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Of chaos and internal fire

The quest for nothingness by lyrical manifestations of re-interpreted Gnostic thought

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Abstract

This essay researches the prevalence of Gnostic influences in contemporary music lyrics, more exclusively within the confines of the extreme metal scene. A resurgence of such topics has also been evident in contemporary music, not surprisingly as music in general is part of the foundations of culture, and in a wider aspect of the society at large. The essay is performed using a hermeneutic method, interpreting music lyrics and discussing them from a background of cultural and religious theory. The purposes of researching the influences of Gnosticism in this environment are to determine the presence of Gnostic thought in extreme metal lyrics, research the eventual re-interpretation of historical sources of Gnosticism, and to discuss the acknowledged Gnostic influences in the displayed art form in a contemporary cultural perspective, related to cultural aspects such as secularization, modernity and globalization.

Sources include music lyrics appropriate to the subject matter at hand as well as previously published interviews.

The results of the investigation demonstrate that there are multiple interpretations of Gnostic thought apparent in extreme metal lyrics, varying from slight re-interpretations to more extensive ones, as evident in the case of what is identified as a chaos-gnostic current. The Gnostic material has in the latter scenario been integrated into an originally satanic world-view and as a result has become a major part of the chaos-gnostic belief system. The chaos-gnostic current has appeared in a highly secular surrounding, and the results of the essay propose that a secular surrounding can breed elements of transgression within individuals, leading to the resurgence of oppositional counter-cultural characteristics and an awakening of alternative spirituality with oppositional overtones.

Keywords

Contemporary music, culture, extreme metal, Gnosticism, music lyrics, re-enchantment, Satanism, secularization, transgression.

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1. Introduction

The decline of traditional institutionalized religion in the Western world in latter stages of history has for many years been the subject of research, as have the resurgence of historical influences being integrated into the eclectic spirituality of today. The modern world with its defragmentizational tendencies has not stayed clear of the world of spirituality or religion, and new interpretations of visions from the past find their way into the common conscious, cross-breeding in sometimes unexpected fashions. The old has given way to the new and back again. What is certain is that no resurgence of ideas past any longer can count as surprising or inappropriate; the paths are many and the idea of universal religiosity has never seemed more distant. Gnosticism is but one such influence, the return of which has come gradually over the course of the last century.

Gnosticism in contemporary society has been researched from a number of positions, for example with political and historical perspectives. A resurgence of such Gnostic topics has furthermore been evident in contemporary music, not surprisingly, since music in general is part of the foundations of culture, and a wider aspect of the society at large. However, in this area very little research has been done as of yet, which is also one of the reasons why this essay is being written. Studies of religion in literature or film are abounding, as is the research on the importance of music and its functions to religious practice; and where even studies of Gnosticism in literature and film is analysed are not that hard to find,¹ studies of religion in contemporary music lyrics are not quite as common, and certainly not when taking into account the time we spend listening to music; how often do we really contemplate what the words to music actually mean?

Part of the issue is the fact that many music lyrics don't actually have any profound meaning, they are in many instances an accompanying feature which is written more out of necessity than of a need to communicate emotion.² Although much of the music lyrics which are showered in our ears on a regular basis deal with everyday and mundane topics, there are still artists who are exploring what lies beyond the realms of our physical world. A work of music has immense possibilities to be a source from where the individual can create meaning,

¹ For instance, a study of Gnosticism in American novelist Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* exists, as well as studies of Gnosticism in the movie *The Matrix*.

² Adorno 1989:27, Griffiths 2008:40-41

identity and a sense of connection to the world,³ as well as being an aesthetic experience. Musical works can additionally function as a means of proclaiming, reinforcing and determining religious beliefs and to mediate such belief outwards.

The relevance of a study like this lies in the unexpected; when examining what was originally one of the most profane manifestations of music, the contemporary rock and metal genres; one scratches the surface and finds an abundance of existential and downright religious thinking (Well, to be honest, nowadays one doesn't even have to scratch the surface, religious expressions in the metal scene are hidden in plain sight). When researching what is, or at least has been, in essence the working class white man's music,⁴ a passion and fire is found which is rarely manifested in the secular Western societies of the present age. Such is the power fuelled by the need for new cultural and spiritual expressions, that they overcome historical barriers, finding and re-interpreting what is old and almost forgotten into a living example of the innovative trait hidden in mankind; a reminder that whatever may happen along the way, the quest for the divine or, indeed, the transcendental appears to never be fully satisfied in man.

2. Aim and purpose of the study

In this essay I particularly attempt to analyse the prevalence of Gnostic influences in contemporary musical works, with emphasis on modern metal music. There are several purposes for narrowing the field down; the obvious and primary one being the pure weight of material at hand necessitating a limitation. My selection of material is otherwise based upon the assumption that the extreme metal scene, when examining it more closely, is abundant with examples of Gnostic influences.

In short, this essay will attempt to research and define Gnostic influences in modern metal music lyrics, while also analyzing the differing varieties of said re-interpreted Gnostic findings and their historical affiliates. Subsequently I will analyse how the re-interpretation of the original sources have taken place and finally discuss those results in a wider contemporary cultural perspective, related to aspects such as secularization/re-sacralization, modernity and globalization, with special emphasis on the former phenomenon.

³ Bossius 1998:138, 2003:284-286, Moberg 2009:212

⁴ Kahn-Harris 2007:11, 16

While the identification of the highlighted elements as explicitly (if not always exclusively) *Gnostic* is of importance, the main body of work will be focused on latter-day re-interpretation of Gnosticism in sections of popular culture (more adequately defined as extreme metal) and its relevance when forming individual spirituality in a wider cultural perspective. While two currents of re-interpreted Gnosticism are discernable, focus will be placed most exhaustingly upon the more controversial variant, in this essay called chaos-gnosticism.

3. Theory

3.1 Snakes for the divine: Gnosticism

While it basically is impossible to adequately define Gnosticism in such a limited space as this, especially when it comes down to the modern variations and their eclecticism, I will nevertheless present some basic theoretical foundations regarding Gnosticism, which I later will relate my comparisons and analytical assumptions to. Even the original, historical Gnosticism in antiquity was a multi-faceted one; a syncretical movement of individual thought patterns more than anything else.⁵ Its origins lay mainly in Greek, Hellenistic and early Christian thought, but have in addition several elements from other traditions.⁶ The antique Gnostics were a relatively small campaign in numbers; and one that was seen as heretics by the Christians of the time. As such, their impact on religious life and especially on the beginnings of Christianity has through the ages been diminished by the Christian authorities.⁷ Although Gnostic currents have been discovered in other religious traditions, it is predominantly the Christian variant that is of interest in this essay.⁸

3.1.1 Hans Jonas

One of the most prominent researchers regarding Gnosticism is Hans Jonas. In his book on Gnostic religion, aptly named *The Gnostic religion*, Jonas advocates an existentialist view on Gnosticism, firmly rooted in the perception that man's own actions and conceptions of

⁵ Gunnarsson 2004:15, Jonas 2001:34, Shoham 2003:2-3, 90, Faxneld 2006:2-5

⁶ Jonas 2001:37-40, Broek & Hanegraaff 1998:4-6, Martin 1987:11-12

⁷ Pagels 2005:183-188, Broek & Hanegraaff 1998

⁸ Larsen 2008:302, Van Oort 1998:37

knowledge of the alien God is at the very centre of attention in Gnostic thinking.⁹ Some of the most important general traits that define the Gnostic religion are, according to Jonas:

- belief in the concept of an alien God, and that an inferior, malevolent deity known as the demiurge has created the world as we perceive it,
- the notion of universe as a form of prison that is separating Man from God,
- belief that a form of knowledge regarding the alien God, *gnosis*, exists within man and that this knowledge has the potential to liberate man and lead the path towards the true God,
- a dualistic view of the relationship between the alien, transcendent God and man, as well as the relationship between man and the world,
- one of two alternatives: an either ascetic or libertine moral approach.

He is determined to state that Gnosticism can be regarded as an identifiable religion despite factors like its eclectic nature, and the fact that to some extent the term Gnosticism is a product of modern academic construction, since there are general traits that he claims to be universal to all Gnosticism. The work of Jonas is fundamental to this essay and the material examined will often be related to the distinctive characteristics and theories of Gnosticism he suggests. He is also universally regarded as a key authority on the subject matter at hand and as such, his works are very well equipped to be related to when describing the fundamental traits of Gnosticism. It should consequently be noted that the above cited general traits are selected ones and makes to claim to form a complete list; the selection is mine and one that I believe is relevant for the purposes of this essay.

3.1.2 Other scholars in the field of Gnostic studies

The characteristics regarding the resurgence of Gnosticism in the modern age has been researched by among others Cyril O'Regan, whom will also be referred to on occasion: his approach is less inclined to accept the existence of a single, coherent form of Gnosticism, somewhat in opposition to Jonas, and as such, less important to the conclusions of this essay. In *God Interrupted*, Benjamin Lazier speaks at length about the Gnostic revival between the world wars, giving insight to the sudden popularization of Gnostic academic studies of the times. In addition, David Brakke has produced more recent work on the early Gnostics.

⁹ Jonas 2001:34-36, 288

Hanegraaff and van der Broek's 1998 anthology on gnosis and hermeticism has much to offer, especially when it comes down to characteristics of hermeticism and Manichaeism, related to Gnosticism in many ways.

It should be noted that some scholars have actively refuted the idea of Gnosticism as a coherent, relevant term in the field of religion, especially Michael A. Williams, who claims that Gnosticism should not be regarded as an identifiable religion of its own, insisting that the integrated movement is so fragmented and loosely connected, while its doctrines are gathered from so many sources, that a classification as a unified belief system is not relevant.¹⁰ I believe however that Jonas' discussion of and arguments for determining Gnosticism as a relevant gathering term for some key philosophical thoughts and religious beliefs, some of them stated previously in this text, are appropriate and will throughout this essay discuss Gnosticism with the presumption of this as an adequate description.

3.2 Unveiling the wicked: Contemporary music and metal studies

With the advent of the post-modern era, contemporary music studies has diversified and segmented themselves in many ways; while a wider cultural approach can still be relevant, the fragmentation of musical communication itself has necessitated a similar structuralization in the academic studies of music. A study like the one at hand can therefore be qualitatively performed by using the hermeneutic method, analysing the phenomena from both wider perspectives regarding cultural and musical theory in general, and the more specialised perspectives focusing on metal studies and subcultural theory. In the following section I will briefly define the main foundations of cultural, musical and subcultural theory that will be the basis throughout.

3.2.1 Extreme metal, subcultural and scenic theory

The work of Keith Kahn-Harris regarding extreme metal and his contributions to the question of subcultural theory versus the concept of *scenes* will be referred to throughout the essay. Harris (among others, perhaps most notably Andy Bennett) has argued that the concept of scene is a more applicable theoretical idea than the established classification of subcultural theory.¹¹ Accepting a leaning towards a classification of scenes means, in this case, that national and political boundaries is attributed with less significance, indicating the influences

¹⁰ Williams 1996:263-266

¹¹ Kahn-Harris 2007:16-18

which globalization and the advent of technical innovation has had on cultural differentiation. Even though theories of neo-tribal activity as a more postmodernist theory have had some impact in recent years,¹² the concept of scenes is still highly valid when discussing the metal community, since this community as of yet has not departed from a primarily scenic construction,¹³ although heavy metal was never considered an actual subculture due to its lack of coherent style.¹⁴ In the concept of scenic social activity is also inherent the attribution of the possibility to gain capital through scenic activity, closely connected to the idea of cultural capital as popularised by Pierre Bourdieu.¹⁵ There is still also valid material acquainted with subcultural theory, such as for instance the general concept of subcultural capital, thus, such sources will still be referred to on occasion. Subcultural theory is of interest to this study as it brings into perspective some factors of secularization regarding the participants and agents involved in creating the textual material displayed.

Metal studies as academic discipline has emerged in the past twenty years or so, one of the earlier efforts of importance being Deena Weinstein's *Heavy Metal: a cultural sociology*, first published in 1991 and the best early attempt to characterize the heavy metal subgenre(s) and their cultural aspects in a serious and systematic manner, although earlier efforts had been made. While being largely outdated today (a new and revised edition by a different title emerged in 2000), it remains a starting point for the emerging field of metal studies and one that is continuously cited (not least in this essay).¹⁶ The most prominent of the latter-day academics is perhaps the aforementioned Keith Kahn-Harris, but in the last decade or so metal studies have come in abundance and in great variation. The British academia has in many ways been leading the way when applying subcultural and scenic theories in metal studies.¹⁷ This field of study has many approaches and is hard to overview; the approach to metal studies can be sociological, psychological, cultural, musicological et cetera, and has with time moved in favour of the more extreme variations of the heavy metal genre.¹⁸

¹² The term postmodernity was formulated by Jean-Francois Lyotard and argues a rejection of the concept of a "grand narrative". See Lyotard 1993.

¹³ Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004:15-18

¹⁴ Brown 2006:219-220

¹⁵ Bourdieu 2010:225

¹⁶ Mercer-Taylor 2009:40

¹⁷ As evident in the abundance of research done at the CCCS in Birmingham, see Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004:2-10

¹⁸ The constituents of the field of metal studies are elaborated on at length in Andy R. Brown's article *Heavy Genealogy*, which in addition contains an exhaustive list of authors who have occupied themselves with metal studies in one form or another.

3.2.2 Relations to popular culture

There is an abundance of research done in the past decade on various aspects of popular music. Metal studies do not necessarily classify as popular culture; some music just isn't made to be popular.¹⁹ The matter of the word "popular" in popular culture has been debated; does the term remain relevant or has it been rendered obsolete?²⁰ As extreme metal at times borders to the completely unlistenable, it would be adequate to describe the musical art form as one constantly seeking new ways to alienate listeners and explore the boundaries of musicality; an idea well in line with some of the lyrical accompanies to the music that will unravelled later on in this essay.²¹

Metal music can incorporate formulas from popular, classical, art or folk music among others, rendering it at times alien to general classification. The origins however lie in classic rock and blues; thereby, it would perhaps to be most appropriate to say it exists on the outskirts of popular culture. Since the genre's initiation in the early seventies, its popularity have come and gone and come again; while rarely generating big sellers, the metal scene thrives on their underground status and has historically appealed first and foremost to the white working-class male,²² but with the advent of globalization this exclusion is beginning to fade, as growing metal scenes in both the far and middle east prove.

The class factor has been adopted as one of the key ingredients leading to participation in subcultural activity, though recent research identifies other aspects, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and the like, as considered of if not equal then at least adequate importance when formulating subcultural, scenic or neo-tribal interest.²³

While today an integral part of at least Western-civilization culture, the self-image of the general metal scene and its participants remain largely one of subversion, transgression and rebellion. In some ways, this is still true, particularly regarding the most extreme forms; but as subgenre, even extreme metal nowadays is culturally acceptable. As of today, since there are

¹⁹ Ironically, some artists that originally set out to be as extreme and outrageous as possible later have went on to sell millions of albums and be essentially popular music. *Lex Metallica* could be an appropriate term to use: from attempting to name their first album "*Metal up your ass*" in 1983 to becoming one of the best-selling artists in the world.

²⁰ International advisory editors 2007:35-47

²¹ The description of some of extreme metal as virtually unlistenable is no critique; it is a fact that some of the sound of extreme metal principally is indistinguishable from white noise or static, at is meant to sound so, as many listeners will experience when first listening to, for instance, bands like Carcass, Brutal Truth and similar artists. See also Bogue 2007:46, Kahn-Harris 2004:86, Mudrian 2004:124-125.

²² Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004:117

²³ Bennett & Kahn-Harris 2004:13-14

metal fans of basically all ages, the institutionalization of metal into general popular culture is approaching completion.

3.3 Beyond the sacred and profane: Secularization and re-sacralization

When addressing the phenomenon known as secularization, opinions and theories seem to differ radically. Some imply that as a large-scale, general occurrence, secularization has essentially come and gone, leaving in its place a momentum of re-sacralization,²⁴ while others are determined that the secularization process is still very much alive and kicking. Both ends of the spectrum will be relevant for inclusion and evaluation in my discussion. The secularization theories that have been circulating for centuries have met critique because of its limited relevance to non-Western civilizations;²⁵ in this essay this fact is of lesser importance since the field of research is confined to strictly Western-civilization musical works. The main points of said critique revolve around the fact that alternative spiritualities is on the rise, revoking secularization's position as "master narrative",²⁶ and the tendencies of privatization of religiosity.

Steve Bruce is one of the more prominent defenders of the relevance and importance of secularization theories, although he does not claim the theory to be universal,²⁷ while Karel Dobbelaere determines the need for those theories to be re-interpreted for the postmodern age.²⁸ For other aspects of secularization, parts of Bryan S. Turner's works on the matter could be mentioned; to provide insight into the process of re-sacralization Christopher Partridge's twin volumes regarding the concurring re-enchantment of the west is consulted along with Thomas Bossius and his works on re-enchantment in metal (and other) subcultures.

It seems as though academic consensus is slowly moving towards the acceptance that secularization will not be the universal power to overthrow religiosity or the master narrative to be; the question of secularization's effects on culture and society seem to be more complex

²⁴ For example, Christopher Partridge speaks about the difficulty to accept strong theories of secularization, see Partridge 2005:325. The resurgence of religion as a political factor in various parts of the world is another argument against the assumption of secularization's continuous progress on a worldwide scale, see for instance Westerlund 1996. Several other researchers share the presumption that secularization is in decline as a general theory with universal application claims; for example Paul Heelas and Karel Dobbelaere.

²⁵ Turner 2010, Martin 2005

²⁶ Martin 2005:137-138

²⁷ Bruce 2011:220-221

²⁸ Dobbelaere 2004:229-230

and intriguing than expected when the process of secularization began.²⁹ As even Steve Bruce, a strong defender of secularization as a valid concept, agrees, the effects of the secularization process does not specifically mean the death of religion, it means a turn from organized religion and a lesser demand from the public when it comes to these types of institutionalized religious practice, while he furthermore claims that the effects of alternative religion are insignificant unable to fill the void of traditional Christianity.³⁰ The statement of the decline of Christianity is one most can agree with, although the interpretations of the matter differ; as David Martin on the other hand claims a revival as being in process when regarding evangelical Christianity as well as in the process of re-enchantment by the rise of New Age religiosity.³¹ The processes of the re-sacralization of the West is a matter on which there has been much debate, but it is an unequivocal fact that alternative spirituality has grown, as a result of liberalization, individualization and modernity in the secular West.³² Therefore, the assumption in this essay is that secularization has had the impact of the public being less generally interested in traditional religious practice and affiliation, while other defragmented religious and spiritual activity to some extent has filled this void. As this essay discusses Western-civilization events and occurrences, the presumption is that said events have taken place in highly secular countries where religion has been in decline for many years and as such, is no longer the powerful force in culture it once was.

3.4 Cryptic writings: The interpretation of lyrics

The interpretation of lyrics found in musical works, the main study object in this essay, necessitates an instant and clear distinction: music lyrics are not the same as general, poetic lyricism. The music lyric is not merely text, it is a text that interacts with the musical framework and it is a text that would not exist without its musical surrounding.³³ It does not have the same purposes as a poetic, lyrical text but can serve multiple purposes – or sometimes have very little purpose at all. Simon Frith is perhaps the one who, despite his main interest being the actual music, has elaborated on the subject of pop and rock lyrics with most intention and purpose.³⁴

²⁹ Martin 2005:124-126, Bruce 2011:74, Turner 2010: 316, Heelas 2010:255, Partridge 2004:38, Siebert 2005:38-39.

³⁰ Bruce 2011:102,119

³¹ Martin 2005:125-126

³² Martin 2005:126, Bruce 2011:102,119, Heelas 2010:246-247

³³ Fornäs 2003:11-12, Frith 1996:179

³⁴ For verification and elaboration, Frith's 1996 volume *Performing Rites: on the Value of Popular Music* is the most exhaustive source, albeit not as exhaustive as one might expect. The field of study regarding music lyrics is still largely uncovered territory.

The lyrics examined in this essay are selected because of their intention to say something—texts without a purpose beyond accompanying the musical work and providing words for instant sing-along friendliness does not apply. Since the extreme music scene continuously balances on the fringes of what is musically and aesthetically possible,³⁵ the lyrics often contribute to and complement what is to be regarded as a musical art work – although some probably would hesitate to label such manifestations of musical expression as art. The importance of the lyric as a component of significance to the musical work as a whole may certainly be discussed; many artists proudly proclaim the lyric as less important than the music, a statement which makes sense; without the musical part, there is no musical piece. But there are also artists who put a lot of time and effort into constructing their lyrics; not least artists who mediate religiosity through their lyrics. This fact will be found obvious later on in this essay.

Interpreting music lyrics challenges the performer insofar that song lyrics can have different meanings; in a sense, no one reading of such a text can claim to be exclusively accurate. The result of the lyrical analysis will of course be related to the subject matter at hand; this does not infer that other readings with differing perspectives should be considered inaccurate in any way.

4. Material & method

Primary material in this essay essentially equals musical material produced by artists pursuing an aesthetic and intellectual core related in some way to Gnostic thought, while also being considered as classifiable as extreme metal, and publicly released in various forms. The material at hand has been selected by their interpreted relevance to the subject matter at hand, but is not, neither by intention or possibility, an exhaustive reflection of the actual width of such manifestations of Gnostic religiosity. By intention, the width of the material is narrowed down into musical works classified as belonging to the extreme metal scene; since this will lend a more focused approach to the study. It should be noted, that since the material is selected for its relevance in order to discuss Gnosticism, it is not generally typical in the metal music genre to possess such beliefs or interests.

³⁵ Some of the most musically extreme metal music, such as Grindcore, is virtually indistinguishable from pure noise; for further elaboration about the boundaries of extreme music, see Mudrian 2004 and Kahn-Harris 2003:82-84.

The nature of this essay will essentially be a hermeneutic analysis of musical works involving Gnostic elements, with focus on contemporary metal music. Lyrical material expressed in these formats are not always entirely separated from the musical context in which it is found, and therefore I will on occasion discuss this fact and its core implications.³⁶ However, the essence and main body of the essay revolves around the lyrics.

While some of the key terms in this essay have already been described and determined, some remain to be explained, regarding how they are used as well as why they are used.

The frequent usage of the term *extreme metal* is due to its relevance as a collective umbrella term which also adequately describes exactly what it is about – extreme variations of music with some form of relation to the heavy metal genre.³⁷ This classification has become an accepted term both within the metal community and among academics, as it manages to take into account the almost infinite numbers of sub-genres otherwise registered under the common name of heavy metal and gathering them under one distinctive name. Such formula has the benefit of managing to classify artists who during their career produce music which may have aspects of several of the sub-genres associated with extreme metal. While other genre names are also employed when deemed appropriate, they are kept to an absolute minimum to avoid confusion.

Ever present in an essay in religious science are the terms *religiosity* and *spirituality*, and although they may be used in the broadest sense and at times intertwine with each other, they nevertheless crave some clarification. When referring to *religiosity*: the term is generally employed when discussing more traditional forms of religious life and practice, as in the case of established religions and actions related to those forms of institutional religion. As for *spirituality*: this term is generally utilized when discussing less rigid forms of religious life, and adopted as a looser and more inclusive description of religious activity which is more focused on the individual rather than traditional, collective forms of institutionalized religiosity.³⁸

³⁶ Häger 2004:42

³⁷ Kahn-Harris 2007:1-5

³⁸ Granholm 2008:14-15

5. Background

5.1 Spark in the dark: The origins of Gnosticism

As previously stated, the origins of Gnosticism are to be found in the syncretic religiosity of early Christianity, drawing inspiration from Hellenism, classic Greek thought and Zoroastrism, to name but a few.³⁹ The Gnostics were never really a homogenous crowd to begin with; in the early centuries of the first century, they interpreted the Christian doctrine differently to the church fathers and emphasised the value of the human experience to a higher degree.

There was in the original Gnosticism of course a strong emphasis on gnosis; the knowledge of the extra-terrestrial and divine as opposed to the Christian, faith-based religiosity. This is perhaps the single most distinguishable feature of early Gnosticism.⁴⁰ But the tenets as described in previous sections were all of importance, adding to the fact that the early Gnostics were not merely Christians, but were aiming at other goals and by other means. This also contributed to their coming status as outcasts, as the church claimed the Gnostics as heretics and did their utmost to eradicate them, with considerable success, one must say. The proclamation of Gnostics as heretics became a continuous approach from Christianity, an approach that lasted through the ages into our days, where “Gnostic” still can be used as a negative attribute.

The Manicheans has been described as the successors to the ancient Gnosticism that faded, and was an Eastern variation of Gnosticism.⁴¹ It was a numerically and geographically larger current than original Gnosticism ever was, and one that was once to be regarded as one of the world’s main religions.⁴² The Manichaean religion, although more persistent than the Western branches of Gnosticism, died out as well; in some regions of China, where it was most long-lived, the religion lasted at the very least well into the 16th century.⁴³ Gnostic thought was otherwise suppressed and relatively sparse up until the twentieth century, where a resurrection of sorts seem to have taken place, not least as a study object for academics,⁴⁴ but even to some extent as an inspirational source for religious syncreticism.

³⁹ Broek 1998:2

⁴⁰ Broek 1998:2, Brakke 2010:20

⁴¹ Jonas 2001:206-207, Rudolph 1987:326-327

⁴² Rudolph 1987:326-332, Van Oort 1998:37

⁴³ Jonas 2001:207, Rudolph 1987:332

⁴⁴ Jonas 2001:290

5.2 Reconquering the throne: Gnosticism in the present age

While being more or less absent from the conscious world of religiosity for many years, a revival of Gnostic thought has occurred in the modern age, and the interest in Gnosticism virtually exploded (in a relative sense) in the twentieth century when the Nag Hammadi texts were found. Gnosticism has to some extent been re-interpreted, and not always with emphasis on the religious content; some scholars have also made attributions to psychology and politics.⁴⁵ While scholarly interest has been high, the actual resurrection of practicing Gnostic religion has been moderate. While some groups practice Gnostic or Gnostic-like religion in varying forms, the tendencies from the early days of Gnosticism clearly have made its imprint on today's followers as well; it is marginalised, syncretic and fragmentary groups and individuals that are the active performers. While still being an abhorred variant of religiosity among many Christian congregations, Gnosticism appears to receive a higher degree of tolerance than what was the case in their early incarnations. The Gnostic is now on the agenda.

In the current religious climate, Gnosticism is perhaps more well-equipped than most to survive; being a syncretic philosophy from the start, the Gnostic theories can be integrated into many of the new religious movements with relative ease. The New Age movement have certainly adopted some of its thinking and there are other examples of current religious congregations and sects that have been looking more closely to Gnosticism for that creative spark.⁴⁶ Old Gnostic ideas have also been re-interpreted in the most diverse and eclectic manner, as we will find contemporary examples of later in this essay. The claim to hereditary validity appears non-existent; the claim to relevance for the present-day spiritualist is all the greater.

The appearance of a re-interpreted chaos-gnostic variation, as unveiling itself later on in this essay, is one that is scantily examined and scarcely known outside of some relatively underground groups and internet communities. The most notable exception is a passage in Fredrik Gregorius' *Satanismen i Sverige*, where the occurrence of chaos-gnosticism is noted

⁴⁵ See for instance Eric Voegelin's work on Gnosticism.

⁴⁶ The connection between New Age religiosity and Gnosticism has been researched by, among others, Antoine Faivre as part of his works on western esotericism (Faivre 1994:276-277) as well as by Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Hanegraaff 1996:322-323, 1998:374, 379) and Olav Hammer (Hammer 1997:103-104).

in the teachings of a predominantly satanic group called Misanthropical Luciferian Order (MLO).⁴⁷ There will be reason to return to this matter in the following chapters.

5.3 Spiritual wasteland: Metal music, religion and the secular

Music and religion has always connected well with one another; the Christian churches have for centuries integrated music into their sermons and ceremonies, as have other religious denominations and organizations. The advent of the industrialized societies of the modern age has brought a decentralization of economical assets and the occurrence of leisure-time, making it possible for the average man to partake in musical and other recreational activities to a higher degree, thus contributing to the diversity of the musical landscape. Such musical activities have mainly taken place in a profane environment, outside of religious institutions, while music inside said institutions have remained an important factor but being less inclined to experimentation and innovation and more focused on transferring traditional structures to new generations.

Metal music was originally one of the more profane representations of the musical arts, originating in the seventies as a reaction to the hippie movement and drawing creative inspiration from rock n´roll and the blues, which were typical youth cultures focused on the recreational experience. While the overwhelming majority of metal bands still are quite oblivious to religion, there have been subcultural variations where religion have been important,⁴⁸ and singular bands where religion has played a major part in the creative processes. The secular has been ambushed by and at times overwhelmed by the spiritual, in a manner of speaking; a reinvention of metal music in parts, from its predominantly recreational origins to incorporating aspects of the religious experience. There have been two main variations of this process; the metal bands that incorporate religious doctrine into their works, and religious artists that communicate their beliefs through metal music. The latter variation has had harder to gain respectability within the scene, due to its initial lack of acceptance of the non-profane.⁴⁹ With time, this has become less and less of an issue within the metal community.

⁴⁷ Gregorius 2006:52-60

⁴⁸ The obvious example being the Scandinavian black metal scene, see Moynihan & Söderlind 2003, Kahn-Harris 2007, Ekeröth 2007.

⁴⁹ Christian metal bands have always been looked upon with suspicion from the highly secular metal scene; see Brown 2005, Moberg 2009.

Another scenario that Christian rock and metal bands grew accustomed to in the seventies and eighties, and one that to some extent remain to this day, was the tendency to be looked upon with suspicion from their own congregations; playing “the devil’s music” was not seen as the right way to praise the lord.⁵⁰

The metal scene has traditionally been strong in the Anglo-Saxon parts of the world and in the Western secular states of the modern age. This fact mainly prevails to this day, even though the effects of globalization have had effect on the metal scene as well; it is rapidly becoming more and more of a global scene.

A consequence of the metal scene’s strong affiliation to the Western societies is that the schematics of spirituality is very much tied to those cultures’ religious traditions, with strong emphasis on Judaeo-Christian thought. Thus, when creating oppositional counter-cultural aesthetics, it is essentially in opposition to Christianity. The logical assumption for many artists have been (and perhaps rightly so) that in order to create maximum attention and subversion, turning to aesthetic Satanism created the best effect and was consequently the logical step to take, being for the utmost part belonging to such a cultural background themselves. The examples hereof are abounding. This is not to say that all satanic lyrics and art, as produced by metal artists, were merely an aesthetic attribute; several artists showed themselves to be constituent of a genuine religiosity.⁵¹

But as the extreme metal genre evolved, so did the prevalence of religious diversity and extremity; today’s metal scene is not subject to inhibitions of old to the same degree, having spread beyond the limitations of Western society, as much of popular culture has, into what can only be regarded as a subculture or scene among others on a global scale. The aspect of what can be perhaps most adequately described as the evolution of religious expression within the metal scene follows a similar path; from the dialectic between the Christian and the oppositional thinking incorporated into Satanism, to the diversified schematics of eclectic spirituality. As globalization makes its way, so does the integration of new, often multi-faceted, ways to confront the meaning of life and the transcendent. It comes then as no actual surprise that the artistic expressions of religiosity has diversified, and that even artists from

⁵⁰ The difficulties of Christian hard rock band Jerusalem is one example of this, as described in Häger 2011:11-13.

⁵¹ The artist/persona King Diamond is an example; producing albums from the early eighties and up to this date, under his own adopted name as well as under the band banner of *Mercyful Fate*, he is a devout Church of Satan member, and as such also lets his religiosity to the forefront of his lyrics. See Baddeley 2006:123-124, 126-128, Kahn-Harris 2007:115, Weinstein 2000:54, 290.

the Western societies to some extent have embraced new aesthetic formulas of manifesting spirituality through artistry.

6. Investigation

The ensuing section will focus heavily on interpretations of music lyrics, and as such feature lengthy portions of citations from those lyrics, followed by the actual interpretation of them. Lyrics are generally attributed to the artist performing them, and not to the actual author of the lyric; however, the author is easily discernable by following the links in the bibliography section, where all lyrics are to be found in its entirety. Additional text is supplied in the form of interviews.

6.1 A taste of extreme divinity: General preview concerning Gnosticism in metal music

Although this essay predominantly focuses on the occurrence of Gnosticism in metal music, there are of course still other genres of music where such examples can be found. The most well known artist of all that embrace Gnostic ideas, and one that is widely acclaimed, is probably *Tori Amos*, who also have spoken publicly about her determined Gnostic preferences.⁵²

While it is easy to conclude that Gnostic ideas are prevalent in metal music lyrics, the question remains as to how frequent this phenomenon really is. As the material up for analysis in this essay merely represents a small, selected number of lyrics where Gnostic influence is evident, a general examination of just how many bands that use or have used the subject matter for lyrical inspiration may give an indication of its importance.

In the database *Metal Archives*, it is possible to search by keywords in song titles, lyrical themes and the like. The information in the database is user-generated, leaving the margin for error not to be ignored. The database contains over 80, 000 bands from varying genres of metal music and is an excellent source for obtaining information of metal bands, their releases, settings and lyrics.

When searching the database for bands having Gnosticism as one of their dominant lyrical themes, a mere 26 hits turn up. In comparison, the keyword *Christianity* alone conjures up

⁵² See Amos & Powers, 2005.

2,787 hits, *Paganism* 1,218, and *Satanism* 2,609.⁵³ This would indicate a very moderate number of artists interested in Gnosticism. A quantitative approach, however, is not exclusively comprehensive with regards to researching the prevalence of such a lyrical matter, since many artists display great variety in their chosen lyrical topics. This fact indicates the relevance of complementing the view with a qualitative approach. If one instead starts looking at bands that have *on occasion* incorporated Gnostic elements into their lyrics, by searching for keywords such as those defined as Gnostic in the theory section within song titles, the numbers increase somewhat, but even an extensive search for such manifestations show little result. I will present an example of such material that, although not fundamentally Gnostic, appear to have drawn inspiration from such sources, demonstrating the vagueness of relation to the Gnostic within the early metal scene.

One of the most successful metal bands of all time is *Black Sabbath*, widely recognized as one of the originators and creators of the entire metal genre.⁵⁴ They have explored the matters of religiosity and the spiritual in many of their lyrics, ranging from traditional Christian views to Satanism and elements of New Age religiosity. The following example is from the early years of their career:

[...] You're searching for your mind don't know where to start
can't find the key to fit the lock on your heart
you think you know but you are never quite sure
your soul is ill but you will not find a cure.

Your world was made for you by someone above
but you chose evil ways instead of love.
You made me master of the world where you exist
the soul I took from you was not even missed.

Lord of this world
Evil possessor
Lord of this world
He's your confessor now!

You think you're innocent you've nothing to fear
you don't know me, you say, but isn't it clear?

⁵³ <http://www.metal-archives.com/>, retrieved 20111031.

⁵⁴ Cope 2010: 4, Weinstein 2000:14-15

You turn to me in all your worldly greed and pride
but will you turn to me when it's your turn to die? [...]
(Black Sabbath: Lord of this World, 1971)

While not a religious song in essence, it is possible to interpret the lyrics as ambiguously Gnostic-inspired: the lord of the world as opposed to the universal God could be interpreted as an association to the Demiurge, the objection of the worldly as superior to the spiritual. However, this may be pushing the analogue a bit; the song actually appears to be less spiritual than mundane and is set to the background of a Christian world-view. The Gnostic connection in this case gives the impression of being more accidental than elaborate. In the case of Black Sabbath, the lyricist basically changed as the vocalist changed; later vocalists wrote lyrics in completely different ways. The band had no commonly recognized proclaimed religiosity and, as stated above shifted lyrical focus regularly. This does not appear as a Gnostic-inspired lyric, which will be even more evident by comparison to the lyrics that follow.

6.2 Deciphering the Serpent: Texts for lyrical analysis

This section contains the actual lyrical analysis of songs with Gnostic elements in varying forms and shapes; some of them obviously thoroughly constructed with the purpose of mediating religiosity, and some less blatantly religious and sometimes even apparently accidental or unaware of the inspirational sources. The occurrence of religiosity in Metal music lyrics is not always entirely thought-through or elaborate; some bands have very little emphasis on actual lyrical content and may use religious topics in lack of other ideas or have just a passing interest in some features of religiosity. In the cases to follow, there are varying degrees of acquaintance with religious topics, but all of them appear to have been written from a genuine interest in spiritual matters.

All through the eighties there appears to have been little in the way of obvious Gnostic-inspired lyrics within the metal scene, but with the growing extreme metal scene of the early nineties this changed radically. The reasons why the extreme metal scene blossomed at specifically this period in time are many, but one that in my opinion should not be underestimated is the increase in number of underground record companies, making it easier for minor artists to get a record deal, plus the inspirational effects of successful bands such as *Metallica* or *Slayer*. This increase was in part due to the advent of the compact disc, rendering

it possible to press small amounts of records at relatively low prices and making it economically worthwhile. In the liberal societies of the modern age the need for transgressive behaviour may have found an outlet within the extreme metal scene.

6.2.1 Dark Tranquillity - *A Bolt of Blazing Gold*

Dark Tranquillity is not in essence a band that focuses on religion, but rather on human emotion and the essentials of man and the universe. However, in the following lyric we find an example of how Gnostic aspects almost unconsciously sneak into their language:

[...] A bolt of blazing gold,
lifted from the horizon's edge
Another radiant dawn sends new hope,
avowed my hearty pledge
My yearning to be part
of nature's truthful solitude
Of wisdom's inner light
that shines in mystic multitude
The guiding source within,
so few of us will ever know
And few will ever climb
the great world-tree from which we've grown
But those who seek will find
the rhythm that vibrates high and far
And rearrange the cosmic threads,
the pattern of the Weave of Stars

A bolt of blazing gold,
a sunfire in zenith hurled
Oh, wingless skydancer,
rejoiced upon the warmth unfurled
What wonders do you hold ensnared
with your mighty heart?
What secrets may be mine
to brother-share as we depart?

Of richest emerald forged,
my soul still rises, longingly
from inferno's winding caverns,

through dark air soaring, restlessly
If silence was enough!
No words can grasp my starkest thoughts
No language known to man
portrays my naked sentiment

A bolt of blazing gold,
swallowed by the waveless sea
The ocean-winds set sail,
in breeze towards their destiny
On solar beams they rode,
white sea-gull-wings in harmony
For a moment's startling glimpse
a sienna-burnt tranquillity

Oh father of the coloured sky,
unwear thy robe of shadowhood
Let nature's soul once clash again
'neath blooming glades of goldenwood

We're the ones who seek
to dance to fallen serenades
The magic hymns of gold;
as softly sung, the sunlight fades
...away

Of richest emerald forged,
my soul still rises, longingly
From inferno's winding caverns,
through dark air soaring, restlessly
If silence was enough!
No words can grasp my starkest thoughts
No language known to man
portrays my naked sentiment

A world of silent stone,
as frozen in the nightly sky
In heaven's dark recesses laid
no living soul draws nigh
For seconds all is still,

no moonlight heaves throughout the dark
Nor do the heavens breathe,
no dryads wreath within the dark

Within my dark domain [...]
(Dark Tranquillity: A Bolt of Blazing Gold, 1993)

The lyric speaks of “wisdom’s inner light”, the “soul that rises”, as well as “the guiding source within”, all three are themes that can be closely related to traditional Gnostic thought, intertwined with mention and adoration of naturalistic aspects. Some of the other elements of the lyric, such as for example the mention of “the father of the coloured sky” can be interpreted in multiple ways, and the general mode of the song does not have the properties to be deemed genuinely Gnostic. The attraction to the extraterrestrial, the yearning for freedom may be interpreted as relatable to the Gnostic idea of the world as a prison; still, such ideals of the free, unchained state of existence is to be seen in many other instances as well. The lyric is accompanied by a musical landscape of acoustic and distorted guitars, having a relatively laid-back tempo and with the interaction between male, growled vocals and female, “clean” vocals; not particularly common at the time, while today it is a regular feature in extreme metal.

It appears as though this is an example of what I would call non-deliberate Gnostic inspiration; where the properties of Gnosticism that actually exists within the lyric does not seem to be effectuated by an actual deeper knowledge of them or an active religious stance, but rather an artistic expression of more general spiritual inclination where the religious ideas are not at the forefront. The song seems to mediate a longing for expulsion from the earthly origins; perhaps a metaphrase relating to the general alienation which is often felt in adolescence.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ “A Bolt of Blazing Gold” is lifted off their first album from 1993, when the band members were still in their teens. The band was started under another name as early as 1989.

6.2.2 Emperor – *Cosmic Keys to My Creations And Times*

Emperor are one of the bands associated with the Norwegian black metal wave of the early nineties and are regarded as one of the innovators and developers of the genre.⁵⁶ As such, their lyrics dealt less with Satanism than one might expect,⁵⁷ while such influences are to be found in some of their other lyrics, this one contains a mere idolization some form of undefined evil. Yet again there is a naturalistic slant to the lyric as well as some Gnostic-inclined thought:

[...]The heavens are lit by the stars
where years of secrets of universal forces lay hid.
They shine so bright, but yet they have seen more evil than time itself.
Reflected in the deepless lakes
(they are drowning in black elements).

They are the planetary keys to unlimited wisdom
and power for the Emperor to obtain.
(They being) the gods of the wolves
whom upon they bark at night,

requesting their next victim in thirst of blood.
I enjoy those moments I may haunt with these beasts of the night.

What kinds of beings are existing
at the deeps of my lakes?
They surely must be of an evil race,
for no friendly thing can live in such depressive waters.

(Here is also a planet similar to the Moon, but its phases is only one
and it is in its most powerful for all and ever...
There passes no light without the barking of the wolves.)

All these landscapes are timeless,
and this is all just a part of cosmos,
but all is mine and past and future is yet to discover...
Much have been discovered, but tomorrow

⁵⁶ Ekeroth 2006:282, Kahn-Harris 2007:4, 45-46, Weinstein 2000:289-290.

⁵⁷ Emperor were one of the bands associated with the so-called “Black Circle” and the Satanic church arsons in Norway in the nineties; see Kahn-Harris 2007:45-46, Moynihan & Söderlind 2003:103-105

I will realize I existed before myself.

I will be reborn
before I die.

I will realize planets ages old,
created by a ruler with a crown of dragon claws,
arrived with a star gate...
a king among the wolves in the night...
An observer of the stars.

I will realize planets ages old,
created by a ruler with a crown of dragon claws,
arrived with a star gate...
a king among the wolves in the night...
An observer of the stars [...]

(Emperor: Cosmic Keys to My Creations And Times, 1994)

Right at the beginning of the lyric the mood is set by the references to the cosmos, where the stars are keepers of secrets, and when the lyric later speaks of “unlimited wisdom”, there are elements of Gnostic thought to be found; in the search for wisdom in the extraterrestrial, in the cosmos that holds wisdom beyond man, in the quest for this almost unfathomable knowledge which are the keys to the creation. While the middle section elaborates on the existing, physical world and more naturalistic aspects, the latter sections again returns to the cosmic and the link to the transcendent, while bringing forth ideas of resurrection and almost metaphysical ideas regarding time, space and existence. There is a reference in the lyric when the narrator claims to having “existed before myself” bear resemblance of a sense of belonging to a greater scheme; possibly as a part of the cosmic creation. Behind is the image of the I; the self, as eternal and as such related to the divine spark. The lyric is certainly not exclusively Gnostic but contain some ideas relatable to such origin; the naturalistic aspects may be discernable in their otherwise evident embracing of the Pagan ancestry of the Norse countries, a phenomenon apparent in the Norwegian extreme metal scene overall.⁵⁸ The music of this piece is classic Norwegian black metal, in high tempos and constituent of elements such as high-pitched, shrieking vocals and relatively complex riff structures.

⁵⁸ Mørk 2011:140-141

6.2.3 Therion - *The Perennial Sophia*

Already the title of this song is a fair indication that we have Gnostic elements to unravel. Therion are well known for their inclination to incorporate varying religious themes into their lyrics, more often than not with an obvious esoteric and historical touch.⁵⁹ Full lyrics to the song below:

[...] Enter paradise, the snake will find the way
She is Lilith, fallen from the sky
Fall into our world, the Snake of paradise
(You're the) Maid of Wisdom in (the) songs of Orpheus
She's the wisdom, she's the truth: The Eternal Sophia
Perennial, beyond the time, she is the one
You're the river, you're the womb
The perennial
The Sophia
Sophia is here
do we need to fear?
She's the gem of (the) mind
... (or the) serpent for the blind
She will make me see
or she will punish me
She appear in a glare
or disappear
She's the wisdom, she's the truth: The Eternal Sophia
Perennial, beyond the time, she is the one
You're the river, you're the womb
The perennial
The Sophia
Shekinah, Shekinah
Eternal Sophia
Shekinah, Shekinah
Eternal Sophia
She's the wisdom, she's the truth: The Eternal Sophia
Perennial, beyond the time, she is the one
You're the river, you're the womb

⁵⁹ As evident by main man Christofer Johnson's affiliation with the magical order Dragon Rouge and also, lyrics on the vast majority of their albums to date prove the point. For further information on Therion, see also Ekeröth 2007:190-191, 429-430 and Johannesson & Klingberg 2011:154, 164, Swanö 1998.

The perennial
(The) Sophia [...]
(Therion: The perennial Sophia, 2007)

The entire lyric is built upon the concept of Sophia as a paraphrase for wisdom, a reoccurring and central theme in Gnostic thought. She is in addition to this a female representation of the alien God, and the one who brings the serpent to lure the first of men to seek wisdom by tasting the forbidden fruit, as told in the tale of Adam and Eve in paradise.⁶⁰ Here is also the image of the Snake or the Serpent, the seducer of mankind in Christian thought and the bringer of the original sin and the fall. This represents the opposition towards the Demiurge, the refusal to submit to his demands and the first conscious and transcendent act of turning towards the alien God.

Essentially, the lyric proclaims Sophia as being the perennial truth and wisdom. She is the “gem of the mind”, perhaps relating to the divine spark, shining within the mind of the one who is in possession of *gnosis*. The reference to Sophia as being beyond time indicates an alien creation and existence; the wisdom is not of this world but belonging to the eternal. This rimes well with the Gnostic idea of the Alien God, separated from the human world.⁶¹ It is again consequent with the findings in the previous lyric from Emperor where we found a reference of existing beyond the frames of time. We also find a repeated chanting of “Shekinah”, which may be a representation of the “lower” Sophia, the wisdom at work on the earth.⁶² Another interpretation would be as the female force of the Godhead, and the name also has connotations to the qliphoth, as the representation of destruction and evil.⁶³ There is little actual elaboration in this lyric; it appears to merely establish the intended fact that Sophia is the eternal wisdom; in this respect the lyric is very reminiscent of a chanting, as being part of the schematic of reaffirming a held belief and consecrating the object of reverence.

The main topic of the lyric is the reverence of wisdom, the idealization of Sophia. While the concept of wisdom is not one of the more central themes in Gnosticism according to Jonas, Sophia also represents the transmudane mother opposing the demiurge and as such

⁶⁰ Jonas 2001:92-94

⁶¹ Ibid 49-51

⁶² Schäfer 2002:138-139, Jonas 2001:176, Shoham 2003:3

⁶³ Granholm 2005:139

attempting to liberate mankind from the veil of ignorance.⁶⁴ As stated in the text, “she will make me see” indicates the wish to be freed from the shackles of the demiurge, thereby bringing man closer to the transcendent God. The song itself is bombastic and incorporates almost orchestral elements, with intertwining male and female vocals. It is a rather simple text, not going into great detail and resembling a tribute song; but obviously, the author is well aware of the Gnostic heritage and uses such imagery with intent.

6.3 Of chaos and eternal night: The chaos-gnostic undercurrent

6.3.1 Dissection – *Starless Aeon*

The prime representative of the growing so-called chaos-gnostic branching were Dissection, a Swedish band with their lyrical roots firmly planted in a satanic tradition; their early albums revolved around such subjects almost exclusively. Come their resurrection in 2004, the subject matter had morphed into something very different and replaced Satanic content with material from esoteric and religious traditions:

[...] The seventh aeon will soon pass as it has been foretold
The false empires will crumble and all illusions shall be destroyed
The enslavers tremble with fear, soon our stars align
The forbidden gates begin to open by the power of our forceful sign
Daath - wisdom of the abyss is the key to the broken star
Eleven angles pathways of chaos will bring forth our most wrathful god
Qliphothic forces from beyond will usurp the tree of cosmic lies
The sleeping dragon awakens smelling the elixir of our sacrifice

Dies Irae Dies Illa Solvet Cosmos In Favilla
Vocamus Te Aeshma-Diva
Dies Irae Dies Illa Solvet Cosmos In Favilla
Vocamus Te Aeshma-Diva

This is the winter of the last aeon, the hungry end is coming soon
Harbinger of the day of wrath will eclipse the sun and rape the moon
Unfold the starless aeon, the hungry end is coming soon
Harbinger of the day of wrath will eclipse the sun and rape the moon

The snake will completely devour itself putting an end to the cycle of time

⁶⁴ Jonas 2001:93

Acausal flames will burn all to ashes erasing all signs of the demiurge crime
Our dark gods of chaos will return, this time to rule forever supreme
The dragon mother will then resurrect and end this cosmic dream [...]
(Dissection: Starless Aeon, 2006)

This lyric clearly incorporates Gnostic ideas and is an adequate example of a lyric written with the purpose of proclaiming chaos-gnostic ideas, but also drawing inspiration from other esoteric and Judaeo-Christian traditions. The Gnostic is in the details; the reference to the Demiurge is clearly Gnostic as is the proclamation of his crime, obviously meaning the crime of creating the earth and encapsulating mankind within it; thereby refusing mankind its affiliation with the holy. We also see the snake reappearing, although in this case the reference is to “the snake that devours itself”, which should mean *Ouroboros*, the snake that eats itself; though in this case, emphasis seems to be on the complete devouring, leading to the return of “the dark Gods of Chaos”. In this instant, the dragon mother will return and bring the end of cosmos; the starless aeon is the desired state where chaos has ended the world and nothingness reigns.

The chorus is partly a travesty of a passage from *Dies Irae (The Day of Wrath)*, a hymn used by the Catholic Church in the Requiem Mass. It is in essence an apocalyptic-themed lyric. In Dissection’s version, however, it is not the world that will end; it is the entire cosmos that will be thrown into oblivion.

Returning to the beginning of the lyric, the reference to *Daath*, being the Hebrew word for wisdom, and a concept used to some extent in kabbalistic traditions, is further evidence of the Gnostic influence. References to the qliphotic⁶⁵ forces also indicate an acquaintance with the Jewish tradition as well as the Hermetic tradition. The “illusions shall be destroyed, a reference to the illusionary attribute of the Demiurge as creator of the veil that covers the eyes of man. Finally, the eleven angles: the cover of the album is simply a hendecagram,⁶⁶ an eleven pointed star, and the referring to “eleven angles” is from the MLO/Temple of the

⁶⁵ The qliphotic is the nightside or shadow side of the sephiroth, which in kabbalah is the foundation upon which the tree of life is built. Where the sephiroth is deemed to be ruled by angels, the qliphoth is consequently ruled by demons. The magic order of Dragon Rouge incorporates kabbalah into their teachings and uses the idea of the qliphoth to some extent. They incorporate elements of Gnostic origin as well as other esoteric currents. See Granholm 2005:29-31, 126.

⁶⁶ Interestingly, the hendecagram has likewise been used as graphic art by Therion, of whom we spoke in the previous section. The symbolic meaning to them, although, probably remain different, considering their different interpretation of the Gnostic.

Black Light writings of *Liber Azerate*,⁶⁷ where the summoning of the eleventh angle brings forth Satan, and the summoning beyond the eleventh angle brings forth chaos.⁶⁸ The eleventh is the liberator from the imprisonment of existence, indicating a desire to be freed from the shackles of being.

Obviously, the lyric contains much of the Gnostic, but in this instance it is not merely traditional Gnosticism but a re-interpretation of Gnostic ideas of old into some form of original, satanic religious system. While there is a strong element of opposition to the Demiurge, there is no craving for connection to an alien God; on the opposite, the dissolution of eternity is the desired state of existence. The craving is for the dissolution of eternity. The divine spark spoken of in Gnostic writings is replaced by the flame, the inner light guiding the chaos-gnostic and aiding him in the purpose to end cosmos. The quest for wisdom is also represented in the speaking of *Daath* as the key to the broken star; instead of using *Sophia* as a representation of wisdom as we saw in the example of Therion.

The reinvention and adaptation of the apocalyptic text used for the chorus is also indicative of the creativity going into these re-interpretations of old religious and mystic texts. With the lyric being overflowing with religious symbolism and reference, it is obvious that the composer have spent many hours contemplating the divine and delving deep into various forms of esoteric literature. Musically, the piece resembles a relatively typical black metal song, given a touch of the basic rock formula, abandoning more the complex intricacy of their previous works in favour of a more straight-forward approach to songwriting.

It is a well known fact that band leader Jon Nödtveidt was a member of MLO/Temple of the Black Light and as such heavily influenced by their teachings. An interview excerpt sheds further light on the authenticity and extremity of his religious beliefs, as well as evidence of a deep acquaintance of the Gnostic:

[...] Spiritual liberation is a concept that is inherent in all religions, it merely means different things. A person who worships the creator of this world might have as his objective to become one with the creator, but he does not want to live as a physical person. As a Satanist I just want to eradicate this creation completely, restore the

⁶⁷ MLO stands for *Misanthropic Luciferian Order*, an essentially satanic organization incorporating elements from Gnosticism, esotericism, Kabbalah etcetera, and that later transformed into *Temple of the Black Light*. The *Liber Azerate* is a work of MLO origin that was available for download through Temple of the Black Light's website (currently unavailable). It contains much of their philosophy along with some invocations and rituals. Further reading about the MLO can be found in Bogdan, Dyrendal, Hjelm & Petersen 2009:524, Gregorius 2006:52-60 and in Hilton 2005:282-286.

⁶⁸ *Liber Azerate*: 15, 50

original chaos and be as one with it. Of course, there are religions where similar things exist; believing that this world is a lower form of existence and that whoever created this world is evil. Gnosticism could be mentioned – who have great parallels to the Satanism I advocate. It stands for “by enlightenment, insight” and the objective as a Satanist is chaos gnosis – insight of chaos. [...]

[...] Gnosticism emanates from the assumption that this world is wrong, that there is a driving force within you who wants to break free. In traditional Gnosticism it could be named the divine spark. In Satanism we call it the black flame. Gnostics believe that you have to find God within yourself – all other gods are false, oppressive or enslaving. The Satanism of which I speak is aggressive satanic Gnosticism, for we identify ourselves as enemies of this world. [...] ⁶⁹

It is obvious that he refutes the idea of paying homage to the purposed creator of this world; by choosing this way of expression it appears as obvious that this creator is identified as or at least compared to the properties regularly attributed to the Demiurge; further implied by his statement of wanting to eradicate creation and in the following comparisons between Gnosticism and Satanism. It is important to also note that while he speaks of Satanism, it is in particular his brand of Satanism which is referred to – as he mentions, a form of aggressive satanic Gnosticism. Here, some of the disparities between the satanic beliefs of the Church of Satan and their contemporaries and the satanic beliefs of the chaos-gnostics are presented. There is also an example of the self-centered aspects of the Gnostic inspiration – finding the divine within yourself as opposed to searching for an external, ultimate deity, which, in the end, would be a false one.

6.3.2 Dissection – *Maha Kali*

Continuing in a similar vein is their single release *Maha Kali*, but this lyric is adding interesting and unorthodox components and constitutes a fine example of how incorporation of elements from varying religious traditions can be forged into a new form of religious sentiment:

[...] Maha Kali, dark mother dance for me
Let the purity of your nakedness awaken me
Yours are the fires of deliverance which shall bring me bliss
Yours is the cruel sword which shall set my spirit free

Devourer of life and death who rule beyond time
In thy name I shall fulfil my destiny divine

⁶⁹ My translation. Original interview conducted and published in Swedish in Johannesson & Klingberg 2011:209-221. Shortly after this interview, Nödteidt committed suicide.

Maha Kali, formless one, destroyer of illusion
Your songs forever sung, the tunes of dissolution

Kalika, black tongue of fire, embrace me
Make me one with your power for all eternity
Awaken within me the reflection of your flame
Kiss me with your bloody lips and drive me insane

Jai Kalika! Jai Kali!
Make me one with your power for all eternity
Maha Kali come to me

Smashana Kali, I burn myself for thee
I cut my own throat in obscene ecstasy
I make love to abominations, embrace pain and misery
Until my heart becomes the burning ground and Kali comes to me

O dark mother, hear me calling thee
Mahapralaya, bring to me
Through all illusions I shall see
I shall cremate this world and set my essence free

Jai Kalika! Jai Kali!
Without fear I will dance with death and misery
Maha Kali, come to me

"O Kali, thou art fond of cremation grounds
So I have turned my heart into one, that thou may dance there unceasingly.
O mother, I have no other fond desire in my heart.
Fire of a funeral pyre is burning there."

[Female voice:]

Jai Maha Kali, Jai Ma Kalika
Jai Maha Kali, Jai Ma Kalika
Kali Mata, namo nama
Kali Mata, namo nama

Jai Kalika! Jai Kali!
At your left hand for endless victory
Maha Kali, come to me

Jai Kalika! Jai Kali!
Mahapralaya will set our spirits free
Maha Kali, come to me [...]
(Dissection: Maha Kali, 2006)

The lyric is retaining the overall concept of the consummation of chaos and into this scheme is sorting the previously mentioned tenets of Gnosticism such as the illusory state in which man is encapsulated, the yearning for liberation from the worldly prison and the quest to find the essence, the inner flame of the being. By being set free the essence can then be expected to find its natural home in the everlasting chaos.

But into this scheme of re-interpreted Gnostic thought is summoned the figure of Kali, the Hindu goddess of destruction, chaos and wrath.⁷⁰ The lyric interprets Kali as a goddess for worship and an instigator and aide in the progression towards chaos; her attributes from Hindu tradition is here re-interpreted to fit into the scheme of the chaos-gnostic and stand as a female representative for the uncontrolled wrath, the inner black flame leading to salvation and bliss. There are clearly suicidal overtones in this lyric; the repulsion of the worldly flesh is obvious and shall be abandoned to reach a higher form of transcendent being. A clear example of the integration of material from other religions into the chaos-gnostic ontology; where Kali beckons, the black flame arrives. Musically, the song retains a similar style to *Starless Aeon*, adding the component of female vocals in some parts, as highlighted in the citation.

6.3.3 Watain - *Legions of the Black Light*

The black metal band *Watain* is in a manner of speaking the heirs of Dissection, both musically and lyrically. They have also eclipsed them commercially, winning widespread critical acclaim and touring worldwide with their spectacular stage show, one that includes impaled animals, the spraying of the audiences with rotten blood and enough fire to resemble the fiery pits of Hell.⁷¹ As was the case of the previous lyric, we once again find the Gnostic elements incorporated into the general foundation of Satanic content.

[...] I ascend.
As thy light descends -

⁷⁰ Hellman 1998:40-44

⁷¹ Johannesson & Klingberg 2011:343-344, Göransson 2007:47-49

darkening the I to reveal the Self.
The rays of Gnosis are burning yet liberating.
In a blissful imposition of the primal paradox
Ultimate and all-embracing
for as above - so below
as I am lying beyond where mental winds blow.
Release me now, oh saviour of Anti-Cosmos.
Ignite in me the fire of the storming triple 6.
Now oh god of wrath
unchained in you to burn,
rape and destruct!

Astaroth open my eye!
And let the beast regain his sight.
A gift from Azerate
A path way back - to thy Thoughtless Light!
Legions of the Black Light!
Chosen sons of snakes
a burning wrath reveals the Black Sun.

Black Sun Ascends. Forevermore.
Granted to the elected is the key to Chaos core.
Judge me now oh shining one, by blood and fire.
To wield thy sword, oh Lord and Master.
The eleventh and the first
whose wordless word echoes Chaos!
Oh fire-bringer of the Nightside.
Thy light illuminates our Temple,
as we march towards the Other Side...

Legions of the Black Light
Chosen sons of snakes
A burning wrath reveals the Black Sun
Legions of the Black Light.
Chosen sons of snakes
a burning wrath now unveils the Black Sun [...]
(Watain: Legions of the Black Light, 2007)

The Gnostic ideas are as evident here, with the speaking of “the rays of Gnosis” and “the darkening of the I to reveal the self”. Evidence of the attempted search within to find the

guiding light – only, in this case, it is not the classic divine spark but the black flame that burns within.⁷² The references to “the burning wrath” and that Gnosis is “burning yet liberating” indicates that the process of seeking the internal black flame and rejecting the carnal is not an easy path to wander, and that the process is dualistic; both painful and liberating.

The snake resurfaces briefly, proclaiming the legions of the black light as his chosen sons, perhaps in an analogy to the snake as the bringer of original sin and of the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Again, the snake is referred to as a positive, conflicting the Christian view of the snake as the tempter of mankind.⁷³ The symbolism of the eleventh, as we remember was the angle releasing chaos also reappears.⁷⁴ Opposition to the reigning order is apparent throughout, a form of liberal heresy for the modern age where duality of good and evil is present though in a reversed schematic. Here are also references to the more explicitly satanic in the naming of the number of the beast, a concept widely accepted and used by Satanists worldwide.⁷⁵ In all, the lyric appears to be more submissive than the previous example; the obedience to the wrathful God of chaos is more apparent; the Lord and Master who wields the sword and is capable of bringing judgement. This indicates a form of orthodoxy in the submission; a form of worship, albeit being to the God of chaos – the one that occurs to be the image of the black sun, devourer of all life. This black sun could be an analogy of Satan, of Lucifer, the bringer of light to man – though in this case, the essence of the matter is condensed into the black light.⁷⁶ This lyric is set to a musical background of classic black metal style with strong resemblance of Dissection’s early works; fast and winding tempos, interchangeable, combined with harsh vocals and intense riffing.

Watain has proclaimed their shows as containing strong ritualistic aspects; the performance as constituting more than an appearance in front of an audience, but bearing resemblance of a religious experience where they are intensely aware of their inner black flame. Such a statement demonstrates the act of performing music as a spiritual happening, an instant where

⁷² The divine spark or inner light that is so frequent in Gnostic thought, see Jonas 2001:45, Rudolph 1987:57-58, 66.

⁷³ Jonas 2001:92-93, Rudolph 1987:97

⁷⁴ *Liber Azerate*:50

⁷⁵ Though named in the Book of Revelations, the satanic community often adopts and reinvents Biblical imagery, such as the apocalyptic themes. The popularization of the triple 6 as the number associated with the beast within the metal scene came through Iron Maiden’s 1982 song, titled *The Number of the Beast*.

⁷⁶ Satan is of course often associated with the apocalypse and similar thought patterns; see for instance Partridge & Christianson 2008:2-7, Wiklander 2010:85-86.

the performers mediate their beliefs and in the process seem to further determine those beliefs internally.⁷⁷

6.3.4 Nox Aurea – *Odium Divinum*

As the final and perhaps most blatantly Gnostic of the chaos-gnostic lyric examples, *Nox Aurea*'s song *Odium Divinum* contains a lyric literally soaked in references to the Gnostic tradition:

[...] Thou, the essence of purity
and highest emanation of Chaos
The clear light of the void
Grant me Thy infinite powers
Illuminate me with Thy great wisdom
For I am forever Thine

Thou, the Lord who petrifies the blind
and burn them with the fire of divine
I perceive Thy wordless voice
which, in every encounter
master the illusions of mind
Odium Divinum!

Grant me Thy spiritual burning sword
So that I can cut and dissolve
the illusional flesh of the demiurge
For I follow the forbidden paths
To liberation of the true self
Discovered only by those
who have the power to find it

Thou, the golden key to emancipation
whose call guides me into deepest trance
The opposer of the filthy being
Dissolve these fettering structures
Thou, the serpent who lurks in forbidden shadows
which hold the secrets beyond all times
Let me see the beauty of Thy hidden entity
Oh, let me be at one with Thee

⁷⁷ Göransson 2007:49, Johannesson & Klingberg 2011:335

Thou, the purifying fire of Gnosis
whose formless sparks
and spiritual impulses subdues the ego
Thou, the accuser of all cosmic being
My holy Father, I am forever Thine...
Odium Divinum! [...]
(Nox Aurea: Odium Divinum, 2009)

This appears to be an explicitly personal lyric, telling the tale of the quest to find and liberate the inner self, and the light and wisdom that emanates from “the essence of purity”, a clearly Gnostic thought.⁷⁸ There is also talk of overthrowing the Demiurge, the unwanted ruler of this world, with the active aid of the hidden Serpent. The illusionary aspect of the worldly being returns as well. At the end, it all becomes clear: it is through “the purifying fire of Gnosis” that all of the above is to happen; the insight and wisdom which have emanated from the supposedly alien “holy father” is the key to it all.

Still, it is focus on knowledge as opposed to faith; despite embracing the “holy”, it is not faith in the extraterrestrial higher supreme but the wisdom that emanates from the beyond that matters. The twist is, as we have come to find in these sorts of lyrics, the attribution of Gnosis to chaos; it is here that the most acute re-invention and re-interpretation of the Gnostic is to be found, in replacing the alien God with the immaterial yet still alien entity of chaos. The association of the carnal and worldly as the unwanted state and the idolatry of the extraterrestrial chaos as the highest of the holy, and the desire to cast the entire universe into this chaos in order to be as one with the divine and eternal wisdom.

Herein lies the merging of their two main components; the chaotic and the Gnostic. The Satanic has here been given less space within the lyric, who works within a slightly different musical context than previous entries; the music is basically slow doom metal and performed at low tempos with repetitive features, combined with harsh vocals and parts of spoken narratives, male and female-performed.

⁷⁸ Jonas 2001:34-35, Rudolph 1987:76

6.4 In the light of darkness: Initial remarks on chaos-gnosticism

The chaos-gnostic current is reminiscent of a form of reinvented orthodox spirituality; by embracing ideas of old and reinterpreting them into a religious context for the modern age, there appears to be a radicalization of ideals: the rejection of secular values and the search for an extraterrestrial higher meaning, refuting the claims from science and focusing on the internal urge to escape the world and connect to the universe; albeit with the intent and purpose to end it completely...

All of the presented examples are entangled in an apocalyptic worldview, urging for the end of the current existence and the advent of the coming of chaos. The first two examples, coupling the Gnostic with the teachings of the MLO/Temple of the Black Light teachings, differ slightly from the third, still chaos-gnostic but containing no invocations, names or rhymes from the texts of said organizations.⁷⁹ The essence of the lyrics is similar nonetheless; the final judgement shall be invoked and the world as we perceive it will be thrown into chaos and destroyed. The liberating effect of embracing the inner black flame is at the heart of the matter, further indicated by this interview excerpt from Erik Danielsson, vocalist and main spokesperson of Watain:

[...] to me, Watain is a symbol of my inhuman self, a proud monument of darkness in a world of illusive light. As such, it portrays the sides of my self that have victoriously broken the shackles of existence. This is what polarizes my life. Everything else circles around this black hole of liberation [...]⁸⁰

These lyrics containing what is described as chaos-gnosticism represent three bands, all from Sweden, but there are evidence of several other artists who have produced similar lyrics; most of them are Swedish, but there exists a few examples from other parts of the world.⁸¹ It thus looks as if though it is a relatively small core of participants within the chaos-gnostic current, even with the presumption that all participants active in the movement supposedly do not partake in the musical activities.

⁷⁹ Bogdan, Dyrendal, Hjelm & Petersen 2009:524

⁸⁰ Original interview to be found in Kristiansen & Warrior 2011:669.

⁸¹ Other Swedish bands with lyrics including chaos-gnostic thought are Ofermod, Sacramentum and Arctanum, to name a few, while the occurrence in other parts of the world is fragmentary; Acrimonious from Greece could be mentioned as one example.

In the secular societies of the Western world, the quest for individual religious freedom paradoxically might have led to such effects that new forms of orthodoxy has formed; when the Christian state churches become more open-minded and inclusive, easing up on dogma,⁸² there are individuals that form their own dogmatic and orthodox beliefs and institutions, echoing of the religious institutions of old. Although these individuals probably wouldn't have thrown themselves into the arms of a more traditional church or other hierarchical institutions, the need for an exclusive religiosity appears to still be intact.

7. Discussion

The Gnostic influence in music lyrics appear to be an undercurrent of religious interpretations in modernity, but one that is mostly obvious in the outskirts of the metal scene. While the focal point of modern metal music lay just in the musical expression and has less emphasis on lyrics,⁸³ the lyrical subjects shows themselves as to being of great importance to the artists themselves; the obvious extensive research as well as the exhaustion of spiritual awareness that is embodied in the music lyrics that have been analysed in this essay is evidence that the matter of spirituality in some branches of the metal scene is taken very seriously.

Representations of the opposite is also obvious; many artists adopt a pseudo-religious attitude or masque for either greater legitimacy or for the sheer sake of it, perhaps an indication of secularization's effects on the potential controversy of alternative spirituality: where it historically have been nigh on impossible to get away with heresy or idolatry, today's predominantly secular landscape renders it less dramatic to be host to alternative ideas of spirituality. In such a secular society the tendencies to partake in what has been historically subversive religious activity has less profound impact on social status and does not stigmatize the individual externally.

⁸² Bogdan, Dyrendal, Hjelm & Petersen 2009:516, Gustafsson 2000:235-237

⁸³ Theodor Adorno has theorized extensively about the fundamentals of mass-culture and the tendencies of popular music to submit to mass appeal; those theories are also to some extent relatable to metal music and the same inclination to prioritize the immediate as opposed to the complex. The functions and purpose appear largely similar, though extreme metal falls somewhat outside this generalization, where many artists attempt continuous musical innovation and determined emphasis on lyrical originality, as researched by Keith Kahn-Harris. See Adorno 1989:25-27, 2001:69-70, Kahn-Harris 2004:82-86, 2007:29-43.

7.1 Of age and origin: The Gnostic as inspiration

As we have seen, Gnostic thought has become an inspirational source for lyrical expression among some metal bands in the latter years; in some cases this has been clearly intentional and in some cases appears to be more or less unintentional. In those cases where the signs of Gnostic influence emerge as less elaborate, it is reasonable to suspect that less deliberation and effort has gone into research and that the existence of Gnostic thought does not represent any actual religious belief that manifest themselves in the lyrics. Such lyrics could rather be examples of the incorporation of Gnostic thought into general society; effects that are also visible in other areas of Western civilization. The acknowledgement of Gnostic ideas as spiritual stimulation in the modern age bear witness to a less dramatic turn of events; where the Gnostics of old were considered heretics and, as such, enemies of the church,⁸⁴ there is less polemic involved when discussing Gnosticism today, although the historical view of Gnosticism as heretic still remains within some parts of Christianity.⁸⁵

At the other end, there are the lyrics that obviously are closely connotative to the existence of Gnosticism as a foundation for religious belief; where the mediation of Gnostic thought through music lyrics has a deeper meaning. The examples of this investigation has shown that there appears to be a genuine religious confession behind some of the artists that explore the traditions of the Gnostic religion, and in some cases also re-interprets the tenets of old into interesting new forms of esoteric elaboration.

The Gnostic elements that manifest clearly in the analyzed lyrics at hand are the concepts of *wisdom* and those of the *inner light*; those are distinguishable in both cases, even where the Gnostic inspiration seems to be not entirely elaborate. When elaborate, they are also more thoroughly interpreted and bear close resemblance to the Gnostic thought of old, being more straight-forwardly interpreted rather than re-interpreted. The familiarity with the subject matter indicates an exhaustive understanding of Gnosticism and the analysis of the lyrics showcases the inclination to genuine religious belief, closely connected to the origins of Gnosticism. The *dualistic* approach to the relationship between man and the Alien God is less apparent in the analyzed lyrics, and the dichotomy of *libertinism/asceticism* is not clearly expressed. Likewise, the references to the world as a prison is not outspoken but rather to be

⁸⁴ Brakke 2010:42, Almqvist 1998:94

⁸⁵ Almqvist 1998:93

seen by reading between the lines, as in the example of the Therion lyric where *Sophia* has “fallen into our world”.

Despite not displaying all the traits mentioned in the methodological chapters of this essay, the lyrics are clearly Gnostic-inspired. A more exhaustive investigation, including a wider selection of lyrics, might bring evidence of those Gnostic traits that are not obvious in the material of this essay; this remains to be the potential subject of a lengthier essay in the future to come.

Wherein the attraction of the Gnostic as lyrical inspiration lies may differ from case to case; in the first case there appears to be a general anticipation of and longing for the transcendent, whether earthbound or extraterrestrial, the yearning for the transmundane experience is obvious.

In the second current, as in the chaos-gnostic, the Gnostic is more explicit and representative of an actual spiritual inclination; the Gnostic effectuates as an incorporative part of a syncretic faith that is thoroughly thought-through and that incorporates other esoteric elements and is innovative in its unique blending of the ancient, the old and the new. We here find the *libertine* approach; the urge to escape the worldly confines and thereby indicating the world is a form of *prison*; the re-interpretation of the *inner light* in the form of the *black flame* as a representation of the *wisdom* inherent in man and which is a revocation of the acts of the *Demiurge*; the antagonistic and highly *dualistic* relationship between man and the Alien God, or as in this case, the re-interpreted scenario of replacing the Alien God with the formless Chaos. A summary of the outlines of these re-interpretations is to follow in the subsequent chapters.

In this light, the chaos-gnostic current unfolds as an obviously Gnostic variation, while re-interpreting selected Gnostic tenets to fit into the schematic of a Western-civilization alternative religiosity.⁸⁶ Such inspiration may have been derived from the New Age movement that have gained such prominence in recent decennia; the Gnostic have certainly been one of the components of the umbrella religiosity which is characteristic of the New Age

⁸⁶ The chaos-gnostic current should not be confused with the phenomenon known as chaos magic; this concept revolves around notions of magic as the possibilities of affecting and altering the physical sides of existence. See Hine 2002:20.

spirituality and as such activity has become less controversial, may have served as a way of manoeuvring further into undiscovered territory.⁸⁷

7.2 The dead live on: Reinventing traditions of old

Obviously, Gnosticism is not in any way unique as religious inspirational force in its appeal to contemporary man; it appears to be in vogue to re-interpret traditions of old and mould them into new forms of spirituality. The quest for historical legitimacy or, more accurately, a sense of connection to the heritage of old, has been shown to exist in Pagan and heathen resurrection as well as, more exclusively, Wiccan religiosity.⁸⁸ Whether the claims to genuine historical lineage are legitimate can be debated in the respective cases; the claims to inspiration are nevertheless there to be found, and thereby at least an interest in the ancient traditions can be determined.⁸⁹ It would give the impression that as though the popularization of ancient religion and the inclination to reinterpreting such traditional religiosity into transformed variations with relevance to contemporary society is in no way declining; popular culture is overflowing with such examples of reconstructing identities.⁹⁰

Drawing inspiration from the past is not enough, when constructing new religious identity there are also strong elements of syncreticism, incorporating the old into the contemporary view of man as an *individual*; while finding, accepting and integrating material from the past that is deemed essential, that material is then reconstructed to fit into the domineering paradigm of individualism which is so important today. When spirituality has become more personal and focused on the right to an exclusive experience, integrally viable, the incorporation of the old into an individual sustainable structure is of importance. Gnosticism, with its focus on the inner divine spark and quest for the internal yet extraterrestrial divine would unfold as an appealing alternative. The possibilities of interpretations also seem

⁸⁷ The inspirational factors of Gnosticism on the New Age movement are elaborated upon in Hammer 1997:103-104.

⁸⁸ The aspects of constructing ethnic, cultural and to some extent religious identity in the case of modern Paganism is thoroughly examined in Fredrik Gregorius' 2009 dissertation, where the importance of a sense of connection to the past and the ancestral legacy seems to one important factor when groups are constructing such religiosity. No factual direct lineage can be determined, as the Pagan religion was more or less extinct. Neo-Pagan organizations seem well aware of the fact and as a result construct their own versions of Paganism, claiming a spiritual connection to their ancestors' religion rather than an actual traditional lineage.

⁸⁹ Wiccans are similarly in varying degree concerned with their historical connection; while ranging an enormous array of varying interpretations, some are very concerned with the legitimacy to witchcraft of old. See Partridge 2004:138, Gregorius 2009:67-69.

⁹⁰ Evidence is abounding in Christopher Partridge's 2004-05 volumes *The Re-enchantment of the West*; examples ranging from music to film and literature, and beyond.

virtually endless; since Gnosticism was basically forgotten in the common mind for centuries, re-interpretation is perhaps *the* possible solution in this case.

The focus on individualism obviously does not infer on the possibilities of social interaction; as seen in the case of Wicca, the wide array of personal religious construction within the movement does not take away from the fact that an active, if decentralized and less authoritarian, community exists and renders a sense of social connectivity.

The Gnostic attachments found in the case of Therion implies an active spirituality where historical source have been sought out and re-interpreted, whereas the other examples indicate less knowledge of the historical sources. The fact that the Gnostic in these lyrics occur as one of several lyrical topics signals that although the spiritual interest is there, it is merely a part of the scheme and not the exclusive and all-encompassing focal point.

A few words deserve to be mentioned on the topic of esotericism and left hand path spirituality; although not being at the centre of this essay and not a matter I shall elaborate on extensively. There is an obvious inspiration in the lyrics from esoteric lines of thought; in the case of Therion, there is also the determining factor of an active membership in an esoteric group.⁹¹ Although Gnosticism is continuously defined as a coherent form of religiosity in this essay, there are reference points in evidence of Gnostic inspiration in Western esotericism in the common links to mysticism and , more, importantly, hermeticism.⁹² The hermetic tradition was in many ways inspirational to esoteric thought. The esoteric influences involved in chaos-gnosticism will be reviewed later on in the essay.

As for the remainder of this essay, I will now turn my attention more whole-heartedly towards chaos-gnosticism, as unveiling itself to be the more interesting of the two currents, the details of Gnostic revelation and re-interpretation will be even more prevalent when discussing this current.

Considering chaos-gnosticism, let us take a look at what Gnostic ideas that have been summoned and wherein the re-interpretational value seems to lie. To begin with, in the idea of the divine spark or inner light, as mentioned in the previous section, that in Gnosticism is the connection to the extraterrestrial divine, the Alien God which cannot be seen but only felt

⁹¹ As previously mentioned, their connection to Dragon Rouge is well determined.

⁹² Larsen 208:298-290, Hanegraaff 2004:492-493, Faxneld 2010:13-14

through this association. In the chaos-gnostic guise this divine spark is being renamed *the black flame* and given a slightly new meaning, still retaining the relation to the divine but being perceived as the internal fire that burns within the individual; but there is also a connotation to the concept of wisdom: it is wisdom, or knowledge of the transcendent, that awakens the black flame.⁹³ It is not merely a connection but the internal fire also in this case aides the consummation and the inevitable blessing; although here, the blessing comes in the form of overthrowing the universe into the arms of chaos. This chaos is another re-interpretation; where the Gnostics originally believed that salvation comes from the beyond in the form of the Alien God,⁹⁴ the chaos-gnostic interpretation is that salvation comes from beyond in the form of the original chaos, in the repulsion of the abhorred Demiurge's creation into an eternal aeon of chaotic disarray. Adding to this schematic are the aspects of general blasphemy as traditionally seen in Satanism; mocking the creation and its originator, by use of satanic symbolism and textual elaboration.

The Demiurge himself in this modern variation seems to retain similar basic functions as is attributed to him in the cases of early Gnosticism, being the creator of the earth and its inhabitants; this creation is regarded as incomplete and in essence an abomination, enslaving mankind and denying him divinity. The world is an anti-human creation, malevolent and obscene. Accordingly, the Demiurge is revealed as a bastard version of the higher deity; the keeper of the keys to this worldly prison man is trapped within. In essence, little more than the warden of a high-security prison, to present an analogue.

Regarding the *ascetic/libertarian* dialectic, the chaos-gnostic belief system unravels as having elements of both: while being ascetic in the sense of the ignorance of the flesh for the benefit of the spirit, there also seems to be an acknowledgement of the pleasures of the flesh as a way to blaspheme; the interest in desecration of the Demiurge's creation is an indication of the matter. This unravels a lack of interest in choice; the usage of both the libertarian and the ascetic values when found appropriate acknowledges man as being a carnal *and* a spiritual being.

⁹³ It should be noted that the *black flame* concept is not exclusive to the chaos-gnostics; it has also been in use within the Church of Satan and Temple of Set. The gnostic interpretation of the concept as performed by the chaos-gnostics is however even more evident within the presented context. See Ahlm 2010:46-47, Dyrendal 2009:61-62.

⁹⁴ Jonas 2001:49-51

The case of *gnosis*, the knowledge of the Alien God, remains largely intact and comparable to the original Gnostic idea, while incorporating a sense of elitism; the black flame is not for everyone to possess, only a relevant few is ordained with the capacity to connect to their inner black flame and to potentially find the consummation by chaos that is the completion of the chaos-gnostic experience. This elitist view is interestingly relatable to theories brought forth by Hans Jonas, regarding the connection between Gnosticism, existentialism and nihilism.⁹⁵ Those matters will be elaborated upon further in later sections.

It appears as though the Gnostic re-interpretations are adjusted to fit into a belief system that has its origins in the satanic; the chaos-gnostics have started out as Satanists and have on a later stage integrated Gnostic and other esoteric concepts into their system, perhaps as a result of religious searching, in order to create a coherent and reliable system of thought where the misanthropic and oppositional can be given integral parts. As such, Satanism and Gnosticism would have showed themselves to blend with relative ease.

7.3 Versus the world: Elaboration on the religious aspects of chaos-gnosticism

So, the foundation of spirituality as evident in the chaos-gnostic way of thinking lies in the satanic; this surfaces as being the first passion of the chaos-gnostic, in a manner of speaking, at least as far as we have seen in the examples of this essay;⁹⁶ the basis upon where all spirituality within the individual lies and from where the subsequent alterations emanate. This fact implies the chaos-gnostic as being predominantly oppositional, rejecting the Christian God in favour of the serpent-like figure of the Morning Star, seeking refuge and solace in the re-interpretation and inversion of Christian thought, and in the quest for opposition against the acknowledged reigning paradigm of the masses, which is attributed to Christianity, while also identifying an adversary in the values and norms of secular society. The spiritual need for an upheaval in the reigning order results in rebellion and effectuates the individual quest for an alternative to what is regarded as the numbness and mediocrity of mass religion. The opposition also manifests itself in an inclination to embracing apocalyptic ideals, as

⁹⁵ An exhaustive discussion of those similarities is to be found in Jonas 2001:320-340.

⁹⁶ This is the case of at least Dissection and Watain, as evident by reviewing the progression in those bands lyrics, from rather straight-forward Satanism to more complex religious structures. For further evidence, see Johannesson & Klingberg 2011:204-209, 345-346. In the case of Nox Aurea, the case is similar yet more complex: while individual members have claimed an interest in the satanic and a general disgust of Christianity and a society built on such values, there is also an interest in neo-paganism. One of the members was convicted of a church burning in Sweden in the year 2000. Further reading on the topic can be found in Mørk 2011:126, 131, Bossius 2003:182.

exemplified by the imagery of the advent of the end of the world which is overflowing in the lyrics of this essay.

In this rebellion lies also an echo of Nietzsche; the elitist view of the nihilist appear as being close to the heart of the Satanist. Frequently featured attributions Satanists apply to the Christians are the notion of them as being bound almost as by slavery;⁹⁷ implying their will to be weak and the average Christian as being the subject of a slave morality, obeying a weak God ordaining them submission and the suppression of the fleshly desires of the earth; to conquer their urge of immediate satisfaction in order to obtain the rewards of the heavenly paradise to come.⁹⁸ The Satanist opposes these values and deems the hope of paradise as an illusion; instead advocating the salutations of the pleasures of the flesh and the immediacy of the carnal.

Now, this is a highly LaVeyan form of Satanism⁹⁹; one that celebrates the promotion of the ego and illuminates the worldly while rejecting the transcendent. The chaos-gnostic would most likely deny their affiliation to such a form of Satanism, but the fact remains that there nevertheless happens to be similarities,¹⁰⁰ with the chaos-gnostics having common ground with LaVeyan Satanism in the usage of Satan as one of many representations of darkness, the suppressed desire for vengeance as opposed to turning the other cheek, the appraisal of wrath as well as in the explicit nihilistic tendencies of both movements.¹⁰¹ All the while, there appears to be a more profound and exquisitely spiritual side to the chaos-gnostic system of thought; as proven by their inclination to embrace the ideas and concepts of transcendence. The chaos-gnostic teachings of MLO/Temple of the Black Light, from where some of the examples clearly have been inspired, have elsewhere been classified as being a form of *esoteric* Satanism;¹⁰² drawing inspiration from Left Hand Path spirituality and other occult

⁹⁷ Bossius 2003:159

⁹⁸ The Nietzschean concept of slave morality is discussed in (amongst others) Svenungsson 2004:56-57.

⁹⁹ The term *LaVeyan* refers to the Satanism of the Church of Satan, as founded by Anton LaVey in the sixties. Their teachings celebrate the individual and focuses on the ego, while embracing Satan mainly as a metaphorical being rather than as an actual entity. See LaVey 1969.

¹⁰⁰ Nilsson 2000:53-54

¹⁰¹ The similarities of the two movements may be studied more exhaustively and discussed at length, but we have seen examples in this essay of the many ways chaos-gnostics interpret the figure of Satan, as well as the inclination to wrath and vengeance and the nihilistic tendencies. The same factors are being presented as essential to LaVeyan Satanism in LaVey 1969: 62, 25, and 91-95 respectively.

¹⁰² This categorization is one of three variants proposed by Jesper Aagaard Petersen, the other two being reactive Satanism and rationalist Satanism. However, the three do appear to intersect with one another. See Petersen 2009:6-7, Bogdan, Dyrendal, Hjelm & Petersen 2009:524.

teachings while remaining predominantly Satanic in doctrine and philosophy,¹⁰³ and having obvious similarities to cultic milieu.¹⁰⁴ They possess several of the characteristics of a cult or a sect, such as for example the exclusive membership and a negative approach to and opposition of society's general values. The acknowledgement and use of Gnosticism as part of their philosophy has obviously become more initiated with time.

The connection to Satanism is then partly disassembled by the incorporation of other religious and philosophical features; with the general satanic milieu to begin with being diffuse and loosely connected, the implication is that there is sufficient room for individuation, resulting in various forms of self-religion, where focus is on the individual experience.¹⁰⁵ This is also a form of opposition; rejecting traditional religion's habits of hierarchical structures, emphasis on togetherness and strength in numbers, the individual self-religion might help bring a sense of strength in solace and in the elevation of the ego. By proclaiming oneself as above the masses, striving for divinity, there is a manifestation of the idea of the *übermensch*, a nihilistic idea indeed.¹⁰⁶

Features relatable in chaos-gnosticism to Nietzsche's philosophy is not only the *übermensch* ideals and the notion of Christians as suffering from a slave morality; there is also the overall refusal of the Christian God that may appeal to the Satanist, while being open to re-interpretation in the form of the Demiurge for the chaos-gnostic. Nevertheless, where Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God and opened the field even wider for atheism, the chaos-gnostic goes beyond the idea of divine deities and opens up to the idea of being in tune with cosmos itself; of unification with the cosmic.¹⁰⁷ In this respect, the chaos-gnosticism, being in relation to Christian thought by way of the implied idea of God as dead or non-existent, as similar to nihilism, forms a dialectic; a relationship to Christianity in the adversarial approach to their norms.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Granholm 2009:85-86, 97

¹⁰⁴ Gustafsson 2000:30, Granholm 2008:22-23

¹⁰⁵ Satanism has a strong tendency to become a self-religion more than anything else; it appears inherent in the fundamentals of opposition to be inclined to solitary solutions. Elaboration on Satanism as self-religion can be found in Petersen 2011:362-365.

¹⁰⁶ This is referring to the Nietzschean idea of the *übermensch*, as being a superior successor to present humanity. The interpretations of the concept have been many. See Nietzsche 1982.

¹⁰⁷ Lazier 2008:177

¹⁰⁸ Svenungsson 2004:52, 55-57

If the chaos-gnostic foundations are to be found within the confines of the satanic community, in the ideals of oppositional thought, the transcendent is where the Gnostic intervenes in the construction of spirituality. In Gnosticism is inherent the idea of the often-mentioned divine spark, and it is this very notion of the internal connection to the transmudane which the chaos-gnostic movement evidently have embraced with the most passion and integrated into their teachings. The Gnostic serves as the transcendent part of the system, and the re-interpretation of the spark as the way out of the confines of the world as we experience it, the connection to the greater wisdom, the greater sense that is original chaos, reveals the meaning of the individual existence.

It is wisdom and not faith, since it is regarded as an integral part of man, this alleged black flame; it has merely been suppressed by this vile creation and the Demiurge of this world that is deemed false. Escaping existence then surfaces as the main objective, by whatever means necessary, and the black flame remains the guiding force that leads to the integration of the individual to chaos, the desired end-station and unification of man and the all-encompassing totality. These ideas are interestingly close to the idea, as existent in Eastern religion, of Nirvana and the expulsion of man from the known boundaries of existence and into another plane of existence. Enter, once again, syncretism. Elements of apocalyptic thought are also present, as the concept of the end of the world would most certainly imply. Visions of the apocalypse are not uncommon as lyrical topic in the extreme metal scene.¹⁰⁹

This Hindu idea of escaping existence, as additionally existent in Buddhism and Jainism and called Nirvana, is then further echoed in this quest for the elevation to the highest form of being, or rather un-being, in the escape from existence and the merging of the I with chaos.¹¹⁰ We have also seen the inclination to importing other material from Hinduism, as in the case of the invocation of goddess Kali in the Dissection lyric “Maha Kali” above. The emphasis on wisdom as opposed to faith also correlates with the elitist view of the chaos-gnostic and re-aligns us with the above mentioned nihilistic tendencies; where faith is the universal and all-inclusive factor that every man can possess, wisdom is reserved for those who are worthy and able; an elite of mankind. This is where this form of spirituality first becomes exclusive and, as such, can never be a form of spirituality for the masses; when claiming extraordinary

¹⁰⁹ Brown 2005:120-121, Moberg 2006:122

¹¹⁰ Esposito, Fasching & Lewis 2002:282

features in order to awaken the black flame, one is weeding out the weak in favour of the ones who are regarded as strong, thus excluding the vast majority of potential followers.

This form of spirituality also demands relatively high standards of intellectuality and possibility of abstract thinking, being relatively abstract and not reliant on faith; other aspects which would also refute interest from large sections of the public, in the case such an interest should arise.

It is with certainty a religious Gnostic current of thought and as such a quite original way of approaching immortality and the completion of being.

7.4 Night is the new day: Spirituality in a secular society

As we have discerned from the previous chapters, there is a chaos-gnostic current of thought; and one that has inspired artists to proclaim their religious beliefs by way of incorporating them into music lyrics. Now, as the inspection draws closer, the fact occurs that all lyrical examples identified in this essay have the common denominator that the artists that have produced the material all hail from Scandinavia. This appears as no coincidence; where other religious organizations have managed to branch out of its national origins, the chaos-gnostic seems to remain confined to the Scandinavian isles of its origin, perhaps because of its extremity.¹¹¹ The more traditionally Gnostic-inspired are not limited in the same way but is represented also in other parts of the world, although perhaps in slightly different forms and shapes.

The chaos-gnostic current is a small segment and perhaps the answer lies in mere coincidence; there just might have happened to be a select few persons with similar ideas that laid the foundations for such a movement. However, the question begs to be asked; is there a reason why the Scandinavian countries are tentatively more inclined to breed controversial new oppositional religiosity?

The obvious reference point of the previous statement is of course the wave of Satanism in Norway in the nineties, a fellowship where the sheer ferocity of action took the nation by surprise; why would one of the most secular countries in the world be the breeding point of such aggressive anti-Christianity and display such obvious contempt of the principles of law

¹¹¹ As a counter- example, another originally Scandinavian religious movement, the order of Dragon Rouge, has branched out at least into some parts of mainland Europe. See Granholm 2005:180-181.

and order?¹¹² While the mayhem might have calmed in Norway, the apparent religiosity of artists within the extreme metal scene remains largely intact, albeit on a more toned-down level; the chaos-gnostic current have been less public and thus less controversial, but a common trait that the movements share are the inclination to extremity, the dedication and straight-forwardness of action and, of course, their similarity in breeding ground. What part might an origin in a secularized Western society play in the formation of an extremist oppositional religious manifestation?

As the Nordic countries is commonly regarded as those being most secular,¹¹³ the processes of secularization in these regions have nurtured the mass sentiment that religious life largely is a thing of the past; church attendance keeps dropping and the inclination to taking part in the everyday community of religious institution are at an all-time low.¹¹⁴ However, New Age spirituality and other so-called “new religions” have been on the rise for centuries, indicating that the need for spiritual solutions is still there, albeit in different guises.¹¹⁵ This might to some extent explain an interest in alternative spirituality. The debate is on whether to reattribute the scheme of decline in traditional religion with one of transformation or change; in such a scheme the transformation of religious activity from Christianity to alternative spirituality would make perfect sense. It would not, however, be sufficient enough to explain the number of people who claim to be totally disinterested in religion or spirituality altogether.¹¹⁶

The unorthodoxy of the extremity of movements such as the chaos-gnostic may come as a surprise on the surface, since the Nordic countries normally are not associated with high levels of extremism. However, the lack of interest in traditional religion as it has succumbed to the forces of secularization mean that a high level of extremity is needed in order to get the

¹¹² The Satanist movement in Norway (The Black Circle) and its subsequent wave of church burnings and murder has been examined in some detail; not least in the book *Lords of Chaos* by Moynihan & Söderlind. Although disputed by some because of its apparent lack of objectivity in the portraits of some of the leading figures of the movement, it nevertheless provides a detailed insight into the happenings of the time. See Söderlind & Dyrendal 2009: 157-160, Kahn-Harris 2007:45, Baddeley 2006:191-196, Mathews 2009:184-185, Bossius 2006:25-27.

¹¹³ For the purposes of this essay, “the Nordic countries” is synonymous with Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, excluding Iceland which is normally included in this equation.

¹¹⁴ Bruce 2011:10

¹¹⁵ Steve Bruce to some extent challenges this concept; surveys cited in his 2011 volume “Secularization” indicate a low number of people actively involved in the alternative spirituality movement. It can be debated what “active involvement” means, but it is clear that alternative spirituality has risen since the beginning of the liberalization of state churches, and it is certain that this movement has not made up for the big losses in activity in state churches overall. See Bruce 2011:113-119, Heelas 2010:246-248.

¹¹⁶ Bruce 2011:119, Possamai 2005:39

message across. Being ignorant to religion and performing acts of remote heresy is not enough; there would be little reaction. In order to actually be transgressive and achieve the benefits of transgression, such as self-identification and reflexive aspect of liberation, the acts would have to be outspokenly blasphemous and repellent to the greater part of the population. In this schematic, the prospect of church burnings, murder and animal sacrifice clearly outweighs most alternatives; the logical terminus being the extermination of all that is holy, in other words the extinction of the earth and mankind with it. It's essentially a case where one extremism breeding the other: where secularization is taken to the extreme, in theory at least, it breeds an oppositional extremism in return. A secular surrounding could breed elements of transgression within individuals, leading to the resurgence of oppositional counter-cultures.¹¹⁷ The main opponent in the case of the Satanist would by necessity be Christianity, since it is in this context the Satanist is occupied; by inheritance, it exists within a Christian world-view.¹¹⁸ In the case of the chaos-gnostic, the context would appear to be somewhat broader, since he would be less inclined to act exclusively within the confines of a Christian paradigm, drawing from additional sources from other traditions. Interestingly though, the Gnostic perspective indicates an affiliation to Christian thought, as Gnosticism originates within the context of Christianity as well; leading us back into the relation to Christianity.¹¹⁹

The principles of finding inspiration for such alternative religiosity in religions of the past seem to make sense in the postmodern society; when the materialistic, scientific world no longer can be determined as to be holding all the answers and certainly not to those regarding the principles of meaning in the worldly existence, a turn to the past emerges as rational, and many of the searchers who have embraced the scriptures from times gone by have looked at the ancient religions of their homelands, while others have turned their heads to the east and others yet have sought refuge in the opposition of Christianity. This is not least true for the artists discussed in this essay.¹²⁰ As the movement does not appear to have spread to any great extent outside of Sweden, chaos-gnosticism may not be as applicable in cultures outside of the paradigm of Western civilization, given its lack of similarities in philosophy, politics

¹¹⁷ This theory has previously been advocated by Fredrik Gregorius, see interview in Hilton 2005:280.

¹¹⁸ Petersen 2011:363-365

¹¹⁹ The genealogy of Gnostic narratives and their relations to Christianity is elaborated upon at great length in O'Regan, 2001.

¹²⁰ The full width of the spectrum of religious inspiration within extreme metal is almost incomprehensible, but as for the black metal section of the scene at least, the connections to Paganism is well-documented, as of course is the Satanism affiliation. For the Pagan connection, see Moynihan & Söderlind 2003:195-214, Mørk 2010:127-132, Dyrendal 2009:28.

and religion, rendering the current incapable of spreading outside of the confines of their present climate.

The dislike of Christianity and the rediscovery of Pagan traditions go hand in hand, as interest in old religion and culture often are fuelled by a disregard of Christian values coupled with a desire of spiritual fulfilment; supplemented with the essentials of modernity, one finds one's own way, ignores the greater narratives and focuses on the immaterial, the individual and the fundamental.

Criticizing materialistic values is part of the imperatives of chaos-gnosticism and one of the features that is similar to the existentialist philosophy; man is responsible for all his actions and must find the moral values important to him *and* mankind as a whole.¹²¹ The idea is that the immaterial is preferable to the worldly. In existentialism is also evident the notion of the freedom of the individual to find his way, and of man as a God unto himself, as parallel to similar chaos-gnostic ideals we have previously seen, not least in the analyzed lyrics.¹²² Another reference point between the two is the assumption of man as being alone in the world, thrown into an existence where he can only find bliss and solitude within himself; as interpretable as an analogue to the inner spark or flame.¹²³ Here intertwine the three philosophies; existentialism, nihilism and Gnosticism, in the account of man as alone, estranged in the world and left to by his own accord, or his own will, find his way in this world by searching within himself, turning away from the indifferent, malicious or nonexistent God.¹²⁴ Purposed knowledge of the predicament of man would then feed the turn to one of these three philosophies for understanding. The chaos-gnostics share similarities with all these philosophies in this respect, or rather, have sought inspiration, deliberately or not, in their history.

In the critique of the materialism of society lies also a critique of secular values; by refusing to partake in the materialistic, scientific society which is the secular state, the chaos-gnostic steer towards a return to the ways of old in the appraisal of spirit above flesh and thus, paradoxically, towards a new variant of orthodoxy by their dedication and determination to embrace their spirituality. Resembling resistance to the reigning world order, perhaps such a

¹²¹ Stenström 1991:118

¹²² Stenström 1991:112,116

¹²³ Sartre 1986:35,66, Stenström 1991:120

¹²⁴ Jonas 2001:324-325, Blake 2009:82

spiritual resurfacing could only be possible in a society where secular values are in dominance in the population; as a critique of and opposition to the reigning paradigm. The anti-materialistic slant would then be similar to those of portions of the New Age movement, where to some extent material values are discarded as being of little importance.¹²⁵ There are significant differences between them, however, and the chaos-gnostics could perhaps most adequately be described as a cult of the initiated, being an exclusive union with little claim to popularity or universality.

In this sense, chaos-gnosticism could be classified as holding a critical approach to materialism, while adding a spiritual dimension to this anti-materialism; instead of criticizing science, one neglects it or in some cases integrates elements of it, as similar to segments of the New Age movement.¹²⁶ It integrates components from Gnosticism in order to seek inwards to achieve consummation to the outward cosmos/chaos, and emphasizes egocentric aspects similar to nihilism, rejecting the Christian God while seeking refuge in the transcendence of cosmic schemes. By mediating their belief, or rather knowledge, of the great beyond, through their musical works, they believe they are actively awakening the black flame that is the key to anointment to chaos and the end of creation. The Satanism inherent in the belief system is equivalent of religion by its inclination to function as a way to manifest meaning and coherence to the individual; in the guise of self-religion.¹²⁷ This Satanism is holding on to a form of esoteric inclination in its apparent leanings towards the transcendent, as opposed to the more rationalist, atheistic-inclined teachings which are at the core of the Church of Satan and its adherents.

The chaos-gnostic lyrical mediation exemplifies an evolutionary tendency when it comes to lyrical expressions of spirituality within the extreme metal context insofar that it represents a turn away from the rather simplistic use of traditional Satanism imagery or Christian evangelism by incorporating multiple layers of thought from other religious traditions; in this case most explicitly Gnosticism, but with elements from other traditions as well. It is in the merging of the lyrical and the musical structures into a complete musical work which the true mediation of spirituality is found; when the extremity of the lyrics and the music interact and

¹²⁵ Hammer 1997:18-19, Frisk 1998:208

¹²⁶ Hammer 1997:222-228, Frisk 1998:17-19, Lewis 1992:7

¹²⁷ Petersen 2009:1-2, Dyrendal 2009:71

complement each other is where the wholeness of the art piece forms, from which the mediation of spirituality emanates.

Whether there is a missionary aspects in the mediation can be argued; the importance seems rather to lie in the effects meaning-making associated with mediation through the creation and performance of aesthetically transgressive art.

There are several areas where further research on Gnostic thought in contemporary music could be carried out. Obviously, the chaos-gnostic current as apparent in this essay would benefit from more research, as this essay has merely scratched the surface of the teachings of MLO/Temple of the Black Light. In the teaching of said organizations there would additionally be interesting factors to study in the incorporation of material from other traditions, such as for instance esotericism and eastern religion.

The possibilities of other musical directions incorporating Gnostic thought could make accessible the chance of performing comparative studies between two or three such directions, researching their historical roots, re-interpretation and active performance of them.

Comparative studies of Gnostic influence in contemporary music from different cultural backgrounds would also be possible as an adaptation of the previous concept; where this essay has focused on European and specifically Scandinavian manifestations, a comparison to, for instance, the existence of Gnosticism in the Americas could provide insight into other interpretations of the Gnostic myth.

These are but a few examples of what directions future research could take. There are undoubtedly many more areas of interest; the future of Gnostic thought appears to be a diversified one, and the multitude of existing and potential pathways to the transmundane as intriguing in their individuality.

8. Conclusions

The analysis of the music lyrics in this essay have shown the existence of Gnostic thought as re-interpreted in, basically, two forms: as a gentle re-interpretation of Gnosticism where aspects of the Gnostic tradition are embraced and slightly rearranged, and while there are re-interpretational values, there is also a tendency of staying true to tradition. In the case of Therion's lyrics, the knowledge of the topic at hand is extensive and elaborate, while the lyrics from Emperor and Dark Tranquillity appear as less elaborate in their references to Gnosticism. By incorporating Gnostic thought into their lyrics, which are also containing elements of other religious traditions, they are mediating a sense of spirituality, whereas in the case of Therion the lyrics are more reminiscent of a genuine spirituality where the lyrics have a greater purpose of mediating and reaffirming belief.

The bastard version of the matter in the form of chaos-gnosticism is drawing inspiration from satanic origins and Gnosticism, while coupling the two philosophies. By mediating their spirituality through musical works, the chaos-gnostics attempt to awaken their inner black flame, crucial in the quest for oblivion which is the believed result of the desired incorporation into chaos. The chaos-gnostics also incorporate elements of other religious traditions as well as having reference points to other philosophical renderings of the past, such as existentialism and nihilism. Significant is the quest for opposition of the current order, where rejection and disgust of both Christianity and secular values is evident.

The lyrics of all three artists demonstrate them as being well-acquainted with Gnostic features and it is obvious that the lyrics mediate spirituality on a relatively abstract level. The spirituality of the chaos-gnostics appears as being a genuine and extreme interpretation of Gnostic thought.

While extreme metal artists pursuing interest in Gnostic thought are relatively widespread, the presence of artists with chaos-gnostic preferences would look as to being limited to the confines of the secular states of Scandinavia and restricted to relatively small numbers as well. While having reference points to the New Age movement in their abhorrence of the material properties of modern society, the chaos-gnostic current would more adequately be described as a cult of the initiated, being an exclusive alliance with little claim to popularity. The movement has manifested in a secular society and the results indicate that spiritual counter-activity such as the one at hand has a fertile breeding ground in such a society based

on the fact that acts of transgression in secular states demand more extremity in order to actually *be* transgressive and thus serve its purpose to the individual. Bred in the shadow of a secularization paradigm, it is oppositional by nature and has responded by extremity, re-sacralization and, with it, a touch of renewed sense of orthodoxy. Whether the chaos-gnostic current will remain active or fade into obscurity is uncertain, although the movement does not appear to have spread to any great extent outside of Sweden.

The chaos-gnostic current in some aspects have reference points to existentialism and nihilism, in the respect that they all object to the existence of a benevolent deity, a God of the earth; and in the affirmation and embracing of the concept of man as being alone in the world, left to his own devices and thus being the essence of his own existence. Such an existentialist interpretation of Gnosticism with nihilistic and misanthropic overtones as a reaction to man's presupposed alienation in this world is in accordance with the overall sense of the times; where many believe the end of the world is near and apocalyptic ideas has seen a resurrection. A similar time was the one when Hans Jonas performed his studies on Gnosticism, in the background of the great depression and the approaching of a second world war, and where he made the connection between existentialism and Gnosticism; perhaps such links appear as all the more obvious within such a depressive paradigm.

This essay has shown that there are multiple interpretations of Gnosticism in contemporary music, and while the focus in this instance has been on re-interpretations of Gnosticism in extreme metal, one might suspect that Gnostic thought is existent also in other forms of contemporary music lyrics. It remains to be seen in what forms such thought might manifest itself.

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