

“Dark Lord of Gorgoroth” Black Metal and the Works of Tolkien⁹⁹

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, I will discuss the influence of Tolkien's fiction in a subgenre of extreme hard rock music known as “black metal”. Tolkien's Middle-earth plays an important role for many bands of this genre, and their use of the Catholic author's fantasy world can be seen in band names, artwork, lyrics and pseudonyms. Themes from Middle-earth are occasionally mixed with satanic imagery, as well as heathen lyrics. A pre-

⁹⁹ I would like to express my gratitude to Tom Shippey, who has read and commented on my text. This text grew out of a paper that I presented in 2011 at the conference “Satanism in Western culture: International conference on the Devil's disciples”, Stockholm University, Sweden. After writing this article I became aware of another article on a similar topic by Michael Cunningham (2010). I have, at the very last moment, tried to take his interesting contribution into consideration. Cunningham also considers role playing games an important factor for individuals of the black metal milieu. He discusses black metal in a wide context including the early Norwegian scene and Fenriz and Varg Vikernes, but does not propose, like I do, that Tolkien influenced black metal started with them.

liminary search of the archives of the website Metal for black metal bands that use Tolkien as lyrical themes, yields a result of 85 different bands, and if the search is performed on "metal band" overall, the result is as many as 151 entries. The search does not take into account occasional references to Tolkien, nor does it take into account pseudonyms of band members or artwork being used for the records.¹⁰⁰

Black metal and the use of Antichristian lyrics are naturally inconsistent with Tolkien's personal world view and his fiction. In his imaginary world there are evil powers at play, but we must not forget that we're in a fictive world, one that Tolkien described as a sub-creation. Even though Tolkien made this world convincing, partly based on his use of languages, history, legends and myths, they remain of fiction, believable narratives, but still not reality. The aim of this paper is to explore why bands, of the so-called "second wave" of Scandinavian black metal, have chosen Tolkien as a medium to support their satanic imagery and anti-social worldview. I will also discuss how black metal bands became influenced by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. Analysing band names, stage names, lyrics, and cover art for their albums, will help us understand why and how Tolkien matters to this particular sub-culture. In order to discuss how different bands ex-

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.metal-archives.com/>

press Tolkienian concepts and ideologies, I will present material chosen from a few influential bands, from the period 1989-1995, and try to clarify why black metal bands find his Christian works so attractive. I will not, however, discuss how evil is expressed and functions in Tolkien's Middle-earth. The reason is simple; it is rather irrelevant for the black metal artists. They drew inspiration from Tolkien's fiction, but were never interested in Tolkien's understandings of evil. For them, Tolkien's fiction, together with other sources, served as a stimulus; it created an attitude and the right kind of atmosphere.

WHAT IS BLACK METAL?

In the early 1990s, several related events in Scandinavia shocked the public and attracted massive media attention, making multiple headlines; it was a time of several church burnings, threats, grave desecrations, murders and suicides that could be traced to influential persons in a particular milieu, known as The Black Circle.¹⁰¹ 15 members of the scene were arrested for acts of violence, and somewhere between 15 and 20 of Norway's old wooden stave-churches became targets

¹⁰¹ It should be mentioned that this kind of behaviour was never and is not the norm within black metal, but is rather extreme, even for this particular subculture.

for arson (Phillipov). The Black Circle began as a small and marginal group of anti-social individuals who shared the same musical preferences, had a similar misanthropic ideology and announced a self-identified satanic worldview. The Inner Circle, as they were also known, consisted of the core members from the black metal scene. Most of them stayed in touch by letters, met at concerts, or gathered at the record shop *Helvete* (meaning: "Hell"), located in Oslo, in Norway. The dominant individuals during this period were Euronymous from the band Mayhem, and Grishnackh from the band Burzum. But many bands and individuals were also indispensable in creating the modern black metal genre; particularly Scandinavian bands such as Dissection, Emperor, Darkthrone, Gorgoroth, Enslaved, Satyricon, Immortal, Marduk, Hades, Dark Funeral, Thorns, Abruptum and so on. Nathan T Birk writes that: "their recordings during this era – again, collectively and individually – wove a rich, complex, and above all enduring fabric quite unique to the more secular definition of Black Metal during the 1980s" (Birk, 9). In the earlier period, the 1980s, the term black metal had begun to be used to refer to a special form of metal with overtly satanic form. The 1980s saw the rise of many bands that used satanical themes in their artwork or in their lyrics, pioneered by bands such as Venom, Bathory, Celtic Frost, and Hellhammer. The English band Venom released three highly influential

albums: *Welcome to Hell* (1981), *Black Metal* (1982) and *At War with Satan* (1983) that would make a tremendous impression on the scene. Many bands used extreme occult imagery and blasphemy as inspiration, such as Death SS, Slayer, Onslaught, Sodom, Mercyful Fate, Possessed, Sarcófago, Sabbath, Master's Hammer, Samael, and Antichrist and so on (cf. Patterson). In itself, flirtation with the occult was nothing new, it had been done already in the 1960s, with bands such as The Coven, Black Widow, Black Sabbath or Led Zepplin, to name just a few (Moynihan & Söderlind, 1-32). The younger bands, especially those which identified themselves as black metal, would take the satanic topics much further and embrace a self-identified Satanism and blasphemy wholeheartedly.¹⁰² Some would even combine their misanthropic philosophy with all kinds of evil, and embrace both racism and fascism (on the later, see Taylor, Olson). Even though some bands could express racist or political statements in interviews or use Nazi imagery, the scene was relatively apolitical and more concerned with being provocative. Black metal is an extreme offshoot of heavy metal music, with its own particular subculture and imagery. The music can be described as "characterized by

¹⁰² There was never a philosophical or religious system. Satanism in this case is a used as term for self-identification of an elite ideology that many members of the scene used of themselves, with the intention of appearing provocative and dangerous.

screamed, high-pitched vocals, extremely rapid tempos, 'tremolo' riffs, a 'trebly' guitar sound, and simple production values" (Kahn-Harris, 4). This second wave of black metal which predominantly surfaced in Norway and Sweden in the early 90s is what interests us here. Black metal is usually defined by opposition; they exist and are considered black metal in reference to what they oppose (cf. Olson 2008). Most black metal bands of the early 90s considered "death metal" as something low-minded, and considered themselves superior, even though most of the bands actually started out as death metal acts. Black metal musicians saw Christianity as something pathetic, a system for the weak that festered on Norway. They considered their own beliefs, usually a mixture of satanic symbols, pessimism, self-pride, and pagan sympathy, as grander and worthy of a northern spirit. Sometimes it was emphasized with fascistic statements. Tolkien had another understanding of this and wrote in a letter to his son, Michael, in 1941:

"I have in this War [Second World War] a burning private grudge – which would probably make me a better soldier at 49 than I was at 22: against that ruddy little ignoramus Adolf Hitler (for the odd thing about demonic inspiration and impetus is that it in no way enhances the purely intellectual stature: it chiefly affects the mere

will). Ruining, perverting, misapplying, and making for ever accursed, that noble northern spirit, a supreme contribution to Europe, which I have ever loved, and tried to present in its true light." (Letter 45, in Carpenter, 55-56).

Tolkien once said in a letter to his friend, Father Robert Murray in 1953:

"The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism." (Letter 142, in Carpenter, 172)

What do individuals who embrace evil and heathen beliefs, have to do with a Catholic writer and his fictional world Middle-earth? At first glance, they have nothing in common and it would seem as if black metal musicians would stay as far away from a Christian writer as they could. Still, there is something in Tolkien's fictional world that might appear as realistic or even heathen (depending on the understanding of the

reader).¹⁰³ To explore this strange paradox a travel back in time, to earlier rock music, is necessary.

THE USE OF TOLKIENIAN THEMES IN ROCK MUSIC

In the 1960s J.R.R. Tolkien's fiction became increasingly known and the fandom mainly started in the United States, in the context of the hippie and anti-war movement, to the dismay of Tolkien himself who had no good words for this youthful enthusiasm and misunderstanding of his works. By the end of the 1960s Tolkien's Middle-earth was well-known, particularly among students and younger people, who in turn drew inspiration from Tolkien's works. From the beginning his works attracted serious admirers and enthusiasts, as well as those who dismissed his works or used every opportunity to slander his novels (Curry, 5-10; Shippey, 305-328). Many of his admirers were greatly inspired by his secondary world and all of his invented languages. This appreciation of Middle-earth naturally served as inspiration for many musicians. Before we turn to Norway and the first use of Tolkien's works in black metal, an outline of earlier rock albums inspired by Tolkien will serve as a good backdrop. Two of the most influential bands for the hard

rock music scene in general are Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath both of whom drew on Tolkien for poetic creativeness. Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin paraphrases a poem that Tolkien wrote in Quenya in the opening lines of the song "Ramble On". Led Zeppelin went on to reference Tolkien in two songs from 1971: "Misty Mountain Hop" and "The Battle of Evermore". When Geezer Butler wrote the lyrics for the song "The Wizard" on Black Sabbath's debut album (1970), he was reading *The Lord of the Rings* and was inspired by Gandalf. Surprisingly, one of the most significant individuals for metal music, Ian "Lemmy" Kilmister (who would form Motörhead) sang a song directly based on Tolkien, as early as 1969. At that time he was the vocalist and lead guitarist of the band Sam Gopal. On their album *Escalator*, there is a song called "The Dark Lord" that mention both the black riders and Sauron's eye. Other bands include Rush who wrote the song "Rivendell" for their album *Fly By Night* (1974) and "The Necromancer" from *Caress of Steel* (1975), and Camel who did a song called "Nimrod/The Procession/The White Rider" on their album *Mirage* (1974). Many more bands followed and established Tolkien-based themes as an element in progressive and hard rock music.¹⁰⁴ Even one of the members

¹⁰³ Tolkien's use of Old Norse myths is explored in Kuusela 2014.

¹⁰⁴ For example: Jack Bruce (from The Cream) "To Isengard" on *Songs for a Tailor* (1969); The Grateful Dead "Mountains of the Moon" on *American Beauty* (1970); Elephant's Memory "Old Man Willow" on *Elephant's Memory* (1969);

of Venom, Jeff "Mantas" Dunn, recorded a song called "Lothlorien" for the cassette compilation *Powertrax* in 1986. The Swedish heavy metal band 220 Volt recorded a demo in 1982 with a song called "Sauron", that was included as the B-side on their single *Prisoner of War* in the same year. The German metal band Running Wild used lyrical themes similar to Venom on their first two albums; on the second album *Branded and Exiled* from 1985 there is a song called "Mordor".¹⁰⁵

What about Norway and Sweden? There is actually one progressive rock band from Norway which made use of Tolkien's fiction as early as the 1970s. The band Prudence recorded two songs in 1974, "Gandalf" (instrumental) and "Bilbo and Frodo", the first one for their record *No. 3* and the second one as a single. In Sweden, the musician Bo Hansson released an instrumental album entitled *Sagan om ringen* in 1970, which was later released as *Music Inspired by Lord of the Rings*

Argent, "Lothlórien" on *Ring of Hands* (1971); Folly's Pool "Before the Gates of Elessar" on *Folly's Pool* (1977); Andy Goldmark, "Lord of the Ring" on *Andy Goldmark* (1973); Avalon "Land of Mordor" on *Voice of Life* (1977); Barclay James Harvest "Galadriel" on *Once Again* (1971); Mountain "Tired Angels" on *Nantucket Sleighride* (1971); Styx "Lords of the Ring" on *Pieces of Eight* (1978). A good list of bands influenced by Tolkien can be found on <http://www.tolkien-music.com/>.

¹⁰⁵ More German speed and power metal bands would follow and one of the most successful bands that used many Tolkien themes in their lyrics is Blind Guardian. On their first album *Battalions of Fear* from 1988 they had a song called "By the Gates of Moria" and they would continue to record songs based on Middle-earth. Notable is their concept album *Nightfall in Middle-earth* from 1998.

in 1972. When we turn to the late 1980s and the first half of the 90s, when Scandinavian black metal was taking form, we also turn our focus to young teenagers who grew up listening to different kinds of hard rock and metal music. Many of the bands mentioned earlier served as inspiration, and the fact that many used Tolkien as a theme, must have been noted from an early stage.

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* was translated into Norwegian in 1972 ("Hobbiten") and *The Lord of the Rings* was translated as late as 1973-1975 ("Krigen om ringen"). The Swedish translations were earlier. *The Lord of the Rings* was translated between 1959-1961 ("Sagan om ringen"), *The Hobbit* already in 1947 ("Hompen"). Tolkien had a profound impact in Norway in the 1970s, and the publishing house Tiden chose to invest in the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s and a growing interest in mythologies and fantasy literature. This can be seen, for example, when they decide to publish a new translation of *The Lord of the Rings* as early as 1979 and after that cheap mass produced editions aimed at book clubs (Rem, 137-138). It is probably no coincidence that Tolkien had a great impact on many of the persons that were born in the early 1970s, including many of the most important individuals of the Norwegian black metal scene.

"We were drawn to Sauron and his lot, and not

the hobbits, those stupid little dwarves"¹⁰⁶ This quote can be found in an interview with Varg Vikernes (born in 1973), from the period when he was imprisoned for the murder of his former friend and contestant for leadership in the Inner Circle, Øystein Aarseth (born in 1968). They were both key personalities in the black metal scene, but due to personal differences, threats and slander, the tension escalated and made Varg stab Øystein (known as Euronymous) to death with a knife in 1993. His birth name was Kristian but he did not want to associate himself with Christianity and changed his name to Varg, from the Old Norse *vargr*, denoting an outlaw and a dangerous person at the fringe of society (cf. Gerstein; Kuusela 2012). Varg Vikernes also used the pseudonym Count Grishnakh for his one man band Burzum, and became known in the news simply as "The Count". Anyone familiar with Tolkien will immediately recognize both *Burzum* and *Grishnakh*; the first word comes from Tolkien's fictional language Black speech and means "darkness", and the second word is the name of an orc captain (as: Grishnákh) who serves Sauron in *The Two Towers*. In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* the following verse, containing the word *burzum*, is inscribed on the One Ring, forged by the Dark Lord Sauron:

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Vikernes in Moynihan & Söderlind, 150.

Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul,
Ash nazg thrakatulûk agh burzum-ishi
krimpatul.

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them,
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness
bind them

Before he started his band Burzum in 1991, Varg had another musical project, which he called Uruk-hai, and started his own record label, Burznazg. Somehow, he was preoccupied with the orcs, although they can be considered subordinate evil-doers, and must have been drawn to the Black Speech and its inscription on the One Ring. Undoubtedly, Sauron and the Ringwraiths must have been a more powerful image of evil. By aligning himself with Sauron, not Saruman, Varg, with the pseudonym Grishnakh, made sure to belong to the most powerful evil force in Middle-earth. Tom Shippey says that: "there is something extremely convincing, for very many people, in Tolkien's presentation of evil; but it is worth re-stressing that his concern with the topic is highly contemporary, and by no means unique. Many authors of the mid-twentieth century were obsessed with the subject of evil and produced unique and original images of it" (Shippey, 119). A discussion of Tolkien's concept of evil would

take us to far away from the topic of this article.¹⁰⁷ Most of the readers engaged in the black metal scene were young men without any higher forms of education, they were not academics. I think the answer for being attracted to evil in Tolkien's fiction is simple; the evil in Middle-earth seemed cool. The reason why Varg used so many names connected with Tolkien's Middle-earth can be found on an early picture of him, where he is posing in front of the camera with a knife. In the background there is a map on the wall, and those with sharp eyes will recognize it as a map of Middle-earth, not just any map, but one that belongs to a specific context, the role playing game MERP (Middle-earth Role Playing) by Iron Crown Enterprises.¹⁰⁸ Varg writes years later on his webpage, while imprisoned and contemplating his life, that one of his first bands was called Kalashnikov and that:

"I also played fantasy RPGs ... and was very much influenced by the fantastic world of Middle-Earth. One of our songs was because of that named "Uruk-Hai", and we soon changed the name of the whole band to Uruk-Hai. I don't re-

¹⁰⁷ When it comes to black metal the texts by Tolkien was only inspirational; an understanding of how evil works in Middle-earth is irrelevant for this subculture. For a discussion of evil in Tolkien's works, see Shippey, 112-160; Davisson, 99-109; Fimi, 154-157; Cunningham, 216-220.

¹⁰⁸ See Cunningham (2010: 225-229) for a discussion of the game and its development.

member the lyrics of that song, but I don't think it was very deep or particularly advanced (the chorus was: "Uruk-Hai! You will die" or something like that...). Now, "Uruk-Hai" is as most Burzum fans should know the name of the "High-Orcs" of Sauron, and it translates as "Orc-Race", from Black Speech, the language of Mordor."¹⁰⁹

He also says that:

"Of all the fascinations I have had in life I think my fascination for fantasy role-playing games has influenced and shaped me the most, and this fascination is also an important part of the foundation of Burzum. I first discovered MERP (Middle-earth Role Playing), when I was 12 years old, and after that other games too, and to say the least *life took a turn for the better*."¹¹⁰

While he was imprisoned his mother threw away all of his role playing games, blaming them for making her son become a Satanist and all that went wrong in his life:

¹⁰⁹ http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story01.shtml

¹¹⁰ http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story15.shtml

"Everything that had ever been released for MERP until 1993. All the D&D sets and tons of supplements. GURPS with tons of supplements. RuneQuest. HårnMaster. Twilight 2000. Rolemaster with tons of supplements, Conan RPG, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It was all gone forever. Almost every single penny I had gotten my sneaky hands on between age 12 and 20 had been spent on RPGs."¹¹¹

It is quite interesting that Sauron's forces served as an inspiration, and that the orcs and Uruk-hai, "orc-folk", became central figures in this young man's life (he must have been around 16-17 years old at the time he formed Uruk-hai). Varg imagined a link between the evil beings of Tolkien's fiction and Christianity's demonization of Norsemen and Old Norse gods. He explains his notion as follows:

"I grew up reading the traditional Scandinavian fairy tales, where the Pagan gods are presented as "evil" creatures, as "trolls" and "goblins", and we all know how the inquisition turned Freyr (Cernunnos/Dionysus/Bacchus et cetera) into "Satan". Tolkien was no better. He had turned Óðinn into Sauron and my Pagan forefathers into the

¹¹¹ http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story15.shtml

fighting Uruk-Hai. To me the "dark forces" attacking Gondor were like the Vikings attacking Charlemagne's Christian France, the "dark forces" attacking Rohan were like the Vikings attacking the Christian England."¹¹²

I am a bit critical of this explanation as genuine of the period described, it sounds much more like something he made up when he had become older and had time to think about a suitable framework and explanation. It might have been as he claims, but there is still a chance that the evil that Tolkien depicts in his fiction is reason enough for young black metal individuals to associate themselves with them. His album, *Det som engang var*, recorded in 1992, features the song "'En ring til aa herske" ("One Ring to Rule") and his first album, simple called *Burzum*, features an instrumental song called "The Crying Orc". Varg was not the only person using imagery from Tolkien's works, although I think he can be seen as the one who started this trend in the black metal subculture.

Another important person in the Norwegian back metal scene is Gylve Nagell (born in 1971), best known as his pseudonym Fenriz (the name is of course a variant of Fenrir, a great wolf in Old Norse mythology). From 1986, he played in a death metal-band called Black Death that

¹¹² http://www.burzum.org/eng/library/a_burzum_story01.shtml

changed their name to Darkthrone in 1987. One early demo tape by Darkthrone is called *Thulcandra*, a name for Earth in C.S. Lewis' novel *Out of the Silent Planet* (published 1938). Darkthrone would later, from 1991, embrace black metal and become one of the most influential bands of the scene. Varg Vikernes actually wrote lyrics for five Darkthrone songs between 1994 and 1995. Fenriz also had his own solo project between 1989 and 1995, it was a band called Isengard. The name is clearly taken from Tolkien's works. Isengard's first demo cassette was *Spectres over Gorgoroth*, and featured a logotype with a creature taken straight from Middle-earth Role Playing (from the module *Creatures of Middle-earth*). It depicts Thuringwethil, "she of the secret shadow", a female vampire who served as Sauron's messenger in the first age of Middle-earth, described in *The Silmarillion* (1977). The demo cassette includes the song "Dark Lord of Gorgoroth". On the cover, the following text is printed: "The crossing of Gorgoroth lies in front of us. A dark desert plateau surrounded by the shadow and ash mountain", and the grammatical strange: "The spectres soaring above reeking of the rotten earth once rose from; spreading their ghostly wings over the ancient land of Mordor". I also think that the name *Darkthrone* might be derived from Tolkien. The words found upon the One Ring, forged by Sauron in Mount Doom, are: "One for the Dark Lord on his *dark throne* / In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie". On the back cover of Darkthrone's record *Panzerfaust*, released in 1995,

the following message can be read: "Before Fenriz dies he would like to state the following: Follow the Light from The Star Beyond the Stars. Hail to the Grandest Goddess [sic!] Agarwaen Hiril o Morgul of Awe/Aghast". Once again, we find clear references to Tolkien's works.

It is fascinating that bands could combine concepts of the Viking age, believed to be a glorious past, with Antichristian and satanical themes, and at the same time include allusions to Tolkien's works. For most black metal artists, the different topics could merge and create what they called "the right kind of atmosphere". In 1992, a Norwegian band called Fimbulwinter (the name of a long winter in Old Norse myths) released a demo cassette with a song "When the Fire Leaps from the Ash Mountain", based on Mount Doom, which contains the following:

The moon as it rose
Up from the dark plain below
Came the crying of fell voices
And the howling of many wolves
Suddenly a shadow
Like the shape of great wings
Passed across the moonlit sky
And the tower of Sorcery rules¹¹³

¹¹³ Metal Archives website: http://www.metal-archives.com/albums/Fimbulwinter/Rehearsal_Demo/216415

A reader of *The Lord of the Rings* might recognize the verses, as they are actually taken directly from the book (*Fellowship of the Ring*, Chapter 7: "In the house of Tom Bombadil"). One of the members of this band, Stian Tomt Thoresen, used the pseudonym Shagrath (compare with the orc-name Shagrat in Tolkien's fiction) and would many years later become very successful with another black metal band, Dimmu Borgir.

A Norwegian band with a more explicit satanic image was formed in Bergen in 1992, under the name Gorgoroth. The name is evidently from Tolkien, but their lyrical themes are based on blasphemy and Satanism. Numerous black metal bands would follow and take their band names from Tolkien's works, or base their lyrics or use pseudonyms from Middle-earth.¹¹⁴

For many bands it was a question of creating the right kind of atmosphere, and evil beings in Tol-

¹¹⁴ Many other metal bands that were not black metal, would also tap Tolkien's works for inspiration or use names directly from his fiction. For example the Swedish death metal band Amon Amarth (formed in 1992), the German power metal band Blind Guardian (formed in 1986), the American heavy metal bands Cirith Ungol (formed in 1972) and Attacker (formed in 1983; their debut album is *The Battle for Helm's Deep*). Tolkien's popularity in the hard rock scene cannot be denied, but its reach outside the Scandinavian second wave of black metal, is beyond the scope of the article. It is probably no coincidence that the Swedish death metal band Unleashed, who used mostly Viking themes as inspiration, would also sing of Olog-hai and orcs on their first demo *The Utter Dark* from 1990. They actually played in Oslo, Norway, as early as 1991. This period was when many black metal artists tried to distance themselves from death metal.

kien's fiction were admired for their appearance and behaviour. The Swedish black metal band Marduk used a painting of the Nazgûl as cover for their record *Those of the Unlight* in 1993, which included a song with the same name which refers to "the nine", that is the nine Ringwraiths. The first band that refers to Tolkien outside Norway, in the context of black metal, is probably the Greek band Rotting Christ. On one of their demo cassettes, *Satanas Tedeum* from 1989, the song "The Nereid of Esgalduin" can be found. Esgalduin is a river in Middle-earth. The Polish band Behemoth started out as a traditional black metal act and used allusions to Tolkien on their first full-length album *Sventevith: Storming near the Baltic* from 1995. Svetovid is the name of an old Slavic god, venerated in the Middle-ages. On the song "Forgotten cult of Aldaron", both Aldaron and Delduwath is mentioned. Aldaron might refer to the Vala Oromë, "The Lord of Trees", from Middle-earth. Deldúwath is an elvish word, indicating "horror", of a forest that fell under the influence of Morgoth. Another song on the same album, "Enter the Faustian Soul", mentions the gates of Helevorn, and might refer to a defiled river in Middle-earth. Another band from Poland, Holocaust, used many references to Tolkien on their demos *The Crying Orc* from 1994, and *The Towers of Isengard* from 1995. Lingedal, a black metal band from the Netherlands, used references to Tolkien on their first demo *Trial to Reach the*

Stars from 1994; the songs "The King and the Uruk-Hai" and "The Realm of Angmar". The Irish black/folk metal band Cruachan included a song, "The Fall of Gondolin", with explicit Tolkien lyrics mixed with pagan lyrics, on their album *Tuatha na Gael* from 1995. In Austria a black metal band called The Summoning would base most of their lyrics on the works of Tolkien, starting with the records *Lugburz* and *Minas Morgul*, both released in 1995.

Another Austrian band, where the members were close friends with those in The Summoning, is Abigor. Their first demo cassette *Azh nazg* from 1993 includes the song "In Sin", where the lyrics mix satanic messages with the following line: "Ash nazg durbatulûk / Ash nazg gimbatul / Ash nazg thrakatulûk / Agh burzum-ishi krimpatul".

TOLKIEN ARTISTS AND BLACK METAL

Typical of many black metal bands is to use the cover art of their albums as a visual element to express their ideologies. Common themes are the occult, Satanism, depictions of nature that correspond with the artwork of nineteenth century romantic painters, including depictions of Nordic historical and cultural identities like folklore, Vikings and Old Norse mythology (cf. Thompson, 122-124). Another theme, the one that in-

terests us here, is the choice of using fantasy artworks as cover art for albums.

In late 1979, the animated film *The Lord of the Rings*, directed by Ralph Bakshi, was released in Scandinavia. This must have reached a new audience and influenced many teenagers who could experience Tolkien's world as an animated movie (Cunningham, 226). At the same time many artists illustrated Tolkien's world Middle-earth. One of them was the famous Frank Frazetta who was well-known for his fantasy and science fiction artwork; not least his works on Conan the Barbarian, or covers for rock bands such as Nazareth or Molly Hatchett. He did illustrations for *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, initially published as a limited portfolio in 1975. Conan was another character who was popular in the metal subculture, a popularity that increased when Arnold Schwarzenegger played the role in two movies, released in 1982 and 1984 (as well as the barbarian Kalidor in *Red Sonja*, released in 1985). Other artists that soon became popular were John Howe, Ted Nasmith, Alan Lee, the Brothers Hildebrandt, Ian Miller and Angus McBride, to name but a few. The art captured Middle-earth in a way that must have been inspiring for many fans of Tolkien. The art was used for different editions of Tolkien's books, as well as in Tolkien calendars and in other media, such as Middle-earth Role Playing. I have already mentioned the influence of MERP for Fenriz and

Varg. Burzum never used any Tolkien artwork; instead he used a cover from the Advanced Dungeons and Dragons adventure module, *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, as cover for his record *Det som engang var*, released in 1993. The Austrian band Abigor used an illustration of orcs by Ian Miller as cover for their EP *Orkblut - The Retaliation*, released in 1995. Miller's illustration appeared in a widespread A-Z guide book on Tolkien's worlds, *A Tolkien Bestiary*, first published in 1979 by David Day. The book is not very reliable as a dictionary, but includes many fine illustrations. Another image from the same book, a drawing of Nazgûls by Allan Curless, was used by Marduk as cover for their 1993 record *Those of the Unlight*. The list could go on, especially the years after 1995, but my focus is on the black metal bands before that period.¹¹⁵ While studying some of the artworks used by black metal bands, it becomes obvious that fantasy roleplaying games played a big part in the social life of many of its individuals. While discussing inspirational sources, Samoth, a member of the Norwegian black metal band Emperor says: "We drew a lot of inspiration from artwork related to Tolkien's 'The Lord of the Rings.'" Another member, Ihsahn, continues: "The lyrics represent very much the imaginary world we were

¹¹⁵ For example, the Finnish black metal band Horna used lyrical themes from the works of Tolkien and used a painting by John Howe, again of a Nazgûl, as cover for their demo cassette *Hiidentorni* in 1997.

occupied with. I never really read LOTR or any of the things that everybody in the scene was reading at the time." (Bennett, 284). He still claims to have been influenced by fantasy and that they tried to build their own imaginative dark fantasy world. This is an interesting statement and something that is supported by this short study.

CONCLUSIONS

Gavin Baddeley (189) writes that: "Black metal, as a 1990s phenomenon, is a creature with an identity largely distinct from its parent heavy metal music. Growing like a poisonous fungus away from the light of mainstream media interest, it developed its own bizarre sounds, imagery and philosophies." Black metal might be seen as a poisonous fungus, but then it should also be seen as fragmented and diverse, were its growth in the late 80s and early 90s unwittingly created entire sub-genres within black metal music. In the period discussed above, c. 1989-1995, black metal can be seen as moving from a transgressive radical individualism to mainstream; today black metal is actually Norway's biggest cultural export! (cf. Thompson, 119-120). Many individuals wanted to retreat to a timeless and idealized past, an era where paganism could merge with Middle-earth and become a roman-

ticised resort for the elite. A reanimation of the Viking heritage in the scene is held as an Anti-Christian resistance and as a critique of the contemporary "Christian" society and values. But why did they pick the works of Tolkien as a medium? The fantastic and realistic world he created mirrors in a way our own, and his fantasy world and the stories he narrates are filled with darkness. For someone like Varg, Tolkien's evil forces are compared to the heathen Vikings and their clashes with Christianity. Fantasy and role playing seem to have been a part of the early movement of the Norwegian extreme metal scene. The evil forces in Tolkien's Middle-earth were very much alive; at the same time, the illustrations visualised the darkness of his literature. Tolkien's fiction is believable fiction, and we must not forget, his books were readily available and quite popular for the people growing up in Norway in the 1970s. Another aspect that is important is that black metal artists often take liberties when reading and interpreting a source. It is not the source text that matter and sets any kind of rules; it simply serves as inspiration for creating the right kind of atmosphere. This is central for many black metal bands; their use of Tolkien should be understood in this context, not through a reading of Tolkien's views of Middle-earth.

My conclusion is that Norway is the birthplace of Tolkienian black metal; where a small group of young

men with a fascination for Tolkien's works, would later become key figures in the black metal scene. Their interests and innovations would, because of their sub-cultural capital, reflect on black metal worldwide; an influence that continues to linger in the black metal scene until the present day. I will end this short article with a quote from a letter by Tolkien. His view of evil and its presence in his works is interesting as a contrast to the interpretations by black metal bands: "In my story I do not deal in Absolute Evil. I do not think there is such a thing, since that is Zero. I do not think at any rate any 'rational being' is wholly evil. Satan fell." (Letter 183, in Carpenter, 243). Satan might have fallen, but for many black metal bands he is very much alive and in good company with both Sauron and the Norse gods.

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