

# When the Devil Plays the Guitar and the Preacher Prays for Mercy

## An Exploration of Two Filmic Portrayals of the Occult and Satanism in Rock Music

### Abstract

“The devil is a catchy lyric.” This quote comes from the movie *AMERICAN SATAN* (Ash Avildsen, US 2017), when Mr. Capricorn (the devil) promises international success to a young heavy-metal band in Los Angeles and its singer, Johnny Faust. The pact must be sealed with a human sacrifice. Linking rock or heavy metal with the devil or demonic powers is a theme that has been used repeatedly in music and film. In this article, two films from independent productions are analyzed to study how the devil reaches people through rock music and ultimately influences their actions. In addition, the temporal context and the events that affected the content of the screenplays are discussed.

### Keywords

Devil, Satan, Church of Satan, Satanism, Heavy Metal, Black Metal, Rock, Movie, Film, Antichrist, Evil Spirit, Occultism, LaVey

### Biography

Fritz Treiber is a microbiologist and molecular biologist specializing in nutrition and nutritional myths. As part of his work in science communication at the University of Graz, he established the Science & Cinema format, where scientists from various fields give their expertise on films understandable for a broad audience. He is the author of various screenplays including “Des Teufels Meisterkoch” and “Heiliger Horstl.” One of his screenplays has been successfully made into an independent film, *DAS KÜSTENMAMMUTBÄUMCHEN* (Fritz Treiber, AT 2013).

## Introduction

Rock music is a common theme in feature films, but the influence of the devil or demonic powers through this kind of music is found in only a few films. And a distinction must be made between horror films, comedies, and

films with realistic character. In this article, two films, *AMERICAN SATAN* (Ash Avildsen, US 2017) and *MÁLMHAUS* (METALHEAD, Ragnar Bragason, IS 2013), are explored. Both have a certain grounding in reality. In *AMERICAN SATAN*, the devil often appears in human form and other supernatural effects are not used. In *MÁLMHAUS*, the focus is on the music, which already contains the devil and in one form or another turns the listener against Christianity. This source selection and the juxtaposition of these two movies allows us to examine from different perspectives the phenomenon of the devil in rock music in films. In *AMERICAN SATAN*, the classic pact with the devil is in the foreground. A young heavy-metal band finds worldwide fame and impressive sales of its album but only at a high price. In *MÁLMHAUS*, a priest who in his younger years devoted himself body and soul to rock music now seeks to bring a young metal musician back onto the right path. The film is set at the time of the emergence of black metal in Norway in the early 1990s and of the associated church fires. The very different perspectives make it possible to condense the complex and vast topic of the devil in rock music without only scratching the surface of the subject.

Manuel Trummer provided a helpful definition of the devil in his book *Sympathy for the Devil* (2011):<sup>1</sup>

- (1)The devil stands against the divine order. He is outside social norms and culturally sanctioned values.
- (2)Satan tries to destroy order and overthrow values. He is thus hostile to God and the human community in principle.
- (3)The devil acts in different forms and under different names. He does battle as both a radiant Lucifer and a destructive dragon.
- (4)Satan remains a singular figure but appears embedded in a large court of demonic forces that feeds popular-cultural conceptions of the devil, from the early modern belief in witches to the occultism of the period from the 19th to the 21st century.

The following questions frame this article. How does the devil appear in the films and where can this image of the devil be located in the history of religion and culture? What weight is to put on references in the films to Satanism or occult practices? How does the reaction of believers or representatives of Christian churches to “satanic” rock music differ between films and reality?

1 Trummer 2011, 61.

# The Devil and the Music: A Short Summary

Analysis of rock music of the 20th and 21st centuries can usefully return to the roots of this style, found in the Blues. We have no documented founding moment for the Blues. Around 1910, the word appeared in relation to music in the Mississippi Delta. The themes of the music, its basic tendencies, were sadness, hardship, and powerlessness that often beset the lifeworld of African Americans. It also, however, could entertain: when bluesmen played their songs, everyday life was interrupted by their performance.<sup>2</sup>

Two features of music from this period will later appear in rock music in reference to the devil. First, it was said that bluesmen were tempted by the devil on their travels or might make a pact with him. In exchange for their soul, they would have success in music, master their instrument, or be sexually attractive to women. The life of musician Robert Johnson (1911–1938) was surrounded by this myth. He was said to have begun as a not particularly gifted guitar player, but to have disappeared and then returned a true virtuoso, surely the result of an alliance with the devil. His death at the young age of just 27 led to legend-making, including that he was poisoned by a jealous husband.<sup>3</sup>

The lives of many early blues musicians were characterized by violence, alcohol, licentious sexuality, and a certain restlessness. This lifestyle ran counter to the message of African American churches, which often set the norms for society. The second interesting devil-related feature from this period is thus that the Blues served as an outlet for people who did not feel comfortable in this society and thus came to be seen as the devil's music. The bluesmen were the devil's henchmen and were called to repentance by preachers, while parents and their children were warned against the Blues.<sup>4</sup>

The spiritual turning point of the hippie era in the 1960s brought a growing interest in occult symbolism and ideologies. The writings of Aleister Crowley were rediscovered and reinterpreted, with an image of the self-proclaimed sorcerer and occultist used on the cover of the 1967 Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.<sup>5</sup> The same year the Rolling Stones published their album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*, and one year later their next album contained the song "Sympathy for the Devil". We should note, how-

2 Middleton 1972, 144.

3 Davis 1997, 5.

4 Oakley 1981, 66; Patterson 2004, 172–173.

5 Trummer 2011, 101–105.

ever, that their apparent interest in the occult did not manifest itself in their music; more decisive here was its marketing in relation to the zeitgeist.<sup>6</sup>

The band Black Sabbath, however, often referred to as the first heavy-metal band in music history, was a pioneer in moving in a new direction. It was formed in Birmingham, England, in 1968 by guitarist and main songwriter Tony Iommi, bassist and main lyricist Geezer Butler, drummer Bill Ward, and singer Ozzy Osbourne.<sup>7</sup> Alice Cooper, the son of a preacher, was one of the first heavy-metal musicians, a shock-rocker who believed in God and the devil. Fusing elements of hard rock and psychedelic rock, these bands were heavily influenced by the Blues, as numerous interviews confirmed.<sup>8</sup> They also led a counterculture in relation to the hippie movement. Love and peace seemed deeply unrealistic in a world divided into West and East, a rupture that threatened nuclear war. The sound of the music became heavier and darker; a large drum kit with heavy drums, a bass, one or two guitars, one being the rhythm guitar and the other the lead guitar. The lead guitar was used for virtuoso solos, singers were characterized by strong voices, and screams were part of the songs. The dark sound needed dark lyrics, and demons and the devil provided them.<sup>9</sup>

The period from the mid-1970s and into the 1980s saw the emergence of the new wave in British heavy metal, with bands such as Black Sabbath, Def Leppard, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, Motörhead, and Saxon and also Ozzy Osbourne as a solo artist. The most extreme form of metal, black metal, followed. The name of this genre comes from the band Venom's second album, titled *Black Metal*, released by Neat Records in 1982. The band was characterized by anti-Christian and satanic lyrics and symbolism.

Bands in other countries also turned to dark subjects, with some part of the first wave of black metal, such as Denmark's Mercyful Fate, formed in 1981. The Swedish band Bathory, formed in 1984, named themselves after the legendary Hungarian countess who is said to have bathed in virgin blood to preserve her youth. Celtic Frost from Switzerland released their first full-length studio album, titled *To Mega Therion*, in 1985, with a cover designed by Swiss artist HR Giger.<sup>10</sup>

6 Trummer 2011, 115–116.

7 Conte 2000, 8.

8 Rensen 2009, 46–47.

9 Granholm 2013, 5–33.

10 Mørk 2009, 171–198.

The second wave of black metal ensured this genre was better known by a broader public. The Norwegian scene of the early 1990s led the charge, and a change in musical style was associated with it. The singing became shrill, there was occasional roaring, and the lyrics were sometimes incomprehensible. The so-called blast beat was supposed to be reminiscent of machine-gun fire. Another change was the intentionally low quality of the productions. The best-known of these Norwegian bands from this period were Mayhem (1984), Dark Throne (1986), Immortal (1990), Satyricon (1990), Varg Vikernes's one-man band called Burzum (1991), Emperor (1991), and Gorgoroth (1992).<sup>11</sup>

## Film Analysis

The title of the film *AMERICAN SATAN* promises much. The comparison to other productions with similar names is compelling. *AMERICAN PIE* (Paul Weitz, US 1999), *AMERICAN BEAUTY* (Sam Mendes, US 1999), *AMERICAN SNIPER* (Clint Eastwood, US 2014), and *AMERICAN GANGSTER* (Ridley Scott, US 2007) were all lucrative blockbusters. *AMERICAN SATAN* however, failed to achieve this commercial success.

The plot of the film revolves around a heavy-metal band that seeks to break-out in Los Angeles. The devil offers to make them known worldwide but, of course, there is a price to pay. The devil first appears in the film as an old white man, with a worn jacket and a sailor's cap, who drives a small, dilapidated tourist tour bus (fig. 1). He drives at walking pace next to Johnny Faust, the

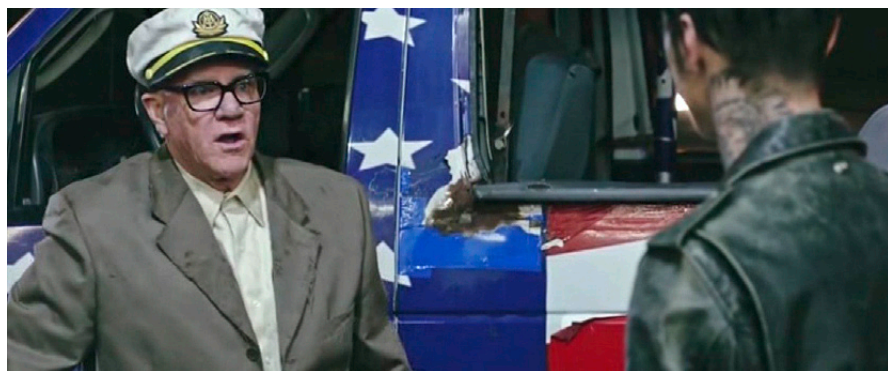


Fig. 1: Johnny Faust meets the devil for the first time. Film still, *AMERICAN SATAN* (Ash Avildsen, US 2017), 00:07:55.

11 Moberg 2012, 113–130.

singer of the band The Relentless – and the main character in the film – and the guitarist Vic Lacota and tries to persuade them to take a ride. The young lads refuse, and the devil stops, gets out of the car, and quotes the biblical passage John 7:24: “Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly” (AMERICAN SATAN [2017], 00:07:50). The two young men take him for a madman and move on. The devil again drives alongside them, taunting them as just another band trying their luck in the city who will surely be disappointed.

A few scenes later the devil appears again, as a homeless man. He asks Johnny for a cigarette and complains to the band that he is stuck in this “vessel” (body) waiting for them to show up. Johnny recognizes him as the man who rode in the tourist bus on their first night in town and calls him a religious nutcase (00:15:40). After the band has had to cancel their first big gig as a result of sabotage by a competitor, Damien, ex-boyfriend of Lily Mayflower, they again meet the devil, who this time is wearing a designer suit and driving an expensive sports car. He approaches the band members and invites them for a drink (fig. 2), revealing himself to the band manager by laying his hands on him. The representation of the devil has changed. Here he is a successful businessman, a man of wealth and taste. After the devil offers the band a pact that will make them successful, the singer and band manager Ricky Rollins asks him why they have been chosen.

RICKY ROLLINS: Why exactly a band like us?

DEVIL: Rock’n’roll, heavy metal. You’re so loyal to me. You wear me on your sleeve. But your fans are dangerous, and your fans are full of passion. (00:28:25)



Fig. 2: The devil offers a pact to the band. Film still, AMERICAN SATAN (Ash Avildsen, US 2017), 00:27:27.

DEVIL: Have you ever seen Iron Maiden? They filled stadiums full of their fans. Singing along to songs like “The Number of the Beast.” Or what about Van Halen? “Running with the Devil.” The Stones, “Sympathy for the Devil.” I mean, on and on and on and on it goes. I’m not saying I’m Satan. I’m just saying the devil is a catchy lyric. (00:28:44)

In exchange for a human sacrifice, they will become famous worldwide and accordingly rich. The sacrifice will be the revenge murder of Damien, the competitor who sabotaged their first gig. At the last moment Johnny lets Damien out of the burning tour bus. Damien runs but dies moments later on an electric fence. The next day comes the call from a record company and shortly thereafter the first record contract. Months later, the band visits a strip club where Lily Mayflower, their bassist, once worked. There, the devil again talks about his activities in the music industry.

DEVIL: You know, in 1967, we put Aleister Crowley on the front of Sgt. Pepper’s. We wrote underneath it, “Welcome The Rolling Stones!?” Ha! Aleister Crowley! The old sorcerer himself. Back then, that was beyond fucking insane! And then six months later, The Stones put out their album. Their Satanic Majesties Request. And on it, on the front cover, they had hidden The Beatles faces. (01:13:10)

In addition, the devil takes Ricky Rollins, who dies from a cocaine overdose. He had run away during the human sacrifice and now must pay the price.

Later in the film, full of alcohol and drugs Johnny sits in the very bar where they once made their pact with the devil. The devil seeks to convince Johnny to shoot a confused man on stage and then continue playing. Johnny does not want to act; he had not taken up music in order to kill.

DEVIL: You know, it’s religion that separates humanity, but it’s music that brings us all together. You know, more people are killed through religious conflict than any other reason. We are all our own gods. If you want to find the answers, you have to look inside yourself. Not up to the sky. Our carnal desires are not to be suppressed. They are to be liberated. And sin? Sin is simply a matter of opinion. (01:32:38)

At the end of AMERICAN SATAN, an interview by Larry King (playing himself), with band members Leo and Lily, highlights the role of the devil in rock music.

LARRY KING: [...] First question, your singer Johnny keeps mentioning the devil. Is this just sensationalism?

LEO: Everything Johnny has said is true, but we can't exactly sit here and talk about a physical version of the devil, can we, Larry? People will think we've gone crazy. In music, the devil you see on album covers and T-shirts, it's symbolism for the counterculture.

KING: So, then what's the real devil?

LILY: The voice inside our head that makes us do bad things without remorse. Says whatever it takes to get what it wants.

KING: And the man who was supposedly shot on stage, what was that?

LEO: That was a great way to sell records. (01:44:36)

In *MÁLMHAUS*, the second film we are looking at here, the trigger for the entire story is the tragic accidental death of 16-year-old Baldur, a heavy-metal fan who played the guitar himself. Hera struggles to cope with her brother's death. She seeks solace in Baldur's favorite music, to which she dedicates her life. Hera helps on her parents' farm, has no life goals, and works briefly at a slaughterhouse, where she plays heavy metal over the company sound system, used strictly for announcements, and is fired. She spends her days at home, composing and playing her own music. One evening as she lies sleepily on the couch, a news broadcast reports arson on a church in Norway:

REPORTER (*off*): The music is called black metal.

WOMAN: Personally, I think this kind of music should be banned. It must go away and everyone responsible for this music should be locked up forever.

REPORTER (*off*): This is how groups like Chaos, Hades or Dark Throne name themselves. The texts are mostly incomprehensible, but often contain negative messages. Pastor Sven Ole Christensen, who has been preaching about the dangers of hard rock for years, has now founded an organization that wants to work to ban this special kind of music. (*MÁLMHAUS* [2013], 00:42:52)

TV images and interviews relating to black metal and church fires in Norway in the early 1990s show a Christian cleric preaching against heavy metal. But in *MÁLMHAUS* we find a Protestant pastor who is a metal fan (fig. 3). He is called Janus, the name of a two-faced Roman god who represents the beginning and the end.





Fig. 3: To build trust with Hera, Pastor Janus takes off his shirt and shows her his Iron Maiden tattoo. Film still, *MÁLMHAUS* (Ragnar Bragason, IS 2013), 00:54:40.

HERA: Which bands do you like?

JANUS: Iron Maiden, the early Leppard, Diamond Head, Celtic Frost. I really like Venom, especially when they play live, they're really great. And Kronos, they have the best frontman ever. ... God also exists in darkness. Jesus was not afraid of outcasts, after all he was an outcast himself. That's why he was crucified. They couldn't understand what he was saying. Take people as they are.

HERA: He owes me one thing. (00:50:19)

A few days later, as Hera is riding with Janus in his car, they listen to a mix-tape of Baldur's favorite Judas Priest song, "Victim of Changes".

JANUS: They accompanied me through school, with a few other groups of course. There really hasn't been a day that I haven't listened to Judas Priest. (00:54:40)

Hera not only falls in love with Pastor Janus, but also feels that he is her soulmate. He rejects her because he has no feelings for her and had only sought to help her as part of his pastoral work in his new community. Hera responds to this rejection by setting the church on fire. The fire can also be interpreted as an act of revenge in relation to the accidental death of her brother (01:02:00). During his first visit to Hera's family, Pastor Janus mentions Baldur's death and asks her parents whether they have taken advantage of grief counseling. In a parish meeting in the presence of Pastor Janus,

it is decided that the church fire should be deemed an accident, and that all should come together to rebuild it. The pastor also indirectly represents the guilt or bad conscience of the parishioners who emotionally abandoned the family after the loss of Baldur.<sup>12</sup> This again shows the close interdependence of churches and communities or church and state in the Nordic countries, which many supporters of black metal rebelled against. Janus does not comment on the church fires in Norway in the film, even after the church he works at is burned down. Ultimately, Hera finds her way as a musician and thus her place in society, supported by a priest who loves black metal.

In the two films described here, the devil's salute occurs with varying frequency. In *MÁLMHAUS*, it is repeatedly used in different ways, depending on the story. Baldur shows the devil's horns to his sister, who is calling him to dinner. Here it is a gesture of kindness. Hera uses this greeting after being thrown out of the meat factory by holding out the devil's horns to her fore-



Fig. 4: Upper left: Baldur greets his sister, Film still, *MÁLMHAUS* (Ragnar Bragason, IS 2013), 00:02:10, Upper middle: Hera shows the devil's horns to a foreman at work, Film still, *MÁLMHAUS*, 00:29:04, Upper right: Boy with Metallica T-Shirt and Horns Up, Film still, *MÁLMHAUS*, 01:16:15, Bottom left: Hera salutes Jesus, Film still, *MÁLMHAUS*, 01:02:45, Bottom right: Girl salutes The Relentless on TV, Film still, *AMERICAN SATAN* (Ash Avildsen, US 2017), 00:49:07.

12 This is a key scene where the pastor notes in conversation that after Baldur's accidental death, the congregation's support was lacking to help the family come to terms with the loss. The joint building of the church by the congregation, can be interpreted as a kind of reparation to Baldur's family – although Hera set the church on fire! *MÁLMHAUS* (Ragnar Bragason, IS 2013), 01:12:40.

man, but it is not meant as a good message. When Hera tries to lead a middle-class life after the church fire she caused, she meets a little boy in the supermarket wearing a Metallica T-shirt who greets her with the horns up. When Hera sets the church on fire, she directs the salute towards the image of Jesus in the church. In *AMERICAN SATAN*, as a form of youthful rebellion, a teenager uses the salute in front of the camera, thereby demonstrating loyalty to the band The Relentless (fig. 4).

## Discussion

The devil appears in several forms in the film *AMERICAN SATAN*. As an old man and homeless, as a rich and renowned businessman, as the band member Lily Mayflower and as a successful lawyer. The image of the devil that seduced the band members corresponds to that of a social critic with a pinch of diabolical rhetoric of the late 1960s.<sup>13</sup> He is a man of wealth and taste. His philosophy is rendered in simplified form as he talks to the heavily drug-addicted Johnny in the bar. Religion divides people and causes wars, we are all our own gods, we should look inside ourselves and not up to heaven. Free will is emphasized, but also that a junkie has lost his, his will weakened by addiction.

However, the devil as a liberator from social constraints is only one side of the character depicted in the film. Following Johnny's acquittal after the bar brawl with a fatal outcome, violent episodes rapidly increase worldwide. Victims, mostly teenagers, resist their oppressors with deadly force. The devil wants to see these acts spread and increase, but that goal is not attained in the film in the end. The devil is the creator of chaos, thus plunging the world into misfortune. At the same time, the oppressed can escape their oppressors by force. This motif appears in some black-metal groups again and again, where the warriors of Satan go into the final battle against the good.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Lily, the band's bass player and also the devil, lives up to the role attributed to her. She sexually seduces the main character of the film, Johnny. His relationship with his girlfriend Gretchen breaks up as a result. The depiction of the devil as a seductive woman has been a theme in music

13 Trummer 2011, 115.

14 Trummer 2011, 258–260.

history, especially with blues bands or rock'n'roll bands in the second half of the 1950s. A woman through whose sexual power a man is plunged into misfortune can only be based on satanic forces. The devil thus appears in the film *AMERICAN SATAN* in the form of a demonized woman, described by a concerned mother from the Bible Belt as a “lesbian Satan woman”.<sup>15</sup>

In the film *MÁLMHAUS*, however, the personified devil does not appear at all. The main actress is admittedly called a Satanist by two work colleagues as she stands in line in the cafeteria. During the film, she uses the sign of the devil's horns in various situations. But the devilishness in this film is mainly in the music itself. Demon summoning and a devil's pact were indeed at the heart of music such as Black Widow's song “Come to the Sabbat” (1972).<sup>16</sup>

It is not just the devil who is personified in *AMERICAN SATAN*. When Johnny Faust collapses after an overdose of heroin and suffers a cardiac arrest, he is revived by a paramedic who is actually the Archangel Gabriel, who appears again and again in the film. During the resuscitation, the devil stands next to Gabriel. Their roles can be interpreted in line with the wager between God and the devil made in the book of Job (1:6–12; 2:1–7). At the beginning of the film, both Gabriel and the devil are homeless and meet Johnny and his bandmates. At the end of the film, a lawyer who got Johnny out of jail on a technicality knocks four times with his ring on the release papers. This is exactly the gesture the devil has made again and again in the film. Did the devil, who is also the lawyer, sacrifice his own son, Damien?

The film *AMERICAN SATAN* is full of allusions to Satanism and occult practices, always associated with rock music.<sup>17</sup> Satanic themes and various allusions to Goethe's *Faust* are scattered throughout the film. The intention of the film is to make viewers believe that the devil is everywhere in the music business. One of the last scenes in *AMERICAN SATAN* sums up what brings the devil and rock music together – provocation and the resulting marketing that sells records. The greater the outcry in the media, the more the free advertising.

At the end of the film, another exciting question arises?

Priests or other representatives of Christian churches who point out the dangers of satanic heavy metal are not to be found in supporting roles in *AMERICAN SATAN*. The only suggestions that Christians feel disturbed by what they consider a satanic band are provided by a protest by Christians in the

15 Trummer 2011, 93.

16 Trummer 2011, 124–126.

17 Schmidt 1992, 130–138.

Bible Belt before a concert by The Relentless and the insulting of band members in the same area. And indeed, at the end of the film, another intriguing question arises. In a rehabilitation clinic, Johnny practices mediation under the guidance of a Hindu guru. So, is Hinduism the only way to salvation?

By contrast, in *MÁLMHAUS*, a pastor becomes the devil's advocate, for in his youth, he listened to numerous bands with a clear Satanist background. Perhaps the character of Pastor Janus is meant to serve as a role model. The idea of his listening to bands from the first wave of black metal like Venom and Celtic Frost is remarkable, and in addition, he has three black-metal musicians from Norway help rebuild the church that Hera burned down.

The film is set in the early 1990s, and at that time such bands were clearly deemed Satanic.<sup>18</sup>

It remains an open question here whether the scriptwriter therefore put these sentences into the mouth of the character of Pastor Janus about his band preferences as a youth and now as a clergyman. Hera also mentions, providing an almost scientific approach, that heavy metal illuminates the darker side of life, an interpretation that cultural scientists can give only now, looking back on this youth or subculture of the 1980s. Female black-metal musicians in the early 1990s, women like Hera herself, are also absent from the research literature. The development of black metal was virtually created in *MÁLMHAUS* by the screenwriter.

The representatives of the second wave of Black Metal in the first half of the 1990s were very anti-Christian. Hera's setting fire to the church, however, has only personal motives, as a response to the loss of her brother, rejection by the village community and the church, rebuff from the pastor. Hatred of Christianity, often present in early black-metal philosophy, is not associated with her character in the film.<sup>19</sup>

Clergy repeatedly warned about the dangers of heavy metal (fig. 5). Konrad Sterninger (1948–2022),<sup>20</sup> for example, was a passionate preacher against

18 Research has proposed that these devil images were mainly chosen to boost record sales through provocation. The musicians had no detailed interest in the philosophy behind them, let alone in a religious grouping like the Church of Satan. One exception is King Diamond of Mercyful Fate, who privately professes the Satanism of LaVey, in which he has a genuine interest. But this Satanism does not influence the band's lyrics. The images of the devil that are conveyed come rather from the medieval imagination or horror films. See Trummer 2011, 234–235.

19 Mørk 2009, 171–198.

20 Noé 2022.



Fig. 5: Pastor Sterninger demonizes the concert of the rock band AC/DC on Ascension Day 2015 in Spielberg, Austria. During his sermon he makes the gesture “horns up” with one hand. Film Still, Konrad Sterninger, Das Gleichnis vom Unkraut unter dem Weizen, Folge 6, YouTube, <https://tinyurl.com/m54kuw8m>, 00:14:37.

heavy metal, leading the fight against satanic music in Austria<sup>21</sup> from the early 1980s:

Can you see it? That was pure homage to Satan. The musicians with their satanic horns. [...] Do you know what that means? On Ascension Day, was this a deliberate choice? With the sign – Satan.<sup>22</sup>

Sterninger was not only a man of words; he was also a man of action. In the early 1980s, he organized a burning of youth magazines, books, and records as part of a prayer group.

Then I said, do you have stuff like that at home too, trashy books and things like that? Bring them, bring them with you. The next Saturday in the prayer group they came, with trolleys, I really tell you. [...] They brought *Bravo* [youth magazine] and all the stuff and it burned, wonderful.<sup>23</sup>

21 Tartarotti 2015, *Kurier online*, <https://tinyurl.com/2w5uj6ph> [accessed 26 September 2022].

22 Konrad Sterninger, *Das Gleichnis vom Unkraut unter dem Weizen*, Folge 6, <https://tinyurl.com/m54kuw8m>, 00:13:47–00:15:04.

23 Konrad Sterninger, *Offenbarung des Hl. Johannes Kateches*, Teil 1, <https://tinyurl.com/4dtm3pz4>, 00:00:00–00:01:10.

At the beginning of this speech, Pastor Sterninger refers to the place in the Acts of the Apostles that recounts how magicians burned their pagan books after their conversion by the Apostle Paul in Ephesus (19:19). According to a contemporary witness, records by the bands Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath and Ozzy Osbourne were also burned at a bonfire near the church.

In 1982 Mercyful Fate released their EP *Mercyful Fate*, which included the song “Nuns Have No Fun”. The band’s singer, King Diamond, has described reactions to the release:

At that time there was a priest in Denmark who really persecuted us and defamed us everywhere. [...] He went to the newspapers, to the radio stations and told everywhere about our atrocities, and at some point these media people also approached us to hear our opinion – and that was the best promotion a young band could get at that time. The plan had worked.<sup>24</sup>

The devil’s sign of the horned one – a fist with index finger and little finger outstretched – rarely appears in *AMERICAN SATAN*, because by 2017, the time the film is set, this gesture was already part of the heritage of popular culture as far as the public was concerned. In the film *MÁLMHAUS*, by contrast, set in the early 1990s, this gesture is used deliberately, reserved for a small circle of initiates who know what to do with it. The devil’s sign was used for the first time by the band Coven on the cover of their album *Witchcraft Destroys Minds and Reaps Souls*, released in 1969. On the back of the sleeve, the musicians are seen behind a ceremonially decorated altar, with inverted crosses, a kind of missal, skulls, chalices, and black candles, alongside hands forming the devil’s sign. This gesture was widely used by the musician Ronnie James Dio, a pioneer of heavy-metal music. Dio was the lead singer with Black Sabbath for three albums and continued performing in other bands, including his eponymous band.<sup>25</sup> Dio recalled walking as a young boy with his grandmother, who had immigrated to the United States from Italy – if something didn’t seem right to her, she made this gesture with her fingers. He incorporated this sign, supposed to ward off the evil of this world, into his stage shows.<sup>26</sup>

24 Albrecht 2002, 128–129.

25 Spracklen 2018, 407–423.

26 METAL: A HEADBANGER’S JOURNEY (Sam Dunn, CA 2005), 00:37:58.

In MÁLMHAUS the names of the three musicians (Øystein, Pål Ole and Yngve) who visit Hera refer to deceased band members of the Norwegian black metal band Mayhem, Øystein “Euronymous” Aarseth and Per Yngve “Dead” Ohlin. Øystein Aarseth, the founding member of Mayhem, chose Euronymous, a lowly demon, as his stage name because he was inspired by Anton LaVey’s *Satanic Bible*. Aarseth called for an active Satanism, saying, “If a band cultivates and worships Satan, it’s black metal ... it can be ordinary heavy metal or just noise. What’s important is that it’s satanic; that’s what makes it black metal.”<sup>27</sup> He was not referencing LaVey specifically, for, he noted, “LaVey admitted several times that he generally had no fondness for rock music or metal, and he tended to see the kind of ‘Satanism’ promoted in, for instance, black metal lyrics as misunderstood and reversed Christianity.”<sup>28</sup> True Norwegian black metal had a militant, anti-Christian, anti-society attitude. Charismatic Christianity preachers believed their longstanding and emphatic warnings confirmed. The research community continues to explore why this specific form of Satanism was able to establish itself in the Nordic countries and especially in Norway.<sup>29</sup>

Metal music is entertainment, as its concerts demonstrate, but images of death, destruction, and suffering are a norm in this genre of music. Murder and suicide are part of its imagery.<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, Hera overcame her trauma through music, an approach that has been shown to be scientifically valid. And studies have shown that people who deal directly and openly with death can handle it better and can also cope better with their own mortality.<sup>31</sup> The devil as a shocking factor, but also as a cash cow, has become obsolete in rock music. Yet the classic devil, the adversary of God, still thrives at the box office, as evinced by *THE POPE’S EXORCIST* (Julius Avery, US 2023) with Russell Crowe, a success that is surely likely to be repeated by *CONSTANTINE 2*, with Keanu Reeves, in 2024.

27 Introvigne 2017.

28 Dyrendal 2008, 68–98.

29 Soderlind/Drydendal 2009, 153–170; Hjelm/Bogdan/Dyrendal/Jesper 2009, 515–529; Zuckermann 2008, 57–76.

30 Hjelm 2012, 1–2; 5–18.

31 Quinn/Glaves 2022, 376; Recours/Aussaguel/Trujillo 2009, 473–488.



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