Rising concomitantly with the adversarial nihilism of Black Metal, discourses of darkness have characterised the genre’s visual and textual aspects since its genesis.¹ And yet, Black Metal’s focus on all things dark and nocturnal finds itself apposed with invocations (perhaps less frequent, though equally significant) vis-à-vis the genre’s defining anti-Christian project of the Dawn. Working complementarily with satanic invocations of night and darkness, Dawn’s role—as a sort of “light at the end of the tunnel” that night represents—is of tremendous import to Black Metal’s ideological struggle. It is the goal of this article to situate the Dawn motif within this struggle. From this gained knowledge, we may examine at once how Black Metal may inform our understanding of the Dawn, and how Black Metal perspectives on the Dawn and its cultural weight might influence our approaches to Black Metal theory and ideology.

While the Dawn as a lyrical motif features prominently in the Black Metal canon, for the sake of clarity and in respect of this article’s constraints, we will concentrate our analysis on two of the more prominent iterations of the Dawn motif: “Awaiting the Dawn” from Primordial’s 1995 release Imrama, and Satyricon’s “The Dawn of a New Age” on their
1996 LP *Nemesis Divina.* Prominent, that is, for the artists’ high profile in the international Black Metal scene and the centrality of the Dawn motif to the text’s meaning. We will additionally consider Inquisition’s “Strike of the Morning Star” (*Nefarious Dismal Orations*, 2007) and Nazxul’s “Dragon Dispitous” and “Iconoclast” (*Iconoclast*, LP, 2009), for their significance as more recent works touching on the Dawn motif.

**THE LUCIFERIAN CONNOTATIONS OF THE DAWN MOTIF**

So that we can better understand the relation of the Dawn motif to the Black Metal paradigm in which we encounter it, we ought to briefly consider the role that Dawn imagery has historically played with regard to Christian theology. Dawn, for instance, is the traditional time of the Eucharist—a summoning of sorts of Jesus Christ. It is a time of beginning and purification, where light is shed, and confusion and darkness banished.3 The parallels between this process of “purification” and the redemptive reputation of Christ are obvious: through Christ, purification; through Dawn, light.

Enter Black Metal, and with it the taking (or perhaps liberation) of the proverbial torch of cultural representation of Dawn. As is understood in both Christian and Black Metal perspectives, Dawn is that part of the day-night cycle that unfurls light upon the world. It is a time of rebirth, a(n) (re)awakening of thought and experience. The obfuscating darkness offered by the night is lifted, replaced by illumination and clarity. In this way, the Dawn offers liberation.

When working within the anti-Christian ideological project of Black Metal, to invoke the Dawn is to invoke the Luciferian. The brilliant rise of the sun, at once searing and revelatory, is an embrace of the forbidden knowledges that the coming of Lucifer—“son of the Dawn”—represents.4 As we will soon demonstrate, because these Luciferian knowledges necessarily exist outside the bounds of divine approval, iterations of the Dawn permit the escape from, and the destruction of, Christianity’s symbolic authority. As it were, we turn our back on the Father and Son with the rise of the sun.

It is instructive to reflect for a moment on the character of this rejection, that hailing the Dawn and Lucifer the Morning Star within a Black Metal context should be an anti-Christian act is unsurprising.5 What is important in terms of this article’s contribution to Black Metal theory is that we consider how this oppositonal act occurs, and, in doing so, to better understand Black Metal’s essential ideological character.

Black Metal poses the arrival of Dawn (and with it Lucifer) as a violent event. Inquisition hail a Morning Star that *strikes*, promising to “obliterate” the sons of Christ. It threatens to “exterminate them, annihilate them,” leaving in its wake a bloodied and “inverted” world in which “our ways” (the ways of the Black Metaller) are claimed by the
very acts of extermination, annihilation, and obliteration. The stake of the Luciferian Dawn’s arrival is not so much the establishment of a new order, but the upset and annihilation of the old.

Such an understanding of Lucifer (the Morning Star, herald of the Dawn) is taken up by Nazxul in *Iconoclast*. Reference is made in the title track and in “Dragon Dispitous” to a violent arrival of the Morning Star which will “shatter alabaster spheres” and “destroy transient temples,” “joining to form an army / that no host ethereal can withstand.” Again, the Dawn represents for the Black Metaller a violent obliteration of transient, though outwardly, strong structures and systems.

As an aside, it is notable that the Black Metaller’s relationship to the Luciferian Dawn is, in the majority of cases, passive—we witness the Dawn, we wait for the Dawn, we welcome the Dawn, etc. The Black Metaller may “join” the Luciferian Dawn’s destruction or take action to speed its arrival (as in the case of Satyricon’s *détournement*, discussed below); however, in the end the destruction wrought by the Luciferian Dawn would appear to be external to, and much greater than, the Black Metaller. It is beyond the scope of this article to interrogate the anti-humanist quality of this phenomenon, though it is an interesting point to raise in any case.

Having established something of a knowledge of the character of Dawn’s arrival and the violence that accompanies it, we ought now to further explain the conditions/targets of the annihilation wrought by the Dawn so that we may better understand the real import of the motif *vis-à-vis* Black Metal’s anti-Christian project.

**THE DAWN MOTIF AND PRIMORDIAL’S “AWAITING THE DAWN”**

“Awaiting the Dawn” is valuable in this regard as it provides an intimate account of the Black Metaller’s pre-Dawn experience and, consequently, of precise phenomena whose Dawn-brought demise is anticipated with relish by the Black Metaller. With the opening lines (“Lilith . . . my bride, a love of sin so deep / Wounds of lust won’t ever heal”) singer A.A. Nemtheanga’s avatar quite clearly identifies these phenomena for the listener. The song’s savage, heaving instrumentation combined with these lyrics indicates a frustrated carnal longing that possesses the avatar, causing him to “yearn,” “weep,” “writhe,” and “twist.” Clearly, issues of obstructed or painful desires are at play here. It is with the reflexive question “am I to pay the wages of sin?” in the third verse that we begin to grasp the nature of the speaker’s environment (also the potential casualty of Dawn’s arrival). The line is an unambiguous allusion to scripture, whose significance is twofold. Firstly, it alludes to the existence of a Christian moral system which is imposed upon Nemtheanga’s avatar—*voilà* the object to be annihilated by the Luciferian Dawn. Secondly, the avatar’s
question reveals the existing moral framework to be no mere source of guilt or shame, but a system that hangs a charge of death over the head of the sinner. Little wonder that the Nemtheanga’s sinning avatar should await the Dawn, hail Satan, and obsessively ask of the “tidings” that Lucifer may bring—at stake is the Black Metaller’s life! Whether or not the Dawn offers a new moral framework appears unimportant—the speaker may “turn my face to a new age” though outlines no blueprint for a replacement for the current order besides its absence. The value of Dawn for the Black Metaller as put forth by Primordial lies in its liberatory destructiveness.

**THE DAWN MOTIF AND SATYRICON’S “THE DAWN OF A NEW AGE”**

If Primordial draw on the Dawn motif as a promise of the future destruction of Christian moral frameworks, the use of the Dawn motif in Satyricon’s “The Dawn of a New Age” represents the realisation of that promise. Given that our analysis of Satyricon’s invocation of the Dawn motif is lyrical in focus, we may preface our analysis by commenting on the fact that the song’s lyrics are taken almost entirely from the biblical Book of Revelations.

Lyricist Satyr engaged in little surface-level textual interference, with any editing being mostly structural in nature, in order to forge a consistent lyrical narrative. Beginning with Revelations 6:8, the passage is a re-telling of the biblical prophecy of the coming of a “pale horse” and its rider Death. Accompanying Death is a black horse with a crowned, conquering rider who brings with him the unprecedented disfigurement of the world:

> And there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.

> And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Taken in its original scriptural context, the above text constitutes a foretelling of the End of Days—that is, the effective destruction of the profane world in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. With Satyr triumphantly proclaiming in the song’s introduction that “this is Armageddon,” the lyrics foretell, however, of no messianic redemption and none of the divine purification or reward that might be expected to follow the biblical End of Times. In this way, this destruction described in these lyrics is at first glance absolutely congruent
with Black Metal’s violent and oppositional character. It is thus tempting to consider these lyrics unproblematically true to Black Metal’s ideological core.

To do so would be easy, though in bad faith. As has been widely argued, we simply cannot hold a text up as a direct signifier-referent link—the text must be understood in terms of its relation to other texts.¹¹ In other words, we cannot neatly divorce “The Dawn of a New Age” from its scriptural roots. This puts us in something of a bind, however—there is now a great tension between Satyricon’s affiliation with Black Metal’s anti-Christian ideological project and the fundamentally Christian origin of “The Dawn of a New Age” as a fundamentally anti-Christian text.

We can resolve this tension, and in doing so better understand Black Metal’s broader project, by considering Satyricon’s paraphrasing of scripture (apocalyptic or not) as a sort of satanic détournement of Christian authority over this instance of cultural communication. Guy Debord defines the act and phenomenon of détournement as a device to render subversive ideas that “have congealed into respectable truths.”¹² By creating a sense of distance “toward whatever has been turned into an official verity” (the idea of the end of the world as a precursor to the redemptive return of Christ, for instance), the device of détournement reveals the “official verity” in question as something that is not immune to or ineligible of being questioned. As a result, the violent removal of such a verity from its authority-granting context obliterates not only the verity’s verity, but the coherence of the entire system which has permitted this verity to reign as true. The scriptural text (historically granted divine authority) appears in such a way that it is eminently recognisable as scriptural, yet sufficiently modified so as to be totally unlike any experience one could have in its traditionally “proper” biblical setting. Satyr perverts verse order by following Revelations 6:8 with Revelations 6:5—to which he adds a phrase of his own invention. Such lyrical intervention has the effect of distancing the listener and the text itself from the authoritative certitude of the text’s scriptural origins, and in doing so dissolves this very certitude. The dissolution of certitude and authority is driven home by its pairing with savage instrumentation and vocal delivery.

Détournement, as discussed in Debord’s The Society of the Spectacle, is a phenomenon whose very existence is corrosive to any type of sign system that finds itself assailed by an act of détournement—that is, it is not so much the act of détournement which undermines totalitarian sign systems but the fact that such an act would be possible. In Debord’s words, “détournement founds its cause on nothing but its own truth as critique at work in the present.”¹³ Relating this back to Black Metal’s anti-Christian project, we can see a similar anti-totalitarian phenomenon at work in “The Dawn of a New Age.” When viewed as a blackened, satanic détournement, the song’s assault on the authority of its lyrics’ source has the effect of undoing the totalitarian ownership of meaning that the invocation of scripture
has historically legitimised. Satyricon’s détournement can be read as a satanic revolt of the highest order.¹⁴

At this point we are charged with the task of explaining how Satyricon’s satanic détournement relates to the Luciferian Dawn. For if Satyricon’s satanic détournement has simply accomplished the destruction of Christian systems of authority (useful though this task may be), what manner of “illumination” has taken place? What sort of day does this Dawn bring?

We hold that it would be fruitless to search for a “replacement system” that we can label the “New Age” brought about by Satyricon’s Dawn. What this iteration of a Luciferian Dawn represents—as in the cases of Inquisition, Nazxul, and Primordial—is quite precisely an absence of totalitarian Christian modes of thought and authority. Indeed, Christianity’s self-perpetuating and self-legitimising authority is burned away by the satanic solar rays of this Luciferian Dawn. To expect anything to be left in the wake of the Black Metaller’s Luciferian Dawn is to ignore the boundaries of canonical Black Metal’s essentially adversarial nature.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Common to all examined invocations of the Dawn motif is the idea of the “process” of Dawn as a violent destruction of Christian systems. Within a Black Metal context, hailing the Dawn—and Lucifer the Morning Star along with it—becomes a gesture of rejection of these systems’ authority and the welcoming (or participation in . . . ) their annihilation. It is hoped that our analysis of the role of the Dawn motif in Black Metal has illuminated its importance vis-à-vis the genre’s anti-Christian project. We would particularly highlight the notion that Black Metal need not be restricted to discourses of darkness and nocturnality in order to remain true to its adversarial ideological roots.

NOTES

¹ Proto-Black Metallers Venom birthed the genre’s name and its discourse of darkness with Black Metal (1982). From there, we witness a litany of darkness and nocturnality within the canon—with the appearance of bands and releases such as Bathory’s “Nocternal [sic] Obeisance,” Emperor’s In the Nightside Eclipse, Darkthrone’s Under A Funeral Moon, Burzum’s “Dungeons of Darkness”, Satyricon’s Dark Medieval Times, etc.

² A search of The Metal Archives database retrieves over 400 songs bearing the word in the title. Consider also that this search excludes songs not featured on full-length releases: Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives, http://www.metalarchives.com/search/advanced/searching/songs?songTitle=Dawn&bandName=&releaseTitle=&lyrics=&releaseType=&genre=black+metal#songs.


5 As well as being commonly considered one of Satan’s titles, “Lucifer” (as many have pointed out) is a name referring to Venus, the “Morning Star.” The complex and evolving identity of Lucifer is discussed in the above-cited “Fallen Star” by Youngblood and L.T.I. Penman in “Repulsive Blasphemies,” Daphnis 38.3/4 (2009): 597–620.


9 We speak of “carnality” in its sexual sense in this instance, though the apposition of “wounds” and “lust” suggests a blurring of any distinction between the “sexual” and the “fleshly” meanings of the term.


13 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 146.

14 At this point we might address the concern that Satyricon’s satanic revolt is granted too much credit—the church remains powerful, and Satyricon are far from the first group to attack Christian modes of thought and authority. The value of “The Dawn of a New Age” lies in its status as a noteworthy contribution to Black Metal as an anti-Christian discourse.