

**UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES**

**SCREAMS AMONG THE TREES: THE CREATION OF A MODERN
GOTHIC HORROR THROUGH SATANISM, BLACK METAL AND
NORSE MYTHOLOGY IN ADAM NEVILL'S *THE RITUAL***

BA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis aims to study how Adam Nevill's *The Ritual* fits the Gothic genre by distinguishing the main themes and its constituent elements of terror and placing them within the context of Fred Botting's *Gothic*. The main purpose of this thesis is to study how Adam Nevill has created his atmosphere of terror and therefore an original version of Gothic horror by combining elements not found traditionally in the Gothic genre.

The main body of this thesis is divided into an introduction, a literature review, an analysis of Gothic elements in Nevill's novel and a conclusion. The introduction gives a short overview of the author and what has influenced his writing, the general reception of the novel, a brief description of the structure of the thesis at hand, and finally a summary of the novel. The literature review provides the reader with a theoretical background and is divided into five subsections. The first subsection focuses on providing a theoretical overview of the Gothic genre and its many elements through Fred Botting's *Gothic*. The second subsection gives a general overview of the sublime and the methods of its creation in literature based on Edmund Burke's studies on the sublime. The third subsection provides the reader with a brief history and symbolism of Satanism. The fourth subsection gives an overview of popular bands, figures and activities associated with Black Metal. The fifth subsection provides information on the legends and traditions of Norse mythology. The second section analyses Adam Nevill's *The Ritual* in light of the theoretical information provided in the literature review and its subsections correspond to the ones in the literature review. The main body of the thesis ends with a conclusion, condensing the main findings from the whole thesis into a summary.

The abstract in Estonian will be provided at the end of the thesis in the résumé.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

I Nevill, Adam. 2017. *The Ritual*. London: Pan Books

INTRODUCTION

Adam Nevill was born in 1969, in Birmingham, England. As a horror fiction writer, he has won The August Derleth Award for Best Horror for his titles, such as *Last Days*, *No One Gets Out Alive*, *The Reddening*, as well as *The Ritual* (“About”, n.d). In total, he has published 12 standalone novels and six short story collections. In his interview with Dawn Keetley, Nevill delves into the aims and inspirations behind his writing. Nevill claims that when writing horror fiction, he puts special emphasis on the use of the numinous, supernatural and supernormal. Using these elements, he magnifies the reader’s sense of horror, terror, dread, awe and wonder. Nevill claims his inspiration for his writings to stem from an experience of reading a wide field of books, ranging from various genres, most notably, thriller and crime novels. Additionally, he draws inspiration from folk magic, pagan beliefs and religion, as well as personal interests in subjects, such as black metal and hiking (“Interview with Adam Nevill, Author of *The Ritual* (2011)”, n.d).

The Ritual is relatively new and no in-depth critical evaluation is available for it, therefore, I have accumulated the reviews of online critics from the website *The StoryGraph* and given an overview of the general criticisms of the novel. The online reviewers of *The StoryGraph* have mixed feelings about the novel. The vast majority of the reviewers like the first chapter of the book which features the survival of the hikers who are being hunted by an unseen entity of unnatural and mysterious proportions. Praises are given for the tension building, atmosphere creation and character development. However, there is almost a unanimous dislike for the second chapter. Most reviewers claim the plot to have taken a turn for the worse as it is generally not understood why Nevill has implemented the use of the Black Metal band. For some, the chapter seems too dragged out or unnecessary, feeling like a completely different novel. Furthermore, critics dislike the fact that the ending left a lot unexplained, for example, the fate of the protagonist and the antagonist, the runic symbols and

the nature behind the hooved people. To generalise the feedback of the critics, this novel is for people who like suspenseful horror stories entwined with psychological hardships and various horror elements, but not for those who dislike slower-paced novels with a radical change of thematics (The StoryGraph, n.d). A Canadian novelist by the name of Steve Stred states: “Nevill writes with effortless joy, even when the worst is happening, I picture Nevill smiling with glee over the prose he is putting down on paper” ({Book Review} The Ritual: Adam Nevill, 2020). He adds that as someone who has been actively stalked by a mountain lion in the woods, Nevill creates an eerily true depiction of something lurking and following you.

In my thesis, I am going to study how *The Ritual* fits the Gothic genre by distinguishing the most common themes in the novel and placing them within the context of Fred Botting’s *Gothic*. Then by focusing on the key events of the novel within these Gothic themes, I will study the specific elements through which Nevill has created his atmosphere of terror. Nevill has scattered these elements throughout the narrative and he has also combined them, however, he has also made them rather easily identifiable in the text. This thesis is divided into two sections which are divided into five subsections. To better understand the Gothic genre and the various elements through which Nevill has created his atmosphere of terror, the first section will provide a theoretical background for the common elements and themes of the Gothic genre and the nature of the sublime. Additionally, I will provide an overview of satanism, black metal and Norse mythology to the extent necessary to identify the elements and symbolism that they entail. The second chapter focuses on how Nevill has employed and diffused said theoretical background in his novel. I have chosen to study Nevill from this perspective because he has created a version of Gothic horror by introducing and combining themes that do not traditionally belong in the genre and has therefore created a new and original modern horror narrative of Gothic.

The plot of the novel *The Ritual* follows four friends from college times who have chosen to organise a reunion in the form of a hiking trip in the mountainous regions of rural Sweden. As two of the hikers suffer from injuries already on day two, Luke, Dom, Hutch and Phil decide to take a shortcut through the forest to reach their intended destination a few days earlier. This, however, proves to be a grave mistake. Their first sign to turn back presents them in the form of a mangled corpse of an animal strung high between trees. The hikers decide to ignore it, and at the end of their first day in the forest, the group stumbles upon an abandoned house where they decide to spend the night. The nightmarish house keeps terrifying secrets and after an almost unbearable night, the group still decides to hike deeper into the forest in hopes of reaching their destination sooner. After hiking through the dense and inhospitable forest for some time, they reach a church with a graveyard. Under the floor of the church, they find a mass grave and Phil is the first to see the indescribable creature who has followed them from the abandoned house. After they set up their tents to spend the second night in the terrifying forest, Hutch gets dragged from his tent and is later found hanging from a tree, gutted like the corpse of the animal in the beginning. In a desperate and horrified state, they attempt to escape the forest and the creature hunting them but they are killed one by one, leaving only Luke. After collapsing from exhaustion, Luke wakes in a bed and is greeted by three figures wearing animal masks and an old lady. They introduce themselves as *The Blood Frenzy*, a Black Metal band with evil intentions to sacrifice Luke to the entity he is running from. Surtr, Loki and Fenris explain the true goal of their intentions and the nature of the entity lurking in the forest. It is explained that through the ritual of sacrifice, the ways of the old and the worship of Odin can continue. Luke is shown what hides in the attic and what the people and the old God so desperately try to preserve. After being given an opportunity, Luke kills his captors, wounds the old God and escapes the forest.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Fred Botting (1995:14) has defined the Gothic genre as a hybrid form of literature which combines and transforms various other literary forms, as well as its own throughout history and texts. He adds that due to the diffusion of Gothic features throughout writings, it is impossible to define a fixed set of conventions for the Gothic genre. To categorise the Gothic features used in Nevill's novel, I have studied Botting's *Gothic*, Edmund Burke's *Sublime* and various sources on Satanism, Black Metal and Norse Mythology which explain the features and common symbols found in Nevill's novel in great detail.

1.1 Botting and Gothic

I have chosen to base my thesis on Fred Botting's *Gothic* because he provides a clear overview of the elements, themes and the most prevalent figures in the Gothic horror genre by studying key texts and their origins. Fred Botting is an English Literature And Creative Writing professor at Kingston University, UK who has considerable experience in analysing various Gothic fiction works, theories, and Gothic fiction in film. In 2018, Botting received the Distinguished Scholar Award for his work in the field of Gothic, the fantastic and science fiction (Kingston University London: 2018). The Gothic genre dates back to the 18th century. It features dynamic themes, such as excess, duplicity, terror, labyrinths, old castles and figures, such as vampires, monsters, ghosts and heroes, among many other elements.

Botting (1995: 1–2) states that the writing of excess is one of the major indications of Gothic literature. He adds that castles, labyrinths, churches, graveyards and other old and derelict buildings, especially in ruinous states, condensed imaginative excess, religious and human evil, social transgression and mental disintegration. Immoral practices, supernatural forces and uninhabited landscapes are some of the themes that fill the mind with terror. Botting (1995: 3) claims that reason is overpowered by imagination and emotions which are

affected by ambivalence and uncertainty restricting the conjuring of a definitive and rational explanation.

Botting (1995: 6–7) states that transgression, the crossing of boundaries of reality and possibility, is commonly associated with ambivalence and excesses in Gothic literature. He adds that Gothic fiction limits are defined by the ambivalence of elements and the duality of themes presented. Light and dark, good and evil, reason and insanity, the past and present, and neither is the main focus; they work together to create codependence (Botting, 1995:7–8). Doubles and duplicity signify evil nature within Gothic characters and narrative themes. It reflects estrangement from core beliefs in individuals and the transgression of boundaries of reality in narrative themes (Botting, 1995: 11–12).

Gothic fiction was also influenced by folklore, myths and legends of the Medieval romances, creating new worlds full of magic, terror and monsters. Furthermore, Gothic was associated with the historic ancient heritage of the Germanic people whose values of freedom and society fought against the transgressions of religion and terror (Botting, 1995: 5). Rather than providing a moral lesson, Gothic literature creates psychological effects that fulfil readers' obscurest cravings and superstitions through fantasies and fear (Botting, 1995:4).

Vampires are one of the most distinguishable characters of the Gothic horror genre. Botting describes them as humanoid blood-hungry creatures in search of eternal life through blood and sacred violence (1995: 144). Furthermore, many vampires possess the ability to transform themselves into various animals for their benefit, reflecting their ambivalent nature (Botting, 1995: 145). Based on the example of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Botting (1995: 146) has stated that men were the main victims of the character Dracula and that he had a violent family past distinguished by honour and blood. Through immortality, this depicts the Gothic trait of the haunting return of the past to terrorise the present. Botting (1995: 150-151) adds

that the ambivalent nature of Dracula also produced Gothic doubles and reversals in the natures of men – the hunted often became the hunters.

1.2 Burke and The Sublime

The reason why I have chosen to study the sublime closely is that it is one of the most integral parts of Gothic literature and in creating terror. By gaining better insight into the construction of the sublime, it is possible to identify the specific elements and methods through which Nevill has created his atmosphere of terror. More specifically, this subsection of the thesis focuses on explaining sounds, obscurity and vastness.

In his findings of *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Burke states that everything that is associated with fear, pain, danger, self-preservation, obscurity, power, vastness, infinity, uniformity, smells and sounds can be a source of the sublime. “Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke 1756: 131). Through Burke’s findings, the sublime can be defined as an intense state of emotional response to awe-inspiring aspects of nature in which a person’s soul and all its motions are suspended and filled with astonishment and a degree of terror.

Burke (1756: 148) states that in terms of vastness, extension or increase in quantity seems to have the greatest effect. Extension in length, height and depth, however, have different degrees of power. Length is inferior to height as is height to depth. Furthermore, Burke argues that terrain plays a big role in forming the sublime, in the case of height, a gradual rise and smooth ground towards an incline diminishes the effect of the sublime. Similarly, a rugged terrain and a steep, perpendicular rise show the greatest effect in forming the sublime.

According to Burke (1756: 160), sounds are a powerful tool for creating the sensation of the sublime in one's mind. The constant of a sound may produce a sense of infinity, which fills the mind with pleasing horror. Similarly, the sudden cessation of a continuous sound alerts the mind because of a perception of danger. This creates the sublime effect due to one extremity transforming into another. However, a much more powerful production of the sublime through terror, are loud and sudden noises. Those can halt senses and fill them with terror through their strength.

Burke (1756: 133) states that to create something terrible, some degree of obscurity is required because the more the subject is familiar with the object of terror, the more he is aware of its bounds and the full extent of the potential danger it presents. He adds that the emotion of fear precedes the cause. Night and darkness add to this notion, giving our minds the free will to fill the obscurities with known associations of the most terrible potentials and greatest fears. Vivid descriptions are potentially more terror-inducing than visual imagery which is limited (Burke, 1756: 137).

1.3 Satanism

In the second chapter of *The Ritual*, Nevill makes a sudden change in thematics used as tools for creating an atmosphere of terror through Gothic elements. I have chosen the sources by Charbonneau-Lassay, La Carmina and La Fontaine because Satanism, goats, inverted crosses, inverted pentagrams, and sacrifices are some of the more prevalent themes in *The Ritual* and these sources provide invaluable information for these themes in the form of history and the true meaning behind the symbols used in Nevill's novel. Once further insight is achieved into Satanism, it becomes clearer whether the symbol used in the novel is truly in its respective category or can be interpreted as a combination of many.

According to Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, (1992: 83) in countries under Greek influence, the he-goat was associated with the popular cult of the goddess Artemis, in which the god Pan was regarded as the universal generator of the procreative power. Pan was depicted having legs, feet and horns of the he-goat and quite often the whole body as that of a goat. Furthermore, Charbonneau-Lassay states that the he-goat is the special emblem of the King of Hell (1992: 86-87). Satan is shown by all medieval demonologists almost exclusively in the form of a buck goat in which he overlooks the devil's sabbaths. In the Middle Ages, the buck stood as the symbol of Satan and animality aligning with the concepts of Christian mysticism. The head of a buck is depicted on top of a five-point star pointing downward, also known as "the black fallen star". This symbolises the antithesis of the pentagram, the star of spirituality, which points in the opposite direction, towards heaven. La Carmina (2023: 39-40) adds to this notion in her descriptions of the Sabbatic Goat, also known as Baphomet or the Goat of Mendes. Based on the image of Eliphas Levi's 1856 book *Dogme et Ritual de la Haute Magie*, Baphomet was a winged human-goat hybrid with breasts, a horned goat's head, a pentagram on its forehead and hooved feet. Baphomet is also depicted as having a torch between its horns, symbolising knowledge and hands pointing up and down. The hands denote the Hermetic Dictum "as above, so below" which symbolises the equilibrium of opposites: man and woman, good and evil, human and animal (La Carmina, 2023: 39-40).

According to the research of La Carmina (2023: 41-43), the inverted cross is a symbol bearing multiple meanings, depending on the cultural and philosophical beliefs of the one bearing the mark. For Christians, the mark is associated with Saint Peter who let himself be crucified upside-down because he deemed himself not worthy to be crucified in the same manner as Christ. In the case of Satanists, it represents the rejection of authoritarian Judeo-Christian doctrines and a denial of superstition and judgmentalism. La Carmina adds that some Satanists might wear one to reflect their ideas of affirmative values of scientific

scepticism and freedom from established dogmas. However, the first known person to exhibit the use of an inverted cross was Eugene Vintras, a 19th-century cult leader who was rumoured to have taken part in demonic rituals while wearing a robe depicting an upside-down cross. In Vintras' case, the inverted cross showed his association with the Satanic movement.

The inverted pentagram is another common symbol adopted by Satanists. Whilst in many cultures, the five-pointed star or pentagram symbolises positive qualities and health, a popular 19th-century occultist Eliphas Levi connected the similarities of the head of the goat to the inverted pentagram. The two horns, two ears and the beard of the goat when connected, create a pentagram. Levi's connection provided the inception of the use of this symbol among Satanists, which then became a symbol of evil and the most widely recognised symbol of Satanism (La Carmina, 2023: 36–37).

La Fontaine (2016: 46) states that ritual murder is the pinnacle of Satanism and the worship of evil, linking it to the realm of spiritual powers while contradicting the holy (ritual) and the unholy (murder). Furthermore, ritual murder in the form of human sacrifice is the form of all evil in Western civilisation, considered alienating from the people in 'the civilised world'. La Fontaine (2016: 48) explains that in all cases of sacrifices, something is expected in return and the general belief is that the greater the value of the subject of sacrifice, the greater the honour toward the recipient of the sacrifice, meaning that a human sacrifice is the greatest of honours, especially in Satanism.

1.4 Black Metal

To understand why Nevill has chosen Black Metal as one of the themes of his novel, I have studied the sources on the history, the essence, popular bands and figures, their undertakings, ambitions and influences, as well as aesthetics. Black Metal shows extreme cases of acts of violence and the representatives of the genre share the will and desire to go

beyond the norms of society and show defiance through their music. However, their ambitions are fueled by different sources.

Heavy metal emerged from nihilism in the 1970s and followed its divergent ways from its origins of exaggerated imagery of vices. These tropes were heavily condemned by critics of Rock and societal norms and eventually forced the genre into its own underworld as it found no resonance to the open public of radio or record labels. This, however, did not diminish its growth rather the genre grew in its secluded fanbase which allowed its aggressive ambitions to expand without the limits of moral boundaries posed by society (Moynihan and Söderlind, 2003: 11–12).

The term Black metal, the subgenre of Heavy Metal, was first coined by the British band Venom” and whilst they are called the forefathers of the genre (Patterson: 2014: 1), the home region of Black Metal is considered the northern countries of Sweden and Norway in which it maintained a stronger level of popularity. The wildness of nature and the darkness and coldness of the seasons aided in setting the perfect environment for this extreme genre to emerge. Underground Heavy Metal has been notoriously anti-Christian and Black Metal was ready to take it to the next level by gathering like-minded people and fighting against Christianity through immediate and radical actions (Moynihan and Söderlind, 2003:12-13).

According to Christopher Thompson, “Mayhem”, formed in the 1980s, was one of the first bands that laid the foundations for Black Metal. Through their efforts to distinguish themselves from other subgenres of Heavy Metal, they created a new sharp and distorted tone and involved lyrics containing Satanism, anti-Christianity, general dislike for humankind and anti-social behaviour (2012: 22–23). Another Black Metal band “Priest” was widely recognised through their impact on visual aesthetics that made them appear frightening and aggressive with the main goal of scaring the public (Patterson: 2014: 1). “Mayhem” based their visual aesthetics on “Priest” by wearing leather clothing, ornamented with heavy and

sharp spikes and using black and white face paint, known as “corpse paint”. As the newfound genre gained popularity, anti-Christian, nihilistic and inhumane acts became more common among the members of the Norwegian Black Metal community. Norwegian media labelled these acts as Satanistic acts of violence. One of the most notable crimes committed was by Varg Vikernes, a member of the Black Metal band called “Burzum” who murdered Øysten Aarseth, the drummer of “Mayhem”. Vikernes was an avid supporter of the idea of casting out Christianity and reviving the ancient Norse religion which is sleeping in all Norwegians. Through the trial of his criminal act, he gained immense popularity and spread the influence of his ideas. He developed a cult following which is one of the main factors for the preservation and continued interest in Norwegian Black Metal. His actions also influence the genre’s progressive shift from Satanism to Norse mythology and a sense of appreciation for Norway’s history and nature (Thompson, 2012: 24).

Moynihan and Søderlind (2003:12-13) reiterate that the burning of churches and cathedrals in Europe was differently justified and the allegiances of Black Metalists varied. Some worshipped Satan through song and actions, others looked to the past and the old pagan ways, continuing the battle of their Viking ancestors 1000 years ago who invaded the monasteries and churches of Britain, killing the innocents and desecrating Christianity. Although then Christianity prevailed and spread across Europe, some claim that the slumbering Vikings found their resurrection through Black Metal (Moynihan and Søderlind, 2003:12-13).

Furthermore, pseudonyms and upside-down crosses were highly popular among Black Metal societies. Many crafted their entire personalities around their names and inverted crosses depicted death, violence and general depravity of the members (Moynihan and Søderlind, 2003: 46-47). What is more, Norwegian Black Metal diverged and solidified itself

as a separate entity, with its members being more ‘evil’ than others through the worship of the Devil and rites of blood and fire (Moynihan and Söderlind, 2003: 91).

1.5 Norse Mythology

The history and symbols of Norse mythology are rich in traditions and legends. To gain further insight into the hidden meanings behind Nevill’s use of mythological elements within the novel, I have studied the sources on the symbolic importance of goats, the legend of the “Wild Hunt”, the possible origin behind the main antagonist in the form of a trickster and various traditions and elements of the Nordic ritual of sacrifice. Through these findings, I can further analyse the methodology of Nevill’s use of Norse mythology.

In regards to Norse mythology, Louis Charbonneau-Lassay (1992: 83) has brought out the fact that ancient Scandinavians depicted the chariot of Thor, the god of thunder and lightning, to be pulled by a goat. Thus, it was a former Scandinavian practice to place a goat’s horn or a piece of the animal’s skin on the highest floor of housing to ward off lightning during thunderstorms.

Based on the studies of John Lindow (2002: 432–433), the Wild Hunt is a legend common in Scandinavia and Germany, involving a hunter in a forest who hunts down women like game animals. In various depictions of the legend, the hunter may be identified as a historical figure, Satan or a figure reproducing the essential qualities of the Norse god Odin. The Norwegian version of the legend is known as “Oskorei” which entails a band of lost souls riding on horseback in the sky and pillaging farms during holiday periods. Scholars have also made a connection of this legend to an Odin cult based on customs from German-speaking regions, as well as involving the idea of young warriors in place of lost souls of the “Oskorei” who fight with the ferocity of wolves and other wild animals (2002: 433). Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind (2003: 167-168) add a different perspective to this legend, stating that

“Oskorei” is a legion of dead souls led by Odin, flying across the night sky which sometimes comes down to abduct people. Additionally, historical accounts dating back hundreds of years, tell stories of groups of real young men on horseback riding through villages, screaming in the night and frightening people. Details include the painting of faces, pseudonyms, noise, high-pitched singing and arson. Treated as demons, the yule ale-drinking group of the riding dead often fought and killed where they stopped but could be warded off by crosses.

Carl Lindahl and Malcolm Jones (2002: 413–414) state that tricksters are found in every social and supernatural level of traditions and can present themselves in deities, witches, animals, spirits and humans. The best example of a trickster in Norse mythology is the God of Mischief Loki who is of mixed parentage and often aids the goals of other Gods and sometimes wreaks havoc by helping the giants, the archenemies of Gods. In short, he does only what benefits him at the current time. He, among many other tricksters, is fluid in his form, meaning he can shapeshift into various animals and change his gender to hide, deceive and escape if needed. In one case, to aid the goals of the Gods, Loki shapeshifts into a mare and mates with Svadilfari, a legendary workhorse in aid of the giants. Without the help of Svadilfari, the Giants lose a building contest and Loki gives birth to Sleipnir, an eight-legged horse who becomes the war steed of Odin. This reflects the possibilities of the offspring that tricksters can produce.

Daniel Bray talks about the sacrificial ritual and the nature of Old Norse heathenism in general. He bases his findings on pre-existing research as well as accounts of historical works, annals, legal material and saga literature. Whilst there are no existing scriptures or practical religious manuals with in-depth explanations of the rituals and theories of the acts of sacrifice in Old Norse heathenistic culture, there are over 150 references to them in Eddic and Skaldic poetry, annals and saga literature (Bray, 2004: 123).

According to Bray (2004: 123), the sacrificial ritual of the Old Nordic heathens was called 'blot'. Similarly, in Old English and Old Norse, the verb 'blota' means 'to worship through sacrifice'. There are various accounts of different types of sacrifice which involve the sacrificing of animals and humans. Animal sacrifice was the most common and was almost always tied with a sacrificial feast called the 'blotveizla', during which local farmers would gather at a temple. During the feast, all men would drink ale and a fire would burn in the middle of the ritual ceremony and various toasts would be made in honour of the Gods and fallen comrades (Bray, 2004: 124). The specific reasons for sacrifice, as well as the recipients varied greatly, for example, a sacrifice would be made to gain a good harvest, peace, long life or power. The recipients of the sacrifice were Heathen gods, guardian spirits, dead ancestors or animals (Bray, 2004: 127-128).

In the case of human sacrifice, a 12th-century German chronicler by the name of Adam of Bremen describes the communal festival that took place in Uppsala in considerable detail. As per tradition, the festival took place every nine years and gathered hordes of local Swedish tribes and heads of communities. During the festivities, people sacrificed nine of each living male creature. Among those creatures were humans and the bodies of the sacrifices were hung in a ceremonial grove close to the Norse heathen temple in Uppsala. The sacrificial rituals also included incantations and singing. In general, Adam of Bremen's descriptions reflect the common understandings of Medieval commentators, most prominently the idea that the ritual of sacrifice was intended to calm the angry, hungry and unstable gods by satiating their endless hunger and thirst for blood (Bray, 2004: 129). In 1906, a Finnish anthropologist by the name of Edvard Westermarck noted that the subject of sacrifice did not require a specific status for desired effectiveness, a person with a lower status could save someone of a higher status (Bray, 2004: 132).

2 THE GOTHIC ELEMENTS IN ADAM NEVILL'S NOVEL *THE RITUAL*

Nevill has implemented many Gothic traits, themes and elements in his novel. His most prominent characteristic, however, is the ability to combine Satanism, Norse mythology and Black Metal and create a codependent narrative mechanism. The Gothic elements within these themes have gone through diffusion by Nevill's extension of traditional narrative devices.

2.1 Gothic Elements

The whole narrative of Nevill's *The Ritual* takes place in Sweden, the historic land of the Germanic people rich with folklore, myths and legends. This natural environment allows for the inherent use of themes, such as Norse mythology, uninhabited landscapes, and transgression of religious and human evil. Furthermore, the use of thematic duplicity and excess are prevalent in his novel as Gothic devices to create an atmosphere of terror.

Nevill has abundantly implemented the use of the Gothic doubles in the form of thematic duplicity. The reader is constantly torn between the association of Norse mythology, Satanism and Black Metal. For example, in the abandoned house, the entity they find upstairs is ambivalent and confusing for the hikers, it entails a Satanistic overtone and later in the novel, it is discovered to bear the connotation of Norse mythology after Luke finds out the true nature of the ritual in the forest (I: 334). Thematic duplicity is also evident during the church scene in chapter 23 where the hikers find the ruins of a Christian church along a derelict graveyard, both innately Gothic. Nevill has created the church as ambivalent, giving it mixed signals of Christianity in its structure, Norse mythology through the runic carvings (I: 107) and Satanism in the various smashed animal and human bones below the floorboards (I: 116), implying a religious transgression and human evil. Nevill exhibits duplicitous forms in

the theme of Black Metal through the band members who capture Luke, as well as the motivation which drives these band members to their heinous crimes. The band members themselves exemplify evil nature through alienation from societal norms by admitting to murdering people and burning down churches (I: 319). The duplicitous drive for these actions lies in the roots of social transgression by the influence of Black Metal and Satanism which was the beginning of the conversion to the true belief of Odin within the Norse mythology spectre (I: 322).

Nevill's main antagonist, the elusive and unexplained "old God" is the main representative of the Gothic literary tradition in the context of Norse mythology. The old God shows various similarities to the traditional Gothic character of vampires. Similarly to the Gothic vampire, Nevill has constructed the old God around sacred violence, eternal life and ambivalence. Similar to vampires, the old God thirsts for blood to aid in the continuation of its eternal life. In Nevill's case, however, the old God not only hunts and kills victims for its own immortality, but it also does so for the sake of the immortality of her "children", the ancient native people located in the attic of the house Luke was held captive in (I: 395). This shows the sacrality in the old God's violence, adhering to the Gothic trait of immoral practices of sacrificing people to it through a ritual to gain something in return (I: 325). Nevill has also bestowed the Gothic vampiric ability of metamorphosis or transformation to the old God. Nevill's main antagonist can change its physical form based on situational necessity. More on that in the subsection focusing on Norse mythology. Furthermore, Nevill has constructed the old God which conforms to Bram Stoker's character Dracula. Similarly to Dracula, the old God in Nevill's novel hunts men except for Surtr who falls victim to the old God at the end of the book. The old God is also responsible for the reversal of character for Luke, the one being hunted becomes the hunter evident in Luke killing his captors in chapter 65.

2.2 The Sublime

Nevill uses the sublime throughout his book, however, it is most prevalent and affecting in the first chapter of his novel as the second chapter focuses more on the profane themes and elements. Through the use of nature and the old God, he applies the use of vastness, sounds and obscurity in the creation of the sublime.

At the beginning of his book, Nevill sets the mood of his novel by painting a picture of a Gothic landscape. An extensive mountainous region carved by retreating ice a few million years ago. An environment in which the characters seem minuscule in comparison to the vastness and sublimity of the nature they are surrounded by. Nevill's addition of an ominous mist surrounding the characters aids in setting an eerie mood for the horrors to come (I: 5). Similarly, Nevill creates a metaphor for the forest, comparing its lightlessness and vastness with the depth of the ocean. Whilst they do not venture downwards but rather horizontally, they are going deeper into the forest as they do not exactly know their whereabouts and the wild forest forces them to take detours and follow an inconsistent direction like a Gothic labyrinth (I: 133). Nevill conforms to Burke's arguments, exemplified in the hilltop that Luke, Dom and Phil climb. The mountain is covered in big boulders, and roots and is almost too steep for the injured to drag themselves up to, creating sublimity through the terrain and in the necessity to conquer the hilltop to gain some sense of security from the entity hunting them (I: 169).

Nevill also illustrates creating sublimity through the uniformity and cessation of natural sounds through the perception of Hutch after leaving the abandoned house. Hutch feels a sudden uneasiness when he realises that the constant chatter of birds and the wind has ceased completely. The uniformity of sounds in the background proves no threat and is most likely not noticed after a while, however the sudden realisation of its halting alerts Hutch's senses immediately. Through this, Nevill forebodes the immediate threat within the vicinity of the hikers and creates terror through sound and the cessation of uniformity with the forest as

its medium (I: 85). Comparably, Nevill also draws sources of the sublime from the other spectrum of loud sounds. During the second night of the hikers, Nevill introduces the nature of the old God following them. Nevill has bestowed the old God with a combination of various animal noises, resembling a bovine cough and a canine bark and moving around their camp at unnatural speeds, surrounding the hikers from every direction. The old God also breaks heavy branches that snap violently, creating terror through loud sounds, darkness and obscurity (I: 138).

Obscurity is another commonly used narrative device by Nevill. Furthermore, he can use obscurity with and without the common pairing of darkness to it. When the hikers reach an abandoned church, Phil notices something barely distinguishable. A dark and tall figure blended in with dead trees in broad daylight, standing still and watching the hikers. Whilst Phil is puzzled by it, he only realises its sentience once it turns around and retreats into the trees, creating panic and terror through obscurity (I: 100). Diversely, Nevill uses darkness to envelop terrors into obscurity. This is exemplified in chapter 40 where Luke and Dom face the old God during the night. The entity hunting the hikers prefers to use darkness to hide its position and to gain an advantage. Ambivalent in nature, the creature exhibits the capacities of various predatory animals, as well as intelligent strategies whilst always using the veil of darkness to its advantage, only presenting an obscure depiction of itself (I: 176, 177).

2.3 Satanism

Nevill's use of Satanism is quite prevalent in his novel, however, it is also quite ambivalent and can be interpreted differently. He uses elements, such as inverted crosses and goats in the abandoned house and various symbols presented by the Black Metal band, as well as the final ritual of sacrifice.

The very first signs of Satanism are in the abandoned house that the hikers find at the end of their first day in the forest, in chapter seven, page 31 where the inside of the house is heavily decorated with upside-down crucifixes. With this, Nevill hints at the themes yet to come in the later parts of the novel. Nevill has implemented the use of inverted crosses in the abandoned house to create a sense of evil and eeriness through the association with Satanism. This is evident in the commentaries of the hikers: “Luke heard Dom say, ‘More of that evil Christian shit (I: 30) “As if to himself, he said, ‘You’d think they’d make you feel safe. But they don’t’ (I: 33).

Another common element of Satanism is on the second floor of the house, embodied by the human-goat entity which resides in an infant cradle with its hands poised above, as if praying or worshipping something. As stated in subsection 1.3 of this thesis, I have brought out that the goat played a major role in The Bible, and it is the special symbol of the King of Hell. Nevill has abundantly implemented the symbolic use of goats in his novel to produce a terrifying effect through affiliation with Satan worshipping and animality. Another reason why Nevill has chosen the goat as his most prevalent symbol of evil is the reason that the head of the goat with its upwards pointed horns, long ears and beard forms a downwards pointing pentagram. This connotes the pointing towards hell, the kingdom of Satan. In this particular case of the novel, the dead body of the goat upon which human hands are stitched connotes a form of satanic ritual or a form of worship unknown to the reader as well as the hikers in the novel. The fear of the unknown or something not properly understood creates a heavy feeling of terror. The state of the body also aids in this feeling by bearing the connotation that a goat and a human had to have undergone a sacrificial ritual for the hands to be sewn onto the body of the goat. Hutch, who stands out from the rest as being the most knowledgeable, proposes: “I reckon it’s supposed to be the Goat of Mendes” (I: 41). This reveals the inner thoughts of the characters which confirm that the characters are associating

the entity with Satanism and thus transferring the same idea to the readers. Furthermore, the goat upstairs matches some of the descriptions provided by La Carmina. In addition to the head of the goat, the entity bears human arms and exposed breasts: “Up and down the chest, small pink teats parted the fur” (I: 40). However, the entity also bears significant elements of the Norse mythology which are explained in the last subsection of this paper. The room is also littered with animal bones which is another indication of death and perhaps an act of Satanic sacrifice to the entity or to what the entity is worshipping. Nevill once again uses goats as the symbol of Satanism in the second chapter of his novel. In chapter 49, page 206, Luke wakes in a strange bed after passing out from exhaustion and is greeted by three people wearing animal heads: a hare, a goat and a wolf. Luke also refers to the three figures as: “This wolf and devil and fire?” (I: 220). Luke immediately associates the head of the goat with Satan.

Another marking of Satanism is in the form of tattoos that Loki, the one wearing the head of the goat, bears. Nevill wants Loki to give off an unmistakable representation of Satanism. He gives his antagonist several tattoos of inverted pentagrams on his arms and a large inverted cross on his stomach. With the permanence of tattoos, Nevill reflects the seriousness behind the devotion to the Devil and its principles. To understand the ambitions of the three antagonists more clearly, Nevill has explained them through dialogue between Loki and Luke. Loki confesses to regretting burning Christian churches and wishes he would have burned Scientology churches instead due to them brainwashing people even more (I: 254). This reflects La Carmina’s statements of Satanists standing against established dogmas and supporting affirmative scientific scepticism. Loki also explains to Luke that Satanism for him, is a stepping stone towards the great god Odin, a good start to becoming truly evil, that Odin is what drives their heinous acts of murder and arson (I: 257). With these statements, Nevill creates a terror narrative which creates something more evil than Satanism. Furthermore, during a similar conversation, Luke antagonises the ambitions and beliefs of Fenris and calls

them mere Satanists. This angers Fenris who claims the Devil to be but a tool in their arsenal against Christians and to reach their final goal (I: 227).

The final ritual in which Luke is to be sacrificed entails some elements of Satanism as well. For example, he is tied to an inverted cross and hung upside down as if towards Hell. This can also be interpreted as a suggestion towards St. Peter, nevertheless, given the circumstances and the environment, its association towards Satanism is stronger. This, however, is the only element that can be associated with Satanism in the case of the final ritual.

2.4 Black Metal

Nevill has created his band of Black Metal followers basing them on the contemporary history and elements of Black Metal culture. This can be deduced based on the actions, views, visual aesthetics, ambitions and reasonings that the characters present. Whilst other factors are driving the three antagonists, Black Metal and its constituent elements are the definable characteristics of the people who have captured Luke.

The first signs of Black Metal that are immediately recognisable in Nevill's use of Black Metal music and the use of terrifying visuals. Luke is awoken by loud inhuman screaming coming from a CD player that the three masked figures have turned on. Luke is struck with paralysing fear in the sight of the unknown people and thinks himself to be in Hell (I: 253–254). After revealing their faces, Nevill makes use of the “corpse paint” and depicts all three of them painted in black, white and red and wearing studded leather with spikes, giving them a dreadful appearance as was done by “Mayhem” and many other Black Metal bands and enthusiasts to scare their audience (I: 259). Nevill has constructed Luke's first encounter with his captors to be as visually and audibly frightening as possible. To further solidify this, the three figures give as aggressive, apathetic and enigmatic answers to his

questions as possible, showing no interest or compassion toward his physical state or future well-being, reflecting the inhumanity of Black Metalists' views (I: 260–261). Furthermore, Fenris even mocks and laughs after Luke tells him that his friends were killed, showing the disregard for societal norms of empathy and being against murder (I: 266).

Nevill provides the reader with information about the Black Metal band through dialogue between Luke and Fenris, and later Loki. Fenris introduces themselves as being the Black Metal band “Blood Frenzy” and tells the names of each band member which are pseudonyms: Fenris, Surtr and Loki. Furthermore, Nevill has based their whole personalities around these pseudonyms: Surtr, meaning fire, is depicted by Nevill as volatile, aggressive and unstable, Fenris, the wolf is loud, barking and fierce, and Loki is calm, explanative and smartest of them all, being compared to the Devil by Fenris (I: 265–266).

Nevill has also exemplified the most common characteristics of Black Metal societies in the “Blood Frenzy”. The findings of Moynihan and Söderlind best fit the description of these characters. They are proud Norwegians (I: 269) which entails a more extreme version of Black Metal. They also bear tattoos of inverted crucifixes, pentagrams and Nordic runes, meaning they have connections with Satanism, as well as Norse mythology (I: 316). In regards to the ambitions of the antagonists, they conform to the ideas presented by Thompson which entail a shift of beliefs from Satanism to Norse mythology. This is best seen in in Nevill’s dialogue between Loki and Luke where the former explains what motivates their actions. Loki claims that it is Odin who stirs their blood and that the Devil is only a stepping stone to be liberated from morals and to become truly evil, a true Viking (I: 320). Nevill also reflects the most heinous crimes of Black Metal followers in his characters in the form of burning churches and killing priests in support of anti-Christianity (I: 320).

Based on the findings of Thompson, Nevill has also described the knowledge and affiliation of “Blood Frenzy” towards other Black Metal bands, evident in Luke’s dialogue

with Fenris: “/.../ ’Venom? He smiled. ‘The masters! Now we are getting somewhere /.../’” (I: 268). Additionally, the band name “Mayhem” is written on the jacket of Loki, along with many others (I: 390). Nevill also bestows Loki with many similar qualities to Varg Vakernes, showing his natural affinity towards the criminal: “/.../ Varg and Bard Faust, /.../ They light the path for us to follow” (I: 320). Additionally, Loki, as the appointed leader of the other two shows similarities to Vikernes by showing signs of a cult leader: “We have awoken, Luke. And we want our fellow Vikings to awake too, you know (I: 319). Loki also shows strong emotions toward nature, calling their return to nature ‘destiny’ (I: 324) and the forest ‘sacred’ (I: 325).

2.5 Norse Mythology

Nevill has implemented the use of Norse mythology as a tool for conveying terror in his novel quite often. He does this through the symbolism of the goat, the legend of the Wild Hunt, the form of tricksters found in Norse mythology and the final sacrifice which entails many elements of the Norse tradition of sacrifice.

The human goat entity that the hikers find upstairs of the abandoned house, could also be interpreted as an element of Norse mythology. Based on the statements of Charbonneau-Lassay of subsection 1.5 of this thesis, it could be deduced that Nevill has placed the human-goat entity on the top floor of the house to fit the tradition of warding off lightning. To add to this notion, very fittingly, there is a thunderstorm during the night. However, given the circumstances that the hikers are in and the abundance of inverted crosses and animal bones, Nevill wants the readers, as well as the hikers to associate it with Satanism more than Nordic mythology, to create a shocking first experience of terror.

The use of the Nordic legend of the Wild Hunt or *Oskeraí* is made abundantly clear by Nevill. Most glaringly by the three antagonists who introduce themselves when first meeting

Luke who has awoken in a strange bed of an unknown house: “Luke swallowed. ‘Who are you?’ /.../ ‘Oskerai!’ the figure shrieked again /.../ ‘We are the wild hunt,’ the tall figure said /.../” (I: 210–211). Fitting the descriptions of Lindow, Moynihan and Søderlind, Nevill has created a small band of youngsters who immediately show their wildness and animalistic tendencies through shrieks and the wearing of animal masks and face-paint. It is also evident that Nevill has based his antagonists on the legend of the Wild Hunt through their use of pseudonyms Surtr, Fenris and Loki, all linked to Norse Mythology, meaning fire, wolf and the trickster. Nevill also depicts them as heavy alcohol users: “The two men were gulping something from horns fashioned into cups. Moonshine. The ungainly hare fell to its knees twice (I: 222). Nevill also reveals some of the most heinous crimes that the antagonists have committed in light of the Wild Hunt: “To think we burned the oldest churches. /.../ We have killed nine people. Including two priests. /.../ (I: 254–255). Through these elements, Nevill has created a modern cult of the Wild Hunt in the form of *Oskerai* who act, look and behave similarly to the legend of the Wild Hunt who pillaged houses and killed villagers in a drunken state.

In the case of the elusive entity hunting Luke and his companions, Nevill has created an antagonist who is not easily definable. Whilst unconfirmed by Nevill, the entity shows discernable elements of Norse mythology by behaving like a shape-shifting trickster while hunting down the hikers. The entity shows various characteristics of different animals and objects. For example, when Phil first saw the hunter, it was in the form of a dead tree, blending in with the rest of the environment, only distinguished when it moved (I: 99). In another instance, the entity showed the characteristics and body features of a feline predator by clinging onto a tree and pouncing on Luke after he threw a rock at it (I: 177–178). Finally, when Nevill reveals the most visible form of the entity, it has become a monstrosity of various animals, bearing long yellow canine teeth, a tall ape-like body with the neck of a bullock and

the face of a goat (I: 323). The entity can change its form depending on the situation and use various animal features to its advantage, giving it the mythological abilities of a shape-shifting trickster. Furthermore, Nevill has also given the entity some features of the Wild Hunt, making it bark like the dogs accompanying the dead of the Wild Hunt (I: 314). What is more, Loki states that usually, the Wild Hunt begins at Yuletide, however, this year, it began early and the entity needs sacrifices (I: 257–258), meaning that the entity is fully a part of the Wild Hunt. After speaking with the antagonists, Luke finds out that the entity is actually an Old God and the true recipient of the sacrifice to come (I: 229). Whilst Nevill has included a variety of elements in the creation of this entity, and given the fact that he does not fully explain the true origin or nature of this hunter, it can be speculated that the entity could be an offspring of the god Loki.

In the case of the final ritual of sacrifice, Nevill has once again borrowed and used different elements of Norse tradition. For example, in place of toasts, Nevill has depicted the antagonists as drinking moonshine and singing Black Metal songs accompanied by the ritual bonfire in honour of the Old God whom they attempt to summon (I: 286). This fits with the ideas of the sacrificial tradition that took place in Uppsala where bodies were hung in a grove and incantations and songs were sung to calm the gods who were eternally angry and blood-thirsty. The main reason for the final ritual is also revealed to be one of preservation and long life. In exchange for the sacrifices, the ancient people living in the attic were given the gift of eternal life (I: 265–266).

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to analyse how Adam Nevill's *The Ritual* fits into the Gothic genre by distinguishing the most common themes in the novel and placing them within the context of Fred Botting's *Gothic*. Then, focusing on the novel's key events within these Gothic themes, to study the specific elements through which Nevill created his atmosphere of terror. The first section provided a theoretical background for the common elements and themes of the Gothic genre and the nature of the sublime. Also, an overview of satanism, black metal and Norse mythology was given which identified the elements within their contexts. The second chapter focused on how Nevill employed and diffused said theoretical background in his novel.

The first subsection of the literature review focused on the Gothic traits based on Botting's *Gothic*. It provided an overview of the most common themes, settings, characters and narrative devices present in Nevill's novel. Topics, such as excesses, transgression, ambivalence, doubles, Gothic influences and vampires were discussed. The second subsection of the literature review explained the nature of the sublime, how it is created and its relation to terror. Additionally, its most common themes, such as vastness, infinity, uniformity, sounds and obscurity were discussed. The third subsection covered the most prevalent symbols and meanings of Satanism. Goats, inverted crosses, pentagrams and sacrifices, their history, symbolism, true meanings and associations were the topics of that subsection. The fourth subsection covered the history, popular bands and figures, their ambitions, actions and influences, as well as the aesthetics of Black Metal. The forming of the Black Metal subgenre, bands, such as Mayhem and Priest, figures, such as Varg Vikernes, burning of churches, Satanism and Norse mythology as ambitions, and leather clothing and spikes as aesthetic features were some of the topics discussed. The fifth subsection studied the theme of Norse mythology. More specifically, the symbolism of goats, the legend of the Wild Hunt, the origin

of tricksters and the history, common elements and traditions of the sacrificial ritual in Norse heathenism.

The second section of this thesis, which applied the theoretical information provided in the literature review, analysed how Nevill has implemented and diffused various Gothic traits in his novel. The first subsection focused on analysing Nevill's Gothic setting of Sweden, and the duplicity in the thematics of Satanism and Norse mythology. Additionally, the excesses and transgressions of different elements and the nature of the old God and its various traits applicable to the Gothic character of vampires. The second subsection concentrated on Nevill's use of the sublime as a tool to produce terror in his novel. The analysis of his application of the sublime through vastness, infinity, sounds and obscurity was construed through the use of nature, animal and bird sounds, metaphors and camouflage displayed by the old God. The third subsection focused on analysing Nevill's use of Satanism as a device for the production of terror in the form of the inverted crosses and the ambivalent nature of the Satanic symbolism of the goat in the abandoned house. Additionally, the Satanic ambitions and aesthetics of the Black Metal band members, as well as the final sacrificial ritual. The fourth subsection studied Nevill's use of the Black Metal band as a tool for creating terror. It focused on analysing the aesthetics of the band members, their views and ambitions, connections to Satanism and Norse mythology and affiliations to other Black Metal societies and figures. The fifth subsection analysed Nevill's use of Norse mythology in the creation of terror through the symbolism of goats, the legend of the Wild Hunt that the band members and the old God present, the commonalities between the old God and tricksters in Norse mythology, as well as the parallels between the Heathen tradition of sacrifice and the one present in the novel.

Overall, this thesis revealed how Adam Nevill has applied and diffused various Gothic traits and produced an atmosphere of terror by involving and combining various elements in

themes of Satanism, Black Metal and Norse mythology. He has combined secular, mythological and Satanistic elements and created a new world within the confinements of his characters and the Gothic genre. Furthermore, he has taken traditional Gothic elements and changed them to fit a modern setting. By doing all this, he has created an original modern Gothic horror narrative.

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RESÜMEE

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ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Tõnu Kiis

Screams Among the Trees: the Creation of a Modern Gothic Horror Through Satanism, Black Metal and Norse Mythology in Adam Nevill's *The Ritual*

Karjed Puude Vahel: moodsa Gooti romaani loomine läbi Satanismi, Black Metali ja Põhjamaade mütoloogia Adam Nevilli novellis *The Ritual*

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Annotatsioon:

Käesoleva töö eesmärk on uurida, kuidas mahutub Adam Nevilli novell nimega *The Ritual* gooti romaani žanrisse, eristades raamatu peateemad ja selle moodustavad terrorielemendid ning sobitades need Fred Bottingu raamatu *Gothic* konteksti. Käesoleva töö põhieesmärk on uurida, kuidas Adam Nevill on loonud oma terroriõhkkonna ja läbi selle originaalse gooti romaani teose, sealjuures kombineerides elemente, mida gooti romaani žanris traditsiooniliselt ei leidu.

Töö koosneb neljast osast: sissejuhatus, kirjanduse ülevaade, gooti elementide analüüs Nevilli novellis ja kokkuvõtte. Sissejuhatus annab lühiülevaate autorist ja sellest, mis on mõjutanud tema loomet, novelli arvustused, käesoleva lõputöö ülesehituse lühikirjelduse ning lõpuks ka novelli kokkuvõtte. Kirjanduse ülevaade annab lugejale teoreetilise tausta ja jaguneb viieks alajaotuseks. Esimene alajagu keskendub teoreetilise ülevaate andmisele gooti žanrist ja selle paljudest elementidest läbi Fred Bottingu raamatu *Gothic*. Teine alajagu annab üldise ülevaate *sublime*'ist ja selle loomise meetoditest kirjanduses, lähtudes Edmund Burke *sublime*'i kohta tehtud uurimustest. Kolmas alajagu annab lugejale lühikese ülevaate satanismi ajaloost ja sümboolikast. Neljas alajagu annab ülevaate Black Metaliga seotud populaarsetest bändidest, inimestest ja tegevustest. Viies alajagu annab infot põhjamaade mütoloogia legendide ja traditsioonide kohta. Teises osas analüüsitakse Adam Nevilli rituaali kirjandusülevaates esitatud teoreetilise informatsiooni põhjal ja selle alajaotused vastavad kirjandusülevaates esitatule. Lõputöö põhikeha lõpeb kokkuvõttega, kondenseerides kogu lõputöö põhileiud kokkuvõtteks.

Märksõnad: gooti romaan, Satanism, Black Metal, põhjamaade mütoloogia, sublime, Nevill

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