosexuals, hierarchically structured, strongly fascinated by violence and a variety of grotesque phenomena. Indeed Satan, which the self-image among other symbols is tied to, is often portrayed as a highly masculine being or force.

Attacking the Mainstreams or "No Trend"

When going through the empirical material, fanzines in particular, I was struck by a conspicuous controversy against the "mainstream" and commercial turn the Death Metal scene had taken at the time, from both the side of fanzine editors as well as musicians and fans within the underground. Even though the origin and framing of the Black Metal scene undeniably was connected to an increasing commercialization of the Death Metal scene, it is nonetheless a veiled understatement of sorts when Vikernes claims that "[t]he most accurate thing to say is that Black Metal was nothing but a revolt against Death Metal" (Mørk 2002: 87). The fight against the so-called trendy, mainstream and commercialized branch of Death Metal was rather a concretization of a fight against a greater, though not so evident enemy, i.e. against forces of a more fundamental and more encompassing kind.

Underground metal was – and was meant to be – an extreme and strongly masculine subculture consisting of people who thought differently and were sincerely into this form of cultural expression. It was meant to be a powerful source to an exclusively and authentically conceived identity. About the last half