Satanism in Norway

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The history of Satanism in Norway is, like everywhere else, primarily a history of fantasies about the Other. This history cannot, as Titus Hjelm explains (this volume), be left out of the picture in a presentation of Satanism. In Norway, as elsewhere, there has been important interaction between the publicly shared myth of Satanism as otherness, and the actual practice of Satanism. If one leaves early modern fantasies of witchcraft out of the picture, the recent history of “Satanism” belongs primarily to the world of media-enhanced rumors. Only during the first decade of the twenty-first century do we find organised, “religious” Satanism as a proven fact in Norway. Before this, there may have been scattered individual Satanists, or even small, but unknown groups, but the main arena for Satanism was in Evangelical lore about “the occult”. At different points in time, media took up these rumors, and during the early 1990s, they were fed by the pioneering bands of Norwegian, “satanic” Black Metal.

The 1970s and 1980s

Modern rumors about Satanism seem first to have reached Norwegian media during the middle of the 1970s. Evangelical summer camps a few years previously were reported to have spread an American lore about Satanism that was derived from apocalyptic, charismatic literature (cf. Dyrendal & Lap 2002). Pentecostal publishers Filadelfiaforlaget in Norway also translated and issued British “ex-Satanist” Doreen Irvine’s From Witchcraft to Christ in 1974, mainstream Christian publisher Luther forlag published a Norwegian book on the dangers of Satanism in 1976 (Hagen 1976), and another Pentecostal publisher (Logos) published a translation of Nicky Cruz’ Satan on the Loose in 1978. Throughout this literature, we find a clear pattern of adopting topics from American sources, which is made all the more clear by the only Norwegian book, Kaare Hagen’s Den religiøse Satan (The Religious Satan), which is also concerned with American examples. This set a pattern which was repeated throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with translations of popular American books.
assimilating local concerns and lore about Satanism to current American trends.

From early on, these books used the Church of Satan as one of the examples of American Satanism, as the evidence of organised Satanism lending credibility to darker rumours. Thus knowledge about the recent organisational exploits of Satanism was mediated and disseminated, but there are few signs that any organised Satanism reached Norway at this time. There are hints in a few newspapers, a couple of letters and a phone call allegedly placed by anonymous self-declared Satanists who took issue with scaremongering stories about Satanism, but there is no further confirmation of the existence of any activities. Further hints were dropped during the late 1980s, when a later prominent claims-maker during the Norwegian Satanism scare alleged that there were clandestine, organised Satanists in Bergen who were engaged in criminal activities. No one has confirmed these reports, and the claims have been declared highly unlikely or dismissed as fantasies by both researchers and the occult community (Dyrendal 2006). The oldest of my informants became a member of the Church of Satan in 1984, and at the time knew of no other Norwegian Satanist. There may have been a few other individuals like him, although none is known to me.

There is little evidence of any public interest in Satanism during the first half of the 1980s, neither from mainstream nor Evangelical media. During the last two years of the decade and the first two years of the 1990s, this slowly changed. The claims of the American Satanism scare were reported both sceptically and credulously in media, gradually turning into a media scare during the period 1991–1993. Mainstream media concentrated on allegations about organised ritual abuse, while Evangelical media translated several American books blending Satanism, teenage rebellion, and popular culture (foremost Heavy Metal music and horror film). This package seemed to fit with the first phase of overt Satanism in Norway, that of Black Metal and church arson, and thus had some success.

**Black Metal and Satanism**

During the late 1980s and first years of the 1990s, the Norwegian extreme metal scene turned from Death Metal to a homegrown version of Black Metal. Turning away from the casual dress style of Death Metal, they invented a more explicit, uniformed style going with a demand for ideological and musical purity. The central figure, Øystein Aarseth (aka “Euronymous”), wanted Satan to have the place in Black Metal that Jesus had in gospel music (Søderlind &