

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS DARKLY

Medievalism, Satanism, and the Dark Illumination of the Self in the Aesthetics of Black Metal

Brenda S. Gardenour Walter

Entering into the magic circle of black metal, we cross an invisible threshold into a world of inversion, a dark dreamscape rendered in black, white, and blood.¹ Here, in the in the sempiternal night, ice-laden autumn winds twist through gnarled and blackened woodlands as shadows grow long beneath a freezing moon. Throughout the forest, covens of corpse-painted men robed in black leather chant demonic paeans to death and destruction, to pain and terror, in honor of their lord Satan. In an ecstasy of evil, they lift their heads to the dark sky, pink tongues lolling while phallic fingers writhe and clench into fists. Inverted crosses, downward-facing pentagrams, and the severed heads of sheep flicker in the firelight cast from the conflagration of Christian stave churches in the distance, while the Goat of Mendes, ruler of darkness, surveys his kingdom of hellfire and sulphurous smoke.

The upside-down world of Satanic black metal is uncanny, both familiar in its use of inverted tropes and schemes and yet completely “other” to those on the outside looking in, including Christians and consumers of mainstream popular culture.² For them, it is a spectacle of abject horror in which the viewer, unable to look away, becomes one with the object of revulsion through *jouissance*, or desire.³ Those within the hellish magic circle experience a similar abjection as they gaze outward at the decadence, hypocrisy, and emptiness of WASP-y middle-class culture. In this context, the inverted signifiers of Satanic evil serve not only to distance the blackened self from the hated once-self / other, but also to caricature and reflect the horrors of human society. From Satanic black metal to Cascadian black metal and beyond, the black metal mirror moves from inverted binary into existential complexity, calling the viewer to contemplate not only humanity and

nature, but also his or her own fetid image. Staring into the darkened abyssal glass, the blackened self discovers negatives of negatives, a string of perpetual inversions that ripple into oblivion. At the moment of dark epiphany, the abyss gazes back, the self succumbs to blackness, and is annihilated.⁴

MEDIEVAL CONSTRUCTS: ARISTOTELIAN CONTRARIETY AND THE INVERTED EVIL OTHER

Often oversimplified as “Christianity upside down,” the inverted aesthetics of Satanic black metal are actually quite complex, operating according to the specific rationality of medieval scholasticism and signifying deep discourses of power in Western culture. In the thirteenth century, scholars working in the milieu of the medieval university sought to reconcile Aristotelian constructs and epistemologies with those of Christianity, including the scriptures and the Neo-Platonic tradition transmitted through patristic authors such as Augustine.⁵ In works such as *De Universo*, *Summa Theologica*, and *Scriptum Super Sententiis*, scholastic theologians William of Auvergne and Thomas Aquinas used Aristotle’s logic and natural philosophy as supporting structures for theological precepts and articles of faith.⁶ Aristotle’s cosmology, elemental theory, and physics would prove particularly valuable in the construction of paradigmatic Christian goodness and its radically-inverted contrary, Satanic evil, two binary categories that, by the fifteenth century, were not only ossified but also deeply entrenched in Western culture.

At the heart of the medieval construction of good and evil lay Aristotle’s cosmos, which was divided into two realms. The realm beyond the moon was imagined to be a series of nesting crystalline spheres, each of which contained a planet. The outermost sphere of the fixed stars served as the boundary between the cosmos and the Prime Mover, an entity who applied pressure to the spheres and set them into motion through love.⁷ All movement in the superlunary realm was circular, perpetual, and perfect; below the moon, however, chaos reigned. The sublunary realm was composed of the four elements—fire, air, water, and earth. Because fire was the lightest and most pure element, it hovered above elemental air and rose toward the lunar sphere. Earth, on the other hand, was the most dense and corrupt of the elements, and therefore sank like dross to the very core of the cosmos.⁸ The inherently unstable nature of the four elements meant that they were in perpetual states of transformation, thereby creating myriad forms of matter and a chaotic physical world of violent motion and change.⁹

In the thirteenth century, scholastic theologians began the process of reconciling this ancient and pagan cosmic system with Christianity, thereby transforming

the Prime Mover into the Christian God, the realm beyond the sidereal sphere into his Empyrean Heaven, the world below the moon into a demonic playground, and the bowels of the earth into Hell. The superlunary realm of divine goodness was imagined as a heavenly hierarchy, with God enthroned in the Empyrean, “the subtlest of all bodies” containing “within itself the purest light.”¹⁰ There, the Christian God was surrounded by seraphim, the Virgin Mary, and the saints of his royal court. Radiating from the Godhead, divine light suffused the weightless and translucent ethereal bodies that populated the heavens, illuminating the choirs of angels arranged in concentric circles that descended to the lunar boundary. These angelic beings, Aquinas argued, stood at guard, their eyes turned toward the brightest heaven, in perfect obedience to the Deity.¹¹ From God on his golden throne to the lowest angel, the heavenly realm was one of singularity and unity, a slavish collective bound to serve God’s will alone. On earth as in heaven, only those willing to submit fully to the Christian God through his institutional Church would one day be permitted to see the wonders of this static and luminous world; all others would be damned to the Hellish world below the moon for all eternity.

Having structured and codified the realm of divine goodness, theologians set about constructing the realm of Satanic evil. Following Aristotle’s theory of radical contrariety, they ensured that earthly evil would be the absolute inversion of heavenly goodness in all of its qualities and parts.¹² Sublunary evil was envisioned as an inverted hierarchy, with Satan at its nadir enthroned in the icy core of the dark and fetid earth. Aquinas and his colleagues argued that fallen angels did not have natural bodies, but could collect moist and fetid “earthly exhalations,” or noxious air, in order to manifest in physical forms.¹³ Once coagulated from the “dark atmosphere” that was their home, Satan and his demons most often appeared as monstrous black angels with leathery wings and deformed features. Created as inverted beings, they spoke through their asses and shat through their mouths; associated with the lower bowels and the reproductive organs, they emitted a continual stench of sulphur and dead fish.¹⁴ While demons had the power to “hover through the fog and filthy air,” they remained trapped in the sublunary realm, bound to the corrupt earth—the cold and dry element associated with autumn, black bile melancholy, the colors black and grey, and death—from which they might never ascend.¹⁵

Wicked as they might be, Satan and his minions were initially limited in their power; they could not operate beyond natural law or physics, nor did they work together effectively towards a common goal. They had, after all, fallen from heaven because of their own willfulness, their refusal to submit to any power other than their own. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, demonic enti-

ties were increasingly ascribed greater power over their human prey. Aquinas, for example, argued that while demons were bound by natural law, they had roamed the earth for millennia and, having retained their angelic intelligence despite their fall from grace, grown more perceptive and learned many tricks with which to fool the feeble minds of women and men.¹⁶ Events over the course of the fourteenth century, including the Great Famine, the Black Death, the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and the Great Schism, as well the multiplication of heretics such as Jan Hus and his followers, led many theologians to believe that the Church was under assault by Satanic forces empowered by God to punish his wretched and disobedient children. While the early fifteenth-century cleric Johannes Nider saw this demonic assault as a call to reform the Church in its head and members, many others, such as the author of the *Errores Gazariorum* and Heinrich Kramer, imagined that Satan and his demons had organized themselves into a disciplined and hierarchical army whose primary objective was the destruction of the Christian Body.¹⁷ Like the angels that had subsumed their own will to that of the Deity, so too had demons, apparently, become enslaved in obedience to their Lord Satan.

According to these latter sources, Satan's army was joined in its efforts to destroy orderly and obedient Christendom by devout human followers, including heretics, witches, Jews, and Muslims, all of whom were non-Christian and therefore cast into league with the Devil—the only other option in a radical binary system.¹⁸ Like the demons whose will they obeyed, these Satanic “others” were ascribed inverted bodies, dominated by elemental earth and its correlating humor, black bile. According to medieval medical theory, those suffering from an excess of black bile were subject to fits of burning rage; this overheating produced “a dried, concentrated, opaque, black body” that, through the dispersion of heat, became increasingly cold, yielding a heavy and ashen clot forever bound to the earth.¹⁹ This fundamentally cold physiology drove the melancholiac to crave the consumption of human blood, preferably that of Christian children, and to commit “perverse” sexual acts.²⁰ Wicked individuals no longer acted alone and according to their own will; instead, all evil was bound together into an inverted hierarchy constructed according to Aristotelian precepts as the absolute inversion of Christian perfection. In this upside-down Satanic world, every element of Christianity was mocked and reversed, a process evident in sources from the *Errores Gazariorum* (1430) and the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) to the full elaboration of the Witches' Sabbath as Black Mass in Nicholas Remy's *Demonolatriy* (1595), Francesco Maria Guazzo's *Compendium Maleficarum* (1608) and Pierre de Lancre's *On the Inconstancy of Witches* (1612).²¹ Witchcraft treatises such as these—which enjoyed a wide readership—reinforced deeply held beliefs that evil was inherently Satanic, involved inversions

of Christian worship by melancholic “others” who did not conform to socially accepted constructs of goodness, and entailed the submission of one’s will to the Devil Himself, often through the signing of a formal pact.²²

MODERN MEANINGS: FROM SATANIC ENSLAVEMENT TO SELF-POSSESSION TO ANNIHILATION IN BLACK METAL ECSTASY

Under the quills of medieval clerics, the inverted signifiers of Satanic otherness became a deep discourse of power backed by the unquestionable authority of characters such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Aristotle. After all, Christian scholars had set the agenda, constructed the binary system, and codified evil against their own narrow and slavish conception of goodness. Despite the novel epistemologies and modes of discourse that have fueled successive paradigm shifts from the late medieval to the postmodern world(s), the scholastic construction of Satanic evil and the specific rationality upon which it operates and to which it is perpetually bound remain virtually unchanged. From J. K. Huysmans’ *Là-Bas* and the Grand Guignol works of André De Lorde to the delicious schlock of the modern supernatural horror film and paranormal “reality” television, the colors black, white, and red, the seasons of autumn and winter, the witching hours of midnight and three o’clock in the morning, icy drafts, inverted crosses, black candles, and goat heads continue to function as inverted and melancholic signifiers of Satanic evil—although few viewers know how or why.²³ In the ethos of black metal, Satanic signifiers have come to serve as powerful weapons with the ability to provoke sublime terror in uninitiated outsiders who often respond to them in a near-reptilian fashion, in slavish obedience to deep discourses that they do not comprehend. This deeply-coded and inverted aesthetic not only commands power over a captive and sheep-like audience, but also codes the black metal self as the abject, empowered, and evil “other.”²⁴

In late twentieth-century Norway, the crucible in which Satanic black metal was distilled and rarified, inversion would serve as a means of “othering” and a darkened path to self-empowerment.²⁵ Unmoved and unmoving, Norway has long had an exceptionally stable economy and a static bourgeois culture; it is likewise a bastion of Lutheran conservatism, a world in which everyone is expected to adhere to Christian mores, or at least appear to. In response to what they saw as the emptiness and hypocrisy of Norwegian culture, young bands such as the now-iconic *Mayhem* adopted the Satanic aesthetic as a core element of their identity.²⁶ In donning black leather, black t-shirts, and corpse paint, using inverted crosses, pentagrams, and blackened churches in their iconography, and incorporating self-

mutilation and necrotic animal parts into their live performances, *Mayhem* appropriated the medieval construction of inverted evil as a weapon against the heinous Christian once-self and now “other.” The use of the Satanic by Norwegian black metal groups such as *Mayhem*, *Darkthrone*, *Immortal*, *Emperor*, *Burzum*, and *Gorgoroth* was particularly effective in eliciting outrageous responses from the conservative community both in Norway and throughout the Christian West. Emerging at the height of the Satanic Panic, a period in which the middle class saw itself embattled with evil forces in a dying world, the inverted iconography of black metal and the anti-Christian activities of many of its members were the culmination of bourgeois Christianity’s worst nightmares—a rebellious youth enslaved by Satan and at war with God.²⁷

For those who were called by the darkness, whether they gathered at Øystein Aarseth’s *Helvete* record store, exchanged underground tapes through the mail, or attended performances, black metal served not merely a means of reactionary rebellion, but perhaps more importantly as a Satanic path to purification. The Satanic aesthetic, for example, delineated Norwegian black metal from other forms of Metal, such as Death Metal, which were not seen as extreme or “pure” enough. This quest for mythical purity runs like a blackened thread through the inverted world of northern black metal, most often taking the form of a return to an ancient pagan landscape dominated by darkness, cold, wind, and rocky earth.²⁸ In the Metal imagination—which is informed by modern masculinities and Romanticism as much as medievalism and the Satanic—a return to the primal past entails the return of the Norse gods, such as Wōden, and a warrior culture founded on individual ingenuity, prowess, and brute force.²⁹ Through the black metal looking glass, the “true” and “pure” Norway is constructed as a realm of sublunary melancholia, replete with vengeful and anti-Christian pagan gods and warriors who, wearing leather and brandishing swords and axes, appear against empty autumnal and winter landscapes, ensconced in fetid fog beneath a full moon. These primeval images are conflated with the earth-bound and inverted structures of Satanism, including desecrated cemeteries, burning churches, upside-down crosses, the celebration of the Black Mass (at Kraków and otherwise), and the invocation of the Devil Himself. This inverted Norway is a frigid land laden with the pure power of dark destruction, the throne of earth-bound evil.³⁰ In conflating the pagan past, melancholic elements, and Satanic inversion, the black metal aesthetic is consistent with medieval scholastic constructs, according to which pagan Norway was the land of wicked gods, trolls and witchcraft—all of which were cast into the category of un-Christian evil—as well as the source of *Septentrio*, the cold and dry

winds that swept down from the northern wastes, bringing winter's death to the fields and forests of the bountiful south.

This medievalism and the inverted aesthetics of Satanic black metal have spread like evil seeds from the northern pagan vastlands and the United Kingdom to Greece, Romania, the United States, Mexico, and Japan. In the process, black metal has become a transnational culture with a shared set of codes and signifiers that identify its producers and consumers as members of an inner circle, a Satanic elite within a larger metal community. While the black metal aesthetic is salient across cultures and conforms to the medieval scholastic construction of evil, it is legion in its meanings and interpretations across multiple contexts. Many within the black metal magic circle claim that they have found the path to liberation and self-empowerment. The darkened mirror of black metal, however, contains myriad inversions upon inversions, each reflection revealing the hopeless enslavement of the blackened self until its ultimate consummation with dark oblivion.

In the mirror's first layer, Satanic black metal appears to be a path to freedom from social constructs, a liberation from conservative ideals. In donning the externals of black metal, an individual is defining him or herself as separate from mainstream culture, as a purportedly empowered evil "other." Like a living mirror, the black metal self manifests the repulsiveness of Christian and mainstream society, mocks its fetid hypocrisy, and reflects it back outward, laughing as if to say, "This is what you are." Problematically, this reactionary abjection and inversion bind black metal to its hated other through *jouissance*, a form of desire. Furthermore, taking on the inverted identity of that which one hates only serves to validate the hated other. This is one of the primary complications of using Satanism as a means of countering Christianity. Satanism and its inverted signifiers are above all Christian constructs codified by theologians in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries using the authority of Scripture, the Church Fathers, and Aristotle. To adhere mindlessly to the Satanic metal aesthetic is to become trapped in a binary system in which two inverted categories perpetually spin around a single shared axis of meaning.³¹

This enslavement to distant discourses of power is even more fraught when Satanic black metal moves beyond the Euro-Christian West and into non-Christian and post-colonial contexts.³² As an inversion of Christian goodness, the black metal aesthetic makes sense as a means to counter the dominant culture in a Christian society; but what do upside-down crosses, the color black, and pentagrams signify in Japan? The Japanese band Sigh incorporates both Satanic signifiers and Buddhist imagery into their aesthetic, suggesting an augmented binary inversion. In an act of double-coding, the inverted Satanic signifiers represent the rejection of the

Western Christian other that occupied Japan after World War II as well as the Japanese experience of their own willful submission to that other as wholly repulsive and abject; the Buddhist images, on the other hand, represent a reclaiming of a pre-Christian and mythically pure Japanese identity, one that is in a continual process of self-annihilation.³³ A similar case can be made for the Mexican black metal group Funereal Moon, whose discography reads like a late-medieval treatise on melancholic demons. Their lead singer, Darvula, wears a black monastic robe and corpse paint which features inverted crosses over both of his eyes and an inverted pentagram on his forehead. These signifiers, in particular the marking of Darvula's body, speak not only to rebellion against the dominant and conservative Catholic culture of modern Mexico, but also the Western, white, colonial, slave-holding "other" that Catholicism represents. In both Japan and Mexico, the black metal aesthetic serves as a means of expressing abjection toward and reclamation of the subjected body from the Christian and colonial invader.³⁴ While this appears to be a path towards liberation and personal empowerment, it is nevertheless a trap that binds the post-colonial self to the European other through a medieval Christian discourse of power. After all, no matter how evil Satan gets, He still plays by—and validates—Christianity's rules.

In keeping with the medieval construction of inverted and hierarchical evil, the black metal aesthetic often represents a state of enslavement, not only to old paradigms and to Satan Himself, but also to the tyranny of the purportedly-Satanic collective.³⁵ Bound together into a group of un-Christian un-believers, those who participate in black metal culture at this first and binary reflective level form an inverted organization that is as conservative in its behaviors and beliefs as orthodox Christianity. For example, much of the rhetoric of black metal culture focuses on what constitutes "true" black metal; one t-shirt has Mayhem's album cover for *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* on the back with a superimposed inverted pentagram and a roundel stating "Orthodox Black Metal Fundametalist." Funny? Yes, but not that far from the truth. Message boards and YouTube comment strands are replete with discussions of which bands are "real" black metal and which are "posers"; true black metal is often traced back to the Norwegian scene in the 1990s and therefore tied to white hegemonic constructs.

Not only bands but behaviors are governed by this slavish collective. Returning to the message boards, conservative strains within the ethos of Satanic black metal are not only anti-Christian—comment after comment demands that real black metal-heads must deny Christianity, worship the Devil, and participate in other stereotypically "evil" activities straight out of the *Malleus Maleficarum*—but also predominantly anti-gay. Rumors periodically surface about Gylve "Fenriz" Nagell

of Darkthrone being gay, perhaps because of his love of Icelandic electronica, which is, according to the collective, decidedly NOT black metal.³⁶ More recently, Gaahl, the lead singer of Gorgoroth, one of the most notorious black metal Norwegian bands, revealed that he was in a relationship with a male fashion designer. Up until this juncture, Gaahl had been elevated by some as the paragon of black metal masculinity and a paradigm for Satanic evil. Within the conservative black metal community, responses to Gaahl's homosexuality have been predominantly negative, ranging from comments claiming that gay men can't be a part of black metal to those claiming that homosexuals are an abomination that should be cleansed from the earth.³⁷ In fact, much of the black metal rhetoric surrounding Gaahl's sexual orientation has been indistinguishable from that of conservative and fundamentalist Christianity. One commenter called out several Gaahl-bashers, arguing that if they were truly black metal and truly Satanic, shouldn't they do and believe everything that Christians do not—shouldn't they actually be extremely liberal, to the point of anarchy?³⁸ Surrounded by mindless sheep enslaved by distant discourses and the tyranny of the collective, the lone voice in the internet wilderness went unanswered.

Behind this binary and superficial reflection in the black metal mirror lies a complex and more distant image: that of the single blackened self, standing alone in a barren waste, much like a gnarled and blackened tree against a northern winter sky. Here, Satanic inversions signify a return to the true Lucifer, the rebellious Angel of Light who refused to submit himself to God's will and to become enslaved by the divine. Cast down from heaven to the world below the moon, Lucifer crashed into the melancholic earth, dwelling within its icy core and wandering through its barren wastes.³⁹ Free from enslavement, his will bent to no one, Satan was left to contemplate his own existence, to act as his own god. Similarly, the aesthetics of black metal serve as a means of marking the Satanic self as an independent entity, a being separate from divine will and Christian constructs. In this deeper layer of the mirror, the individual is unbound, liberated from the prison-like strictures of good and evil, potentially free to live life according to the dictates of his or her own inner Satan.

Such liberation requires a reordering of morality centered on the self and the concomitant rejection of social codes and values; at an extreme, it demands that the blackened self eschew human society altogether and live in complete solitude like a disdainful Nietzschean hawk awaiting a chance to feed upon tender lambs' flesh.⁴⁰ In this we might think once again of Gaahl, purportedly living in his ancient house perched on the deeply-forested slope of a northern fjord.⁴¹ From his melancholic aerie, Gaahl gave an interview to VICE in which he described his soli-

tary existence and his primal disgust for human society, including the fanboys of black metal who follow like a mindless flock of sheep, who erect for themselves false gods that they worship and obey.⁴² Like Nietzsche, Gaahl argues that the tyranny of the collective—be it Christianity, black metal, socialism, or what have you—must be destroyed. “This is what the fall of the false gods will do; basically, you will be allowed to focus on the god within yourself. Of course, that’s the only true god.” The complete rejection of the collective, however, proves nearly impossible. Gaahl goes on to say that the god in the self is connected to the “god in all things; God is within nature, and nature will always grow. That is the force of all life, is to grow.” The primal return to a deified natural world resounds throughout the work of Cascadian black metal bands such as Wolves in the Throne Room, who see the eco-destructive hive mind of modern civilization as a sorrowful vastness of “lifeless chaos,” a world laid bare by “black religion.”⁴³ Both Gaahl’s Satanism and Cascadian black metal are problematic in their attempts to reject the collective in favor of an anchoritic life in the wilderness. Once liberated from human society, the blackened self must somehow return to a harmonious, eternal, and “human” nature—a physical place and ontological state from which the modern individual has alienated him or herself entirely—where it will be once again enslaved by the laws of nature and endless cycles of growth, death, decay, and regeneration.⁴⁴

Staring deep into the darkened looking glass, far beyond distant discourses of medieval inversion, beyond the false hope of a return to a mythic and primal past, beyond the empty promise of a truly liberated and sentient existence, the blackened self sees its inverted reflection reverberating into a formless void, a vanishing point.⁴⁵ In this Lovecraftian space of maddening non-being, of “cosmic outside-ness,” the discursive regimes of Medievalism, Christianity, and Satanism cease to exist. Like all of its gods and devils, human society disappears into the darkness, along with the need to define oneself against it. The black metal aesthetic loses all power to signify and dissolves into the very darkness it attempted to convey. In the place of humanness, of nature, of growth, of time . . . there is nothing. Here, in the moment of dark illumination, the viewer encounters the final inversion—non-human non-existence—and at last achieves true liberation through destruction. At the still point, in a moment of ecstatic union with the darkness, the self is annihilated in blackness and absorbed into the Oneness of Nothing, unfettered at last.

NOTES

¹ On the magic circle as a realm of play and transcendence, see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955). On otherness and othering, see the works of Michel Foucault, in particular *A History of Sexuality, Volume I* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

² For the use of Freudian and Lacanian uncanny in horror, see Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005).

³ On abjection, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁴ “And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Amazon Digital, 2011), Aphorism 146.

⁵ The works of Aristotle had arrived at the medieval university with myriad medical, legal, and philosophical texts as a result of the twelfth-century translation movement, during which Latin scholars traveled to areas of the Iberian peninsula purportedly “reclaimed” from Islam, translated the Arabic texts housed in the Madrasas there, and returned with them to Europe. For more on the Arabic inheritance, see Dmitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arab Culture: The Greco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁶ Edward Grant, *The Nature of Natural Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2010), 6: “...almost all theologians can be said to have acquired extensive knowledge of natural philosophy. Many undoubtedly regarded it as worthy of study in itself and not merely because of its traditional role as the handmaiden of theology.” See also William of Auvergne, *The Universe of Creatures*, trans. Roland J. Teske (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998).

⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 6:7, states that the Prime Mover set the cosmos in motion out of love. See also Aristotle, *Physics*, 8. For a full elaboration of the Aristotelian cosmos in the medieval world, see Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸ “These four bodies are fire, air, water, earth. Fire occupies the highest place among them all, earth the lowest, and two elements correspond to these in their relation to one another, air being nearest to fire, water to earth. The whole world surrounding the earth, then, the affections of which are our subject, is made up of these bodies.” Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1:2. “So at the center and round it we get earth and water, the heaviest and coldest elements, by themselves; round them and contiguous with them, air and what we commonly call fire.” Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1:3.

⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, *passim*.

¹⁰ Aquinas insisted that it was composed of the purest ether, or rarified fire, hot and dry. Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cam-

bridge University Press, 1996), 373. See also Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Aquinas, "Treatise on the Angels," in the *Summa Theologica* (questions 50–64). Cf. Thomas Cantimpré, "Life of Christina the Astonishing," in *Thomas Cantimpre: The Collected Saints' Lives*, ed. Margot King and Barbara Newman, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 131: "And see how quick the Angels were to obey the bidding of the Lord!"

¹² On Aristotle and radical inversion, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and "Inversion, Misrule, and the Meaning of Witchcraft," *Past and Present* 87 (1980), 98–127.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, "De Distinctione Angelicorum Spirituum," *De Substantiis Separatis*, trans. Francis J. Lescoe (1959). From the *Summa Theologica*, Part One, Article 64: "Consequently a twofold place of punishment is due to the demons: one, by reason of their sin, and this is hell; and another, in order that they may tempt men, and thus the darksome atmosphere is their due place of punishment." This correlates with Aristotle's theory of atmospheric clouds as the "exhalations" of the earth, cold and moist. See Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 1:3.

¹⁴ See R. B. Pynsent, "The Devil's Stench and Living Water: A Study of Demons and Adultery in Czech Vernacular Literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71 (1993): *The Slavonic and East European Review* 71 (1993), 601–30. See also Martha Bayless, *Sin and Filth in Medieval Culture: The Devil in the Latrine* (London: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁵ "All fair is foul, and foul is fair, hover through the fog and the filthy air." Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 1.1, 11–12. For a discussion of black, melancholia, and evil, see François Azouvi, "The Plague, Melancholy, and the Devil," *Diogenes* 27 (1979), 112–30.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *On the Sentences*, Part Two, d. 7, q. 2, a. 1. On the particular vulnerability of women to demons, see Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ On Nider, the Council of Basel, his agenda for reform, and the *Formicarius*, see Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State Press, 2002), as well as Michael D. Bailey and Edward Peters, "A Sabbat of Demonologists: Basel 1430–1441," *The Historian* 65 (2003), 1375–1395. On the *Malleus Maleficarum*, see Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

¹⁸ For an alternative perspective on alterity versus binary and the construction of categories, see Eugene Thacker, "Three Questions on Demonology," *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro (CreateSpace, 2010), 179–220.

¹⁹ Azouvi, "The Plague, Melancholy, and the Devil," 114. See also Ireven M. Resnick, *Marks of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

²⁰ This conformed not only to medieval medical theory, in which the humorally imbalanced body craved substances with qualities contrary to those it contained in excess in order to rebalance itself, but also to ancient rhetorical constructs of otherness—including accusations of sexual perversion and cannibalism—such as that recorded in the works of Mincius Felix. See David Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

²¹ For other early descriptions of the inverted Witches' Sabbath, see Jacquier's *De calcatione daemonum* (1452) and the *Flagellum haereticorum fascinariorum* (1458).

²² For the medieval roots of the pact, see Alain Boureau, *Satan the Heretic: The Birth of Demonology in the Medieval West* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006).

²³ On the ways in which these signifiers work within the specific rationality of the paranormal, see Brenda Gardenour Walter, "Phantasmic Science: Medieval Theology, Victorian Spiritualism, and the Specific Rationality of Twenty-First Century Ghost Hunting," *Jefferson Journal of Science and Culture* 3 (2013).

²⁴ The appropriation of evil to define and empower the self is not new, having been adopted by Renaissance *magi*, early modern Hellfire Clubs, and the modern quasi-Satanist, Anton LaVey. LaVey's use of over-the-top inverted Satanic aesthetics, for example, served as a means of mocking mainstream, pseudo-Christian middle class America, as well as their children, the purportedly peace-loving hippies—the very world from which LaVey himself came. See *Satanis: The Devil's Mass*, a 1970 documentary by Anton LaVey himself, as well as Blanche Barton's *The Secret Life of a Satanist: The Authorized Biography of Anton LaVey* (Los Angeles: Feral House Press, 1992).

²⁵ This is not meant to disrespect earlier, non-Norwegian black metal bands such as *Venom*. The Norwegian scene, with its violence and church burnings, brought the aesthetic to a global audience, and therefore serves as my starting point.

²⁶ For general background, see Michael Moynihan's tabloid-esque *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003).

²⁷ On the Satanic Panic, see Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000) and *Lucifer Ascending: The Occult in Folk and Popular Culture* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003). For hilarity's sake, see Geraldo Rivera's 1988 NBC primetime special, "Devil Worship: Exposing Satan's Underground," as well as Carl A. Raschke, *Painted Black: From Drug Killings to Heavy Metal, the Alarming True Story of How Satanism is Terrorizing Our Communities* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990).

²⁸ The association of paganism with the Satanic is beyond troublesome; one is pre-Christian, the other is the product of Christianity, and both were collapsed into the same category of "non-Christian non-goodness" by medieval clerics.

²⁹ This is, of course, a past forged by the Romantics, not an actual representation of early-medieval pagan life. Romantic strains can be seen in Bjorn's comment from Mats

Lundberg's 2008 documentary, *Black Metal Satanica*: The Norse gods "were far more personal. To put it into Black Metal, it had something to do with the nature, your blood." (One can't help seeing *Blut und Boden* in this sort of discourse, but the role of Romanticism in nationalism and fascism are beyond the boundaries of this discussion.)

³⁰ See Brenda Gardenour Walter, "Corrupt Air, Poisonous Places, and the Toxic Breath of Witches in Late-Medieval Medicine and Theology" in *Toxic Airs: Body, Place, Planet in Historical Perspective*, eds. James Rodger Fleming and Ann Johnson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

³¹ Even if, as Derrida would argue, that meaning is of necessity decentered. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), 357–70.

³² For an overview of transnational Metal, see *Black Metal: Beyond the Darkness* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012).

³³ On double coding, see Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987). In the case of Japan, an interesting pattern emerges. As the hated colonial past returns, the subjected culture attempts to return to a distant and mythologized past before the colonization. The effect is that of a perpetually-spinning vortex leading back into oblivion in order to escape existence in the present.

³⁴ On Mexico and the legacy of the *encomienda* system, see Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States 1492–Present* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005); on Japanese subjection of the body, brothels, and self-hatred, see John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton & Company, 1999).

³⁵ In Mats Lundberg's documentary *Black Metal Satanica* (Cleopatra: 2008) Ondskapt says "We don't have a book, you understand. We do have a very strong foundation, which is inverted Christianity . . . one basically has to believe very strongly that it is right to kill, it is right to steal, it is right to do all of these wicked deeds. And when you realize that you do these things for a higher power . . . when you are a slave to this higher power . . . you are seeing a devil worshipper."

³⁶ This discourse has increased since the cultic popularity of Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell's documentary, *Until the Light Takes Us* (Variance Films: 2009).

³⁷ From a YouTube comment thread: "What gets me so winded up is Gaahl's blatant hypocrisy. here he is "Mr. Evil" in his fuckin' cellar/dungeon trying his best to look as evil as possible hailing Satan as his inspiration to everything - very black metal I must say - And then him and his bum-chum decide to bring out a ladies clothing range and silly bright frocks. Oh and apparently the name of the range means "Happiness" in some old Norwegian dialect or whatever who cares. Cut the shit man . . . Gaahl is just a nancy-boy trying to be all fuckin' brutal and once again just proves that his so-called "metal is a way of life" bullshit really is just another front to look all superior - when in the end he's just the bitch of some kid boyfriend. U can't be brutal and a nancy-boy at the same time, to say you can

is a very hard argument to make . . .” From http://www.metalstorm.net/events/news_comments.php?news_id=7573&page=2&message_id.

³⁸ “Since when is being a Satanist supposed to be the “epitome of masculinity”? Gaahl is VERY anti-Christian; what’s more anti-Christian than being gay? And also, what makes yo think that all Gays are “little Sissies”? Try telling that to Gaahl after he overpowered a straight guy enough to tie him to a chair and torture him for six hours. Or tell the bears, or the Ancient Romans or Greeks, who fucked AND kicked ass all over Europe for decades.” From http://www.metalstorm.net/events/news_comments.php?news_id=7573&page=2&message_id.

³⁹ British Library, MS Egerton 2781, *Book of Hours*, 14th Century.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Helen Zimmern (Amazon Digital, 2011).

⁴¹ “True Norwegian Black Metal,” prods. Peter Beste, Rob Semmer, Iver Berglin, and Mike Washlesky (Vice Broadcasting Systems, 2007). Gaahl in reality lived in a flat in Bergen where he had an active social life; his solitary boyhood home, however, is an integral part of his aesthetic construction.

⁴² “I have no interest in getting a flock of sheep . . . then I would be just as bad as society is . . . There are so many of these sheep characters . . .”

⁴³ Wolves in the Throne Room, “Behold the Vastness and Sorrow,” *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord, 2007).

⁴⁴ On our separation from nature, see Steven Shakespeare, “The Light that Illuminates Itself, the Dark that Soils Itself: Blackened Notes from Schelling’s Underground,” in Masciandaro, ed., *Hideous Gnosis: Black Metal Theory Symposium 1*.

⁴⁵ One might think here of Schopenhauer’s belief that each level of aesthetics gives way until one ultimately sees the true condition of human life, which is suffering, and will be repulsed.