

Fritz Treiber

Laugh at the devil

Black Metal comedies or when devilish music is really funny

ENGLISH

ABSTRACT 

The devil and rock music form a symbiosis in various films. Satanism in music, especially if we look to the second wave of Black Metal, had a resurgence in the late 1980s. The ideas of LaVey's Satanism, such as worldly success and maximizing one's human potential, however, were irrelevant to the proponents of Black Metal in Norway. True Norwegian Black Metal combined a militant, anti-Christian, anti-society attitude. Characteristic elements of Black Metal bands such as corpse paint, provocative artist names, throat singing, and incomprehensible lyrics are often referenced and portrayed in films. The following films addressing this topic were selected for cinematic narrative analysis: POP REDEMPTION (HAPPY METAL, Martin Le Gall, FR 2013), HEVI REISSU (HEAVY TRIP, Juuso Laatio, Jukka Vidgren, FI/NO 2018) and LORD & SCHLUMPF (Sabine Schreiber, DE 2020). With irony, inside jokes and a skillful juxtaposition of contrarian characters, the seriousness, darkness, hatred and nihilism of the Black Metal subculture is turned into entertaining films.

DEUTSCH

Lache über den Teufel. Black Metal-Komödien oder wenn teuflische Musik richtig lustig ist

Der Teufel und die Rockmusik gehen in verschiedenen Filmen eine Symbiose ein. Der Satanismus in der Musik hatte einen neuen Aufschwung Ende der 1980er Jahre erlebt, besonders wenn wir uns die zweite Welle des Black Metal ansehen. Die Ideen von LaVeys Satanismus, etwa weltlicher Erfolg und die Maximierung des eigenen menschlichen Potenzials, waren jedoch irrelevant für die Fans des

Black Metal in Norwegen. Echter norwegischer Black Metal vereinte eine militante antichristliche, antigesellschaftliche Haltung. Charakteristische Elemente von Black Metal-Bands, wie Corpse Paint (Leichen-Makeup), provokante Künstlernamen, Kehlkopfgesang und unverständliche Texte, werden oft in Filmen erwähnt und dargestellt.

Für eine filmische Erzählanalyse ausgewählt wurden: POP REDEMPTION (HAPPY METAL, Martin Le Gall, FR 2013), HEVI REISSU (HEAVY TRIP, Juuso Laatio, Jukka Vidgren, FI/NO 2018) und LORD & SCHLUMPF (Sabine Schreiber, DE 2020). Mit Ironie, Insider-Witzen und einer gekonnten Gegenüberstellung konträrer Charaktere werden in diesen Komödien die Ernsthaftigkeit, die Dunkelheit, der Hass und Nihilismus der Black Metal-Subkultur entzaubert.

BIOGRAPHY

Fritz Treiber studied microbiology and molecular biology. He has been working in scientific communication at the Karl-Franzens-University in Graz since 2008. In addition to his academic work, he has been involved with metal music since the age of 14 and is also a screenwriter and director of independent films.

ORCID  0000-0002-0570-1469

E-Mail: fritz.treiber(at)uni-graz.at

KEY WORDS

Black Metal; trueness; seriousness; darkness; comedy; satanism; rituals; anti-society attitude; corpse paint; POP REDEMPTION; HEVI REISSU; LORD & SCHLUMPF

Black Metal; Wahrhaftigkeit; Ernsthaftigkeit; Dunkelheit; Komödie; Satanismus; Rituale; gesellschaftsfeindliche Haltung; Leichen-Makeup; HAPPY METAL; HEAVY TRIP; LORD & SCHLUMPF

Introduction

Church burnings, murders and paying homage to Satan – some young musicians shocked the Norwegian public as well as the world beyond with Black Metal in the early 90s. By the middle of the decade, this subgenre of Heavy Metal became a global phenomenon. Satanic, violence-glorifying and occult lyrics, musicians dressed up like corpses, bellowing often incomprehensible singing and blast beats shocked not only religious people. It was the music of a fringe group, which had already reached the mainstream of society. And of all things, this style of music and the attitude of the musicians served as the basic inspiration for three European comedies released in cinemas between 2013 and 2020: *POP REDEMPTION* (HAPPY METAL, Martin Le Gall, FR 2013), *HEVI REISSU* (HEAVY TRIP, Juuso Laatio, Jukka Vidgren, FI/NO 2018) and *LORD & SCHLUMPF* (Sabine Schreiber, DE 2020). The phenomenon of Black Metal had previously been featured in several documentaries such as *ONCE UPON A TIME IN NORWAY* (Pål Aasdal, Martin Ledang, NO 2007), *UNTIL THE LIGHT TAKES US* (Aaron Aites, Audrey Ewell, US 2008), *BLACKHEARTS* (Christian Falch, NO 2017), as well as in the feature film *LORDS OF CHAOS* (Jonas Åkerlund, UK/SW 2018), based on a book with the same title. Humor in metal music has been studied in detail by Deena Weinstein (cf. Weinstein 2019). Metal's subculture has always been able to show reverence to the excess and absurdities of their subculture while simultaneously recognizing its comical value (cf. Konecny 2014). According to Weinstein, the most significant way to comprehend the layers of humor in metal is to assess the types of transgressional incongruities with which metal plays. The first of these strategies involves flouting the cultural norms of general society, whereas the second addresses violations of metal subculture itself (cf. Weinstein 2019, 68). Comedies that center on Black Metal as a theme must construct two different types of humor to please two different target groups, members of the metal subculture and people who are neutral towards metal, in order to be maximally effective. The following study is based on a cinematic narrative analysis. The aim is to answer the following questions:

- How is the subculture of Black Metal portrayed based on the protagonists in the films?
- To what extent do the demon invocations or satanic practices mentioned in the films refer to existing doctrines?
- In what way is the seriousness of Black Metal broken by means of irony and humor?

1 How the devil came to Heavy Metal

In order to be able to analyze satanic and occult themes in Black Metal music and films, first the roots of this music genre must be examined more closely. Black Metal is a subgenre of Heavy Metal. This in turn originated in the 1970s and achieved worldwide popularity in the early 1980s. Many Heavy Metal bands of the 70s and early 80s repeatedly mentioned the devil in their songs. A few examples of song lyrics by prominent bands follow here:

Black Sabbath – “N.I.B.:” *“Oh yeah / Now I have you with me under my power / Our love grows stronger now with every hour / Look into my eyes, you’ll see who I am / My name is Lucifer, please take my hand.”* (Black Sabbath 1970, N.I.B.)

Iron Maiden – “The Number of the Beast.” *“In the night, the fires burning bright / The ritual has begun, Satan’s work is done / six six six, the number of the beast / Sacrifice is going on tonight.”* (Iron Maiden 1982, The Number of the Beast)

An alternative offer for young people

The band Black Sabbath is often referred to in musicological publications as the inventor of Heavy Metal. The dark sound came from the specific modification and composition of their instruments. The tritone, the notes of the devil, were used to a greater extent. The lyrics were dedicated to dark themes, influenced by horror films, 19th century romantic literature and a certain dose of social criticism (cf. Conte 2000, 8). It represented an alternative offer for young people who did not relate to hippie music, disco, psychedelic rock or folk. The appearance and behavior of the musicians at their concerts completed the image, which led to success, as evidenced in record sales (cf. Rensen 2009). The official Iron Maiden biography by Mike Stark also examines the genesis of the album *The Number of the Beast* and band founder Steve Harris comments on the allegations of Satanism against the band after the album release:

“Basically, this song is about a dream. It’s not about Devil worship. They completely got the wrong end of the stick. They obviously hadn’t read the lyrics. They just wanted to believe all that rubbish about us being Satanists.” (Wall 2004, 228)

Active Satanism cannot be linked to the band members to this day. However, this together with critical echoes in the media and protests by Christian groups gained them attention. From an evangelical perspective, Heavy Metal fans are an easy prey for Satan, as they are separated from the flock. The satanic music paves the way even faster.

2 Black Metal – the devil’s favorite sound?

The genre name comes from the band Venom’s second album titled *Black Metal* (Neat Records) released in 1982. Anti-Christian and satanic lyrics and symbolism characterized this band. However, there were also bands in other countries that focused on the same subject. Besides Venom, there are other bands that belong to the first wave of Black Metal. In Denmark, this was the band Mercyful Fate, with their debut album *Melissa* (Roadrunner Records) released in 1983. The Swedish band Bathory named themselves after the legendary Hungarian blood countess, who is said to have bathed in virgin blood to preserve her youth. They released their first album called *Bathory* (Tyfon Records) in 1984. Celtic Frost from Switzerland released their first album titled *To Mega Therion* (Noise Records) in 1985. The band was able to get HR Giger to create the cover design (cf. Mork 2009). Here are two examples of lyrics from bands that are considered to be part of the first wave of Black Metal:

Mercyful Fate – “The Oath:” “...Satan, Leviathan, Baal, Lucifer / I will kiss the goat / I swear to give my mind / My body and soul unreservedly / To the furtherance of our Lord Satan’s designs.” (Mercyful Fate 1984, The Oath)

Venom – “Possessed:” “Look at me Satan’s child / Born of evil, thus defiled / Brought to life through Satanic birth.” (Venom 1985, Possessed)

The entire spectrum of devilish iconography

The central foundation that first wave bands laid for the genre was a textual focus on the devil. Depictions of hell, black masses, apocalyptic devastation, ritual murders, direct description of a monstrous Satan – the entire spectrum of devilish iconography that had become established in rock music in the previous decades was used (cf. Trummer 2011, 225). The lyrics matched the music and the sales figures were also more than satisfactory.

Especially in the Christian counselling literature of the 1980s, there are many warnings against rock music or Heavy Metal. Here are some examples of the presumed effects of the music:

“Many groups are apparently of the opinion that satanic overtones appeal to the audience and thus promote sales of records and concerts. For some of these bands, this meant more or less joking and playing with the occult, but for other bands, there was bloody seriousness behind it.” (Bäumer 1987, 79; transl. F. T.)

Better sales figures were not accepted as an earthly justification for the use of occult or satanic lyrics. Bäumer further explains:

“Satan doesn’t care who beats the advertising drum for him. It is irrelevant whether a band propagates occult things out of conviction or just for fun – in both cases people are seduced.” (Bäumer 1987, 89; transl. F. T.)

Again and again, young people or readers of advice literature are warned to stay away from this music:

“With horror one has to realize again and again that sooner or later he takes every hand that stretches out towards him [Satan] in a steel grip and does not let go again.” (Bäumer 1987, 90; transl. F. T.)

It is important to note that Ulrich Bäumer’s work *Wir wollen nur deine Seele* is not a scientific discussion of rock music and the occult. However, it is a rich source of quotes from rock musicians who mentioned the devil or the occult in some way in connection with their music. Moreover, it was unfortunately used by Christian zealots as the standard work to argue against rock and metal music until the late 90s.

3 Second wave of Black Metal - the pure doctrine?

In the mid-80s, death metal began to replace thrash metal as the most aggressive genre of Heavy Metal. Due to the professionalization of this sub-genre, its music spread globally while also attracting increasingly critical voices from within the metal community. Jon “Metalion” Kristiansen, who has been a journalist and supporter in the Norwegian Black Metal scene since the beginning, wrote about this in an article in *Slayer Mag*:

“The last few years we have been infected with trendy, shitty Death Metal bands and all sudden Death Metal was normal and so called Death Metal bands started to sing about normal things [...] So the real meaning was lost.” (Kristiansen 2011, 221)

Øystein Aarseth “Euronymous” the founder of the band Mayhem, owner of the Helvete record shop and part of the Black Circle commented on this development as follows:

“If a band cultivates and worships death, then it’s death metal, no matter what kind of metal it is. [...] And by saying ‘cultivating death’ I don’t think about thinking it’s funny or being into gore. I’m thinking about being able to kill just because they hate life.” (Patterson 2013, 151)

For some bands, it was important to set themselves musically apart from commercialized and ideologically watered-down death metal. Lucrative record deals and worldwide concert tours, like those of the death metal band Morbid Angel, were seen as a betrayal of the underground by many young musicians in Norway. Therefore, they chose bands of the first wave of Black Metal as role models. Bands like Venom and Bathory became points of reference whose basically tongue-in-cheek lyrics about devil worship and murder and manslaughter were now taken deadly seriously (cf. Trummer 2011, 249).

Basically tongue-in-cheek lyrics were now taken deadly seriously.

Musically, the “finger moving technique” when playing the guitar was used by the band Bathory on their albums (*Blood, Fire, Death & Under the Sign of the Black Mark*). This technique was adopted by many second wave Black Metal bands (cf. Walch 2018, 125). Screams and guttural singing, which conveyed barely intelligible words, were also an important musical stylistic device. The double bass led to the so-called blast beat, which was supposed to be reminiscent of the sound of machine gun fire. The poor recording quality of the productions, self-drawn band logos, and simple, sometimes even black-and-white cover images were a sign of quality for true Norwegian Black Metal far from any commercialization. Ideologically too, people turned to Satanism but rather in the form of militant anti-Christianity and not in the form of a compact doctrine such as that developed by Anton Szandor LaVey.

In addition to the musical innovations, other factors contributed to the spread of the second wave of Black Metal beyond the borders of Norway. Singer Per Yngve Ohlin “Dead” of the band Mayhem in 1991 died by suicide by shooting himself in the head with a shotgun (cf. Sanches et. al. 2022). His bandmate and founding member of Euronymous took photos of his corpse, which years later became the cover artwork for the record *Dawn of the Black Hearts* (Warmaster Records) (recorded 1990, published 1995). From May 1992, there was a significant increase in church arson in Norway. Among 60 church fires, one third could be attributed to the Black Metal scene. In August 1992, Bard Eithun “Faust”, who was a member of the band Emperor, murdered a homosexual man with a knife. In August 1993, Kristian Vikernes “Varg” or “Count Grishnackh” stabbed his bandmate and head of the Norwegian Black Metal scene Øystein Aarseth “Euronymous”. These real-life deeds created a basic myth that subsequent Black Metal bands have always referred to (cf. Grünwald 2018, 58).

Another factor that contributed to the successful spread of the second wave of Black Metal were the musicians’ and fans’ excellent English skills, thanks to the good education system in Norway, which made it easy to connect with the international scene. In addition, most of the musicians came from middle-class households and were thus able to leverage a certain financial freedom to pursue their hobby or vocation (cf. Trummer 2011, 251). The best-known bands from this period are Mayhem (1984), Dark Throne (1986), Immortal (1990), Satyricon (1990), Burzum – the one-man band of Varg Vikernes – (1991), Emperor (1991) and Gorgoroth (1992) (cf. Moberg 2012). Nordic Black Metal spread all over the world during the 90s and also found musical imitators in different countries. Many adopted the stylistic devices in music, appearance and clothing. The philosophy behind it partly fell by the wayside as the social circumstances were different in other countries and the Nordic brand of metal-subculture (cf. Hjelm/Kahn-Harris/LeVine 2011) was not necessarily suitable there.

A reaction to Nordic secular, social and democratic Protestantism

In the current research literature, the causes for the emergence of the Black Metal subculture in Norway are described as follows: In Norway, Black Metal values were a form of opposition to the churches and the complacent and bourgeois values of the establishment (cf. Soderlind/Drydendall 2009). After World War II, the Nordic states were transformed into democratic welfare states. People from the working class became religious, indiffer-

ent middle-class consumers (cf. Hjelm et al. 2009). Satanism, perceived as a social problem, was a reaction to Nordic secular, social and democratic Protestantism (cf. Zuckermann 2008).

4 Black Metal Comedies

An extensive search in the International Movie Data Base yielded three comedies that thematically addressed Black Metal subculture, which serve as the basis for a cinematic narrative analysis.

- The film *POP REDEMPTION (HAPPY METAL)* was released in 219 cinemas in France in 2013. It remained in the program for a maximum of two weeks before disappearing again. With 88,444 ticket sales, the film was a commercial loss (cf. Hamard 2013; Allocine 2013). The film reviews were mixed. An innocent freak joke spoils its potential (cf. Cinema.de 2013) to be a quietly told story that successfully intersperses humor with a few moments of profound seriousness (cf. Kino.de 2014). The film had no ratings on the film rating portal rottentomatoes.com.¹
- With a production budget of around 3.8 million dollars, *HEVI REISSU (HEAVY TRIP; A BAND CALLED IMPALED RECTUM)* was one of the most expensive Finnish comedies ever produced. Grossing only 65,215 euros (cinema tickets + DVD sales), the film was also a financial flop (cf. Nash Information Services 2020), even though it won several awards at smaller film festivals. The film reviews were very positive (cf. Young 2018; Donato 2018) and on rottentomatoes.com Heavy Metal fans already describe it as a cult classic with a score of 94% (based on 32 reviews) (cf. Rotten Tomatoes 2018). The music magazine *Metal.de* saw *HEVI REISSU* first and foremost as a good parody of the metal scene, which would be fun to watch for any metal fan who could laugh at themselves. Even serious topics such as the lack of prospects for young people in rural Finland are dealt with humorously (cf. Carni 2018).
- The film *LORD & SCHLUMPFI – THE LONG WAY TO WACKEN*, started as a YouTube project in 2016 with short, high-quality episodes about the two protagonists published every few months. Following the positive feedback from users, a feature film was produced, which contained the first six episodes along with a further six. The film only

¹ Rotten Tomatoes is an American review aggregation website for film and television.

sold 2,910 cinema tickets (cf. Filmportal.de 2020). Nevertheless, the clips on YouTube, where the film was divided into 12 episodes, garnered an impressive audience with a total of 1,507,028 views. The most-watched episode has 354,211 views (cf. seldom told666, YouTube 2016), while the least-watched episode has 41,740 views (cf. seldom told666, YouTube 2022). The main criticism it received was to do with the fact that a YouTube short series had been compiled into a film. What works splendidly as individual episodes on the Internet, unfortunately, is all too quickly consumed in one go. *LORD & SCHLUMPF* works much better as a daily dose of humor online than on the big screen (cf. Straub 2020).

5 Evil men or outsiders

In the movie *LORD & SCHLUMPF*, singer Lord Belphegor Cthulu and lead guitarist Schlumpfi found the two-man band *Excrementus diaboli*. They play black Bavarian splatter metal. Their lyrics, according to an interview on a local TV station, are about blood, carnage, flesh and death, citing the bands Hellhammer, Celtic Frost, Bathory and Black Sabbath as their musical influences. Lord also mentions they are members of the holy church of Satan.



Fig.1: Lord sits in the basement of a church, which the church sacristan has officially allowed them to use as a rehearsal room for their band.

Film still, LORD & SCHLUMPF (Sabine Schreiber, DE 2020) 00:09:48

The two main characters are both in their late twenties. Lord is a typical outsider who always paints his face with corpse paint and wears a black cap, a black hoodie and a black leather coat. He always speaks softly, almost with an imploring undertone. Schlumpfi is his best friend, also dressed in all black, wearing skull pants and a black Smurf hat. He represents the nice outsider who is communicative and who is also involved in the community. He is also the secretary of the Catholic rural youth movement. At a local Bavarian beer tent festival and already under the heavy influence of alcohol, both protagonists decide to start a Black Metal band.

In *POP REDEMPTION*, The Dead MaKabés are an unsuccessful Black Metal band from France. Alex, the singer and band leader, is unemployed and takes care of his sick grandmother. Erik gives guitar lessons and lives with his lovers, while JP and Pascal are employed. In this film, the former young outsiders are now in their 30s and, apart from still having long hair, have partially integrated into society. Only Alex continues to pursue his dream of making the band successful and playing major festivals. At a children's birthday party, bassist JP explains that he is busy enough with his wife and children and that just listening to the music would be enough for him. The drummer Pascal admits that he is only in the band because of the others and is also too busy running the Chinese-Vietnamese restaurant he and his wife Yöyu own. Erik, the guitarist, admits that he misses playing solo, as he is a virtuoso and therefore plans to leave the band (cf. *POP REDEMPTION* [Martin Le Gall, FR 2013], 00:07:10).

In the film *HEVI REISSU*, the story centers on four young men around 25-years-old, who are also members of a Black Metal band. The main character, Turo Moilanen, lives in a small village in Finland. He has long hair, wears a black leather jacket and rides an old bicycle everywhere. Turo describes himself and his friends as misfits in a short monologue (cf. *HEVI REISSU* [Juuso Laatio & Jukka Vidgren, FL/NW 2018], 00:11:30).

TURO: The four of us have known each other since childhood. We've always been kind of outsiders, but this music is exactly our thing. Other boys play hockey or chase pussy. We play metal. (*HEVI REISSU* [Juuso Laatio & Jukka Vidgren, FL/NW 2018], 00:04:14)



Fig.2: *Impaled Rectum Band members – Turo, Jynkky, Lotvonen and Pasi alias Xytrax.*

Film still, HEVI REISSU (Juuso Laatio, Jukka Vidgren, FI/NO 2018) 00:41:32

The protagonists in all films are members of a Black Metal band. They live for their music but have no commercial success with it. Of particular note is the fact that all the bands from the different films have the same goal, which also drives the plot – to have their band perform at a major national metal festival such as Northern Damnation, Hellfest or Wacken.

6 Invoking the demons and praising the devil

In order for their band to get invited to Germany's biggest metal festival in Wacken, Lord and Schlumpfi decide to make a pact with the devil. How is the devil, or devil worship, or invocation portrayed in the film? There is no evidence of a deeper connection to the teachings of the Church of Satan in the film *LORD & SCHLUMPF*. Lord says in a television interview that he is a member of the Church of Satan. His subsequent behavior throughout the film and the lack of further reference to this religious community allow for the assumption that the name was only chosen because of the popularity of Satanic ideology, without letting it enter the film in any way.

However, the devil can also be summoned on purpose for a favor, like landing a gig at a big rock festival. The Pentatonicon bought as a study edition in the bookstore is meant to provide the instructions for a summoning and a pact. Here they can find the exact ingredients needed to summon the devil.

LORD: Whosoever desires to conjure up the antichrist requires the whisker of a goat, the foreleg of a deer buck, the excrements of a cat, pork blood, but it must come from a black pig butchered at midnight on the night of full moon, chicken bones, bat meat and the blood from a virgin. (LORD & SCHLUMPF! [Sabine Schreiber DE 2020], 00:11:50)

After Lord and Schlumpfi fail miserably in getting all the ingredients for the ritual, they try to summon the devil with the materials they do have. The incantation sounds good in the film because it is in Latin, but the translation does not make any sense, and at the end of the summoning follow the words: “The pious, light-filled patron Lucifer.” Seconds after the summoning, the owner of a talent agency, Pascal Hoof, knocks on the door and the two let him in. He invites them to come to the next talent competition but cannot cross the pentagram drawn on the floor. This is a hint that Hoof could be the devil.

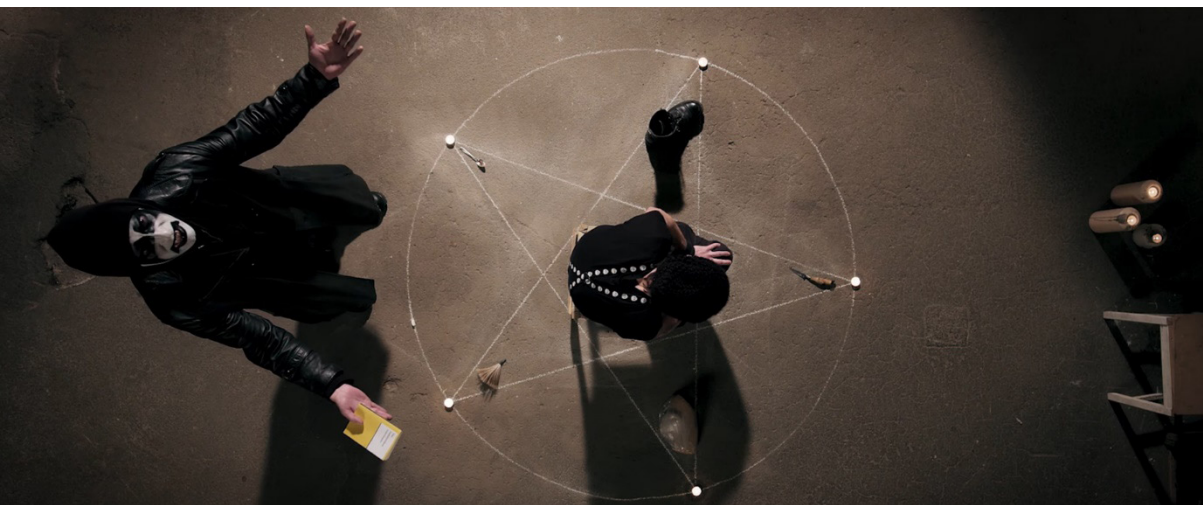


Fig. 3: *Schlumpfi sitting in the middle of the Pentagram and offering his soul to take while Lord is calling out for Lucifer.*

Film still, *LORD & SCHLUMPF!* (Sabine Schreiber, DE 2020) 00:19:06

Because the two did not have all the ingredients for the incantation, they didn't invoke the devil, but Schintilla. This is a Class III Demon disembodied spirit entity. It possesses a person who fulfils the summoner's commission. The summoner has no control over how this is done. At the end of the film, Schintilla is tricked by Lord and he leaves the demon in the countryside with his four lawyers. Another important scene in this movie is when

they are both called to perform an exorcism on a young woman, in the hope that they will be able to get in touch with the devil and eventually play at the Wacken festival. They want to appease the devil with pepper sausage, chili cheese and chili chocolate, but this has the exact opposite effect. They unintentionally drive the demon out of the young woman's body.

The lead singer of The Dead MaKabés sits in an attic room adorned with a web of doll limbs hanging from the ceiling, a skeleton in a cage, and many skulls and candles. He holds an upside-down cross in his hand and repeatedly moves it in circular movements over the candles.



Fig. 4: Alex, the singer of *The Dead MaKabés* performs an unspecified ritual.

Film still, *POP REDEMPTION* (Martin Le Gall, FR 2013), 00:04:10

ALEX: Death to passion. Death, death, death to everyday life. Death to boredom. death to getting up early. Death to work, family, fatherland. Death to comfort and good intentions. Death to love and through my voice death speaks to you all. (POP REDEMPTION [Martin Le Gall, FR 2013], 00:03:50)

Although this is a comedy, central aspects of Black Metal philosophy are summarized here. It is necessary to contradict all social values. Hate is also a central motif in Black Metal and is briefly discussed in the film.

JP: You can't do that, Alex. We don't hate the world like you do.

ALEX: I don't hate the world, just hate assholes...Satan protects us with his black cloak.

PASCAL: Put Satan somewhere else. I shit on your Satan.

Among The Dead MaKabés, only the singer Alex is familiar with the philosophy of Black Metal and tries to live by its lifestyle. In this film too, a Christian motif – the cloak of the virgin Mary – was attributed to Satan, which is said to have the same protective effect on his disciples. The other band members don't think much of it. As teenagers, they stole two shovelfuls of dirt from the local cemetery, were caught and received a prior conviction for cemetery desecration. The nightclub owner, who died in a tragic accident, is to be buried by the band in the forest. The four band members of The Dead MaKabés stand around the corpse like at a funeral.

ALEX: Hail prince of darkness. In awe we surrender your servants to this nightclub owner.

PASCAL: What rubbish are you talking about. (POP REDEMPTION [Martin Le Gall, FR 2013], 00:22:03)

The nightclub owner is left at the scene and they flee in their tour bus. In the films POP REDEMPTION and LORD & SCHLUMPF!, the band's incantation and musical performances are strictly separated. Ritual Black Metal can also be ruled out in the case of the films analyzed (cf. Granholm 2013).

7 Black Metal subculture in films

The so-called corpse paint on their faces, the difficult to understand lyrics and the low quality of the music recordings, and the use of pseudonyms by the musicians are all cornerstones of this subculture. Striking make-up for stage performances was already used by shock rocker Alice Cooper, as well as by the band KISS, to name the most prominent examples. The earliest evidence of the use of black-rimmed eyes and pale cheeks can be found in promotional photos of the Swiss band Hellhammer as early as late 1983, early 1984. Dead, the singer of Mayhem, wanted to look like a corpse and adopted this corpse paint, giving it his personal touch. The musicians' fascination with death and evil is usually cited as the main reason for the corpse-like make-up. The dark sounds are supposed to be visually complemented in a morbid atmospheric way (cf. Trummer 2011, 228). In the current Black Metal scene, corpse paint still represents an important stylistic device for many bands.

This particular use of make-up is intended to intimidate and differentiate but also to appeal to fans. It is an easily recognizable feature of Black Metal



Fig. 5: Pasi alias Xytrax in his workplace of the local library.

Film still, *HEVI REISSU* (Juuso Laatio, Jukka Vidgren, FI/NO 2018) 01:07:34

musicians. This particular styling was also used in all three films analyzed. The Dead MaKabés only wear corpse paint when they perform in a nightclub and afterwards when they flee from the nightclub owner. Among the band members of Impaled Rectum, only Pasi/Xytrax wears corpse paint, and he wears it when he is working in the library. The other band members are dressed like Heavy Metal fans of the late eighties. The same goes for Lord, who always wears corpse paint.

To give their band The Dead MaKabés a new lease of life, singer Alex suggests JP, the bassist, should also sing something. He hands him his notebook with the band's lyrics.

JP: 'Your child is a rat that stinks and sweats, I'll cut his legs until the blood spurts.' What is that supposed to be? What is that? 'I give happiness to your offspring, smile back with the blade.'

ALEX: What don't you like about it? I don't know how many years I've been singing this.

JP: You don't understand a word when you sing. (POP REDEMPTION [Martin Le Gall, FR 2013], 00:35:30)

Incomprehensible lyrics or bawled lyrics that are often sung incompletely when compared with the original lyrics in the album booklets are typical for this genre. Black Metal band Gorgoroth has banned their lyrics from being published.

In the film *HEVI REISSU*, the band coincidentally creates a new sound for the band to use while in the local reindeer slaughterhouse. A brutal noise was created due to a blocked bone saw when a knife got stuck in a part of a reindeer body due to carelessness. Pasi, who later calls himself Xytrax, suggests another example how the sound of a Black Metal band can be made even more authentic.

PASI: Did you know that they placed a microphone in a goat's carcass for the regrading? (*HEVI REISSU* [Juuso Laatio, Jukka Vidgren, FI/NO 2018], 1:02:33)

The pseudonyms that many Black Metal musicians use prevail in this genre of music for a variety of reasons. The guitarist and founding member of Venom calls himself Cronos. The lead singer of the band Mercyful Fate performs as King Diamond. Because the first names of the musicians were often pronounced badly or incorrectly when performing abroad they chose English pseudonyms. Unusual pseudonyms have become an important feature in Black Metal music, like Necrobutcher, Dead, Tormentor or Infernus. Øystein Aarseth, a founding member of Mayhem, chose Euronymous as his stage name because he was inspired by LaVey's *Satanic Bible*. This scripture speaks of a lowly demon called the "Greek Prince of Death". The Greek writer Pausanias mentions this demon in his work *The Description of Greece*: "Eurynomos, said by the Delphian guides to be one of the daimones of Hades, who eats off all the flesh of the corpses, leaving only their bones." (Pausanias 2018, 10.28.7)

8 How humor is created through Black Metal

As a cinematic character, Lord embodies the pure doctrine of Black Metal. This offers the opportunity to deconstruct the seriousness with humor on several levels in the film. The guitarist Schlumpfi is actually a Bavarian folk musician who enjoys making music with Lord but does not get involved with the subculture of Black Metal or even identifies with it. This juxtaposition creates humorous scenes throughout the entire film. Moreover, both characters are never perceived by their surroundings as serious or even fearful Black Metal musicians. The sacristan in the church helps them to draw a pentagram correctly, the saleswoman in the meat store explains to them with a smile that bats are, unfortunately, sold out today. Even the

ritual with which the devil is to be summoned serves as a basis for generating jokes. The ingredients for the ritual are improvised; instead of blood, for example, black pudding is used.

In the movie *POP REDEMPTION*, the character Alex, the band's singer, represents the pure doctrine of Black Metal. He repeatedly tells his bandmates to stay on this path. His three bandmates have long since left the Black Metal subculture behind and only still play together in the band because of Alex. All of Alex's comments about the devil and his potential help or worship are not taken seriously by his bandmates. This ignorance has its own kind of humor. The humorous highlight of the film is how the band hides from the police and disguises themselves as a Beatles cover band to perform at a strawberry festival in the French province. Black Metal themes such as darkness, hatred and nihilism are juxtaposed with bright colors, love and *joie de vivre*, which amuses the audience immensely.

Juxtapositions and ignorance as a source of humor

In the film *HEVI REISSU*, Pasi/Xytrax takes on the role of the band member with the most knowledge about the subculture of Black Metal and also lives by it. Making music is their main focus. Religious components such as Satan worship or demon summoning do not appear at all in this film. A church representative appears at the drummer's funeral but does not comment on the band or their music. Humor is primarily generated by the reaction of society (village policeman, mayor, folk music singer) to the band or their appearance. Pasi, the librarian of the village, adopts the stage name Xytrax, wears corpse paint on his face, wears forearm pads decorated with large nails and a black fur hat with deer antlers, and appears on a rock at the edge of the forest. This is also where the band's cover photo is to be taken – in wild nature. The natural space (Nordic landscapes with mountains, rivers and forests) is very popular in Black Metal. It represents an unruly and dangerous primal space. This space is free from traces of modern civilization or civilization in general (cf. Grünewald 2018, 60). Further, Xytrax designed the band logo *Impaled Rectum*, which one of his bandmates mistakenly identifies as *Iskender Kebab*. The names of Black Metal bands are very often squiggly or abstracted on record covers and difficult for outsiders to recognize. What makes Black Metal terrifying was exposed to ridicule in almost every scene. Among all three films analyzed, *HEVI REISSU* features the most inside jokes for a metal audience.

Conclusion

Black Metal has become part of pop culture in many Scandinavian countries, and is also recognized with national arts awards. The shock caused by the second wave of Black Metal with murders and church arsons seems to long be in the past now. Even the criticism from the ranks of Christian representatives has decreased rapidly. Cornerstones of the Black Metal subculture such as humorlessness as an ideology, media staging strategies such as the creation of an aura of evil and a constant seriousness were used in the films analyzed and deconstructed in different ways to generate humor (cf. Wagenknecht 2012, 158). In summary, it can be said that the Heavy Metal fans are mostly portrayed as harmless outsiders in the films analyzed.

Beneficial effects of Heavy Metal music on wellbeing

Current research suggests that Heavy Metal and its various sub-genres do not have a negative effect on young people or listeners in general. Studies from the 1980s and early 1990s were under a certain social pressure to confirm expected results (cf. Burket et al. 1994). From a scientific point of view, young people form groups of like-minded people who support each other and often find solace in their music, even when they are home alone. There are certain beneficial effects of Heavy Metal music on wellbeing (cf. Quinn/Glaves 2022, 376).

In the film *HEVI REISSU*, the policeman uses traditional prejudices that were also used to blame and insult the 1968 generation. To what extent did these accusations or prejudices apply to young people who listened to Heavy Metal? In the early 1990s, Heavy Metal music and reckless behavior among adolescents was under scientific investigation. A study in the early 1990s showed that both boys and girls who liked Heavy Metal music scored higher in sensation seeking and self-confidence with regard to sexuality and dating. Boys who liked Heavy Metal reported a higher rate and wide range of dangerous behavior, including reckless driving, unprotected sex and drug use. Girls were more prone to shoplifting, vandalism, unsafe sexual behavior and drug use (cf. Steck/Anderson/Boylin 1992). The lyrical themes of Heavy Metal music sometimes depict acts of aggression, violence and misogyny, so researchers have investigated whether exposure to such music might lead to increases in anger, aggressive cognitions, and aggressive/antisocial behaviors. Those who enthusiastically embrace extreme metal music tend to feel empowered and joyful after engaging with this music;

those who do not like this type of music rarely report positive outcomes and are typically left feeling tense, irritated and angry. It should be noted that there are very few people who listen to Black Metal involuntarily or are forced to do so (cf. Olsen/Terry/Thompson 2023).

Metal music has an entertaining character, which also comes to the fore at concerts, but images of death, destruction and suffering are not outside the societal norm in this genre of music. Texts and thoughts on murder and suicide are also included (cf. Baker/Brown 2014). Death and transience also play an important role in the films *HEVI REISSU*, and *POP REDEMPTION*. Alex, the satanist and lead singer of The Dead MaKabés, learns of his grandmother's death and goes to the nearest church, attends mass and sings along to a song in a high, beautiful voice. In the comedy *HEVI REISSU*, the drummer Jynkky dies in a car accident with the tour bus. Pasi gives a speech at the grave of his friend and bandmate. He quotes a song lyric from Black Sabbath.² Some scientific work has shown that open discussions about death in Western societies have greatly decreased. Whether a constant preoccupation with death in lyrics or the contemplation of symbolisms make metal music fans less prone to anxiety disorders and depression compared to other members of society needs to be further explored in detail. On the other hand, a study of 333 metal fans conducted in France found that they had the same or even lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to the general population (cf. Recours/Aussaguel/Trujillo 2009).

Can the devil laugh at the end?

And can the devil laugh at the end? None of the three films pay homage to any form of Satanism like the teachings of Anton Szandor LaVey or Aleister Crowley. The Satanism in *LORD & SCHLUMPF* and *HEVI REISSU* is not based on a fixed concept but is rather fluid in nature. Lord claims to be a member of the Church of Satan but this is not further addressed or portrayed in the film. Satan is supposed to help him play at the Wacken Festival, nothing more. The Satanism that Alex demonstrates to his bandmates can be compared to a reversed Christianity in terms of symbolism and some rituals (cf. Höpflinger 2018). When his grandmother dies, he immediately seeks solace in the nearest church. This is an indication that the character does not really follow Satanism but uses it as a performance device for musical success and as a release in reaction to a world that seems hostile to him. He who laughs last, laughs best – in terms of the three films analyzed, it is not the devil but the audience of metal music fans.

² Black Sabbath – Children of the sea, Vertigo 1980.

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