

# Commodified Evil's Wayward Children:

Black Metal and Death Metal as Purveyors of an Alternative Form of  
Modern Escapism

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## Abstract

This study focuses on Black Metal and Death Metal music as complimentary forms of commodified evil, which, in contrast to most other forms of commodified evil, provide an alternative form of modern escapism. In particular, it demonstrates that in glorifying evil their respective natures and essences effectively suggest to us that the ability to overcome our problems, and cope with the world's atrocities, lies not in the vain hope that justice will prevail, but rather, in embracing evil and actively cultivating a desensitizing ethos of utter indifference to the plight and suffering of others. In addition, because Black Metal and Death Metal have both generated their own distinct sub-cultures, which are predominantly populated by marginalized youths, this study simultaneously begs the question: What is it that motivates them to produce and/or endorse forms of music, and thereby become members of sub-cultures, which ostensibly promote such a negative world view? Consequently, it also demonstrates some of the important ways in which they can serve to help their proponents regain a sense of power and control over their lives. It then concludes by looking at Black Metal and Death Metal's (potential) social effects – both negative and positive.

## Introduction

Evil has always fascinated and perplexed us. It has also long proved a potent seller. Few subjects, for instance, possess the potential to sell more newspapers or magazines than those whose headlines promise to reveal the grisly details of some fresh atrocity or act of terror. Yet traditionally, when not thinking about or conceptualizing evil as being personified in supernatural Devils and Demons, people have simply tended to focus on its utility as a descriptive/classificatory term. In its broadest sense, this has led to everything that is adverse to human life, from war and massacres through to drought and famine, being either classified as or referred to as evil. In a narrower or more specific sense, it has also led to the term “evil” being used to distinguish a qualitative difference between various degrees and types of wrong doing and wrong doers. Hence Daniel Haybron’s assertion: “call Hitler and the Holocaust evil and you are unlikely to arouse much disagreement. On the contrary: you will have better luck generating dissent if you refer to Hitler and the Holocaust merely as bad or wrong.”<sup>1</sup> For the reality is that “such tepid language” is simply inadequate in the face of such atrocious subject matter. In fact, as he justly concludes, “[p]refix your adjectives with as many ‘verys’ as you like; you will still fall short. Only ‘evil’ it seems will do.”<sup>2</sup>

So, while we are used to thinking of evil as a descriptive/classificatory term, what we are not used to thinking of evil as is a commodity. That is, as something that can be produced and sold in our market-based economic system.<sup>3</sup> Yet, with mediums as diverse as movies, books, CDs and PlayStation games trafficking in everything from Demons, Vampires, Werewolves and Zombies through to war, terrorism and serial killing, this is increasingly what it is being reduced to; which is a real cause for concern. For as forms of media, such mediums constitute potential means of moulding/altering/distorting their consumer’s perceptions not only of the various myths, religions, folklore, historical events and figures they eclectically appropriate in their composition, but crucially, of the world around them. And beyond this, of both desensitizing their consumers to real world

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel M. Haybron, “Moral Monsters and Saints,” in *The Monist*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (2002), p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> Haybron, “Moral Monsters and Saints,” p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> Allan G. Johnson ed, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User’s Guide to Sociological Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p.51.

evils and insidiously aiding them in the subconscious development of aggressive, even physically violent, dispositions.

As a rule, however, this highly capitalistic exercise in reductionism has been mitigated, at least to a certain degree, by two important facts. The first of these is that such mediums simultaneously serve as forms of mainstream escapism. That is, as mediums that not only possess the ability to temporarily wrest our intellects/imaginings from their present cares, but which, through the various bounded forms of vicarious experience they provide, can also serve to help us master a myriad of unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues at a step's remove. The second is the ultimate triumph of good over evil generally depicted in such mediums. Or rather, their routine exhibition of what can only accurately be described as the "good guys always win" motif, which effectively serves to couple their escapist functions with the underlying consolatory hope that we too can overcome our own seemingly insurmountable problems.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions to every rule, and the foci of the present study, Black Metal and Death Metal Music, are two such exceptions. For, as our analysis will show, they are complimentary forms of commodified evil whose respective natures and essences effectively situate them in diametrical opposition to the "good guys always win" motif; and hence to the overly optimistic form of consolation it engenders. In fact, as we shall see, by contrast they suggest to us that the ability to overcome our problems, and cope with the world's atrocities, lies not in the vain hope that justice will prevail, but rather, in embracing evil; and thereby in actively cultivating what will be termed a desensitizing ethos of utter indifference to the plight and suffering of others. Consequently, both Black Metal and Death Metal can justly be construed as purveyors of an alternative form of modern escapism.

Yet this is not the only way in which they are exceptional. They are also exceptional in that they have both generated their own distinct sub-cultures, effectively making them forms of commodified evil produced both by and for their respective members. Perhaps more importantly, though, these are not sub-cultures that exhibit a

socially diverse membership. Rather, they are sub-cultures that are predominantly populated by marginalized youths, which begs a question that is central to this thesis: What is it that motivates them to produce and/or endorse forms of music, and thereby become members of sub-cultures, which ostensibly promote such a negative world view? Accordingly, in the course of demonstrating that Black Metal and Death Metal are purveyors of an alternative form of modern escapism, not only will we take time to delineate their divergent (albeit complimentary) ideological bases, we will also demonstrate some of the important ways in which they can serve to help their proponents regain a sense of power and control over their lives.

Finally, because the real significance of any analysis hinges on its social implications, we will conclude by looking at Black Metal and Death Metal's (potential) social effects – both negative and positive. Or rather, by showing that despite the fact their (potential) social effects are overwhelmingly negative, there are nevertheless several important ways in which they are ultimately implicated in the maintenance and reproduction of the good.

Chapter One  
**Black Metal and Death Metal Music**

**Audible Distinctions and Definitions: both of and between Black Metal and Death Metal Music**

If only for the benefit of those who have never had the pleasure/displeasure of being subjected to the aural assaults that Black Metal and Death Metal music constitute, it will be helpful to begin by attempting to delineate audible definitions of, and distinctions between, both Black Metal and Death Metal. That is, definitions and distinctions based on the perceptible differences exhibited between their respective sounds. However, before doing so, we must pause to stress that no such attempt can ever pretend to amount to anything more than a rough approximation. For any attempt to delineate what might be considered definitive or immutable audible definitions of, or distinctions between, these two sub-genres is invariably problematised by at least three general facts. The first of these, as most people who for one reason or another have acquainted themselves with the closely interrelated forms/styles of Extreme Metal are aware, is that Black Metal and Death Metal are both extreme sub-genres of the Heavy Metal genre in music, which, along with Doom Metal, Thrash Metal and Grindcore, “have radicalized certain features of heavy metal, in particular tempo, timbre and vocal styling...”<sup>1</sup> Concomitantly, while any one of these radicalized features might be considered to be a more characteristic feature of a particular sub-genre, overlaps between their various forms, features and styles of playing largely negate the possibility of portraying any individual stylistic element as the exclusive property of any one Extreme Metal sub-genre.

In a certain sense, the second general fact is the polar opposite of the first problem. That is, despite the fact that none of the Extreme Metal sub-genres can claim any particular form, feature or style of playing to be altogether exclusively theirs, most bands, both inside and outside of the same sub-genre, have their own unique sound. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7, No.1 (London: SAGE Publications, 2004),p.99.

even within the confines of a single sub-genre we are prevented from making any immutable assertions about its sound, for we are ultimately presented with the equally difficult task of trying to accommodate what Deena Weinstein identified in the course of her treatment of Heavy Metal as “a multitude of ‘signature sounds.’”<sup>2</sup>

Finally, the last, but by no means least, of our three general problematic facts is embodied in the trite truism that “writing about music is like dancing about architecture.”<sup>3</sup> That is, to gain a true appreciation and understanding of any genre “requires comprehending its sound,”<sup>4</sup> and thus, in the case of Black Metal and Death Metal, ultimately acquiring a few albums and braving those migraines oft complained of by “Metal virgins.”

### *Death Metal*

Although there certainly exist some Death Metal songs, and parts of songs, which exhibit what might be considered comparatively moderate or slow tempos, Death Metal is predominantly an extremely fast and aggressive style of music. Setting this often exhausting pace, and thus providing the foundation on which every band’s musical superstructures are built, is percussion. For this reason, we will begin with the drums, which, as Natalie Purcell confirms and elaborates, “[i]n Death Metal ... are often very dominant and very fast. Hyper double-bass blast beats, which mimic the sound of machine gun firing, are common and are utilized frequently.”<sup>5</sup> Often breaking up the monotonous prevalence of the rapid double bass drumming, however, are rolls and fills as apt and elaborate as the individual drummer’s feel for music and technical ability will permit. And, of course, when occasion permits, it is not unknown for Death Metal drumming to slow to beats dominated by such distinct timed blows to the high-hats that

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<sup>2</sup> Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000),p.22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.23.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Natalie J. Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003),p.9; In the interest of clarification, it should perhaps be noted here that, in the context of Extreme Metal in general, and Death Metal and Black Metal in particular, the term double bass does not refer to the four-stringed instrument of the same name found in the rhythm sections of various other types of music. Rather, it refers almost exclusively to the described bass beat, which is produced by either using two bass drums with individual pedals or a single bass drum with a double bass pedal.



the machine-like-effect/sound generated almost borders on being able to be described as industrial – recalling as it does visions of factories and inhuman machinery.<sup>6</sup>

Falling in line with the drums, much of the guitar playing in Death Metal is also extremely fast. Often played on down-tuned guitars,<sup>7</sup> Death Metal riffs are customarily of a very complex, and thus seemingly even chaotic, nature; with more adept guitarists even managing to work spurts of the rapid trilling and finger tapping usually reserved for guitar solos by Thrash Metal, 80's Glam Rock, and accomplished lead guitarists like Joe Satriani and Steve Vai, into them. It will come as no surprise, then, that the effect produced is frequently such an amazing density of sound that it renders the riffs almost wholly unintelligible to the casual listener.<sup>8</sup> All is not lost, however, when the pace of the riffs deigns to slacken to a slow grind. For during these instances the chaos routinely gives way to low churning riffs whose menacing tone can be quite arresting.

Turning our attention to Death Metal's vocals, it is worth noting, as Purcell has done, that it is they “which would strike the casual listener before anything else,”<sup>9</sup> and that “[t]hose who are outside of the scene typically classify it [Death Metal] according to the vocals, ignoring the definite trends in the instrumental music itself.”<sup>10</sup> Succinctly, the reason for this is that they are spewed forth in an assortment of primal/bestial tones that ranges from low guttural growls (which often sound as though they are being produced

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, former Death/Industrial Metal band, Fear Factory, made the industrial aesthetic their central focus; opting not only to incorporate industrial samples and sequences into their music, but to write lyrics centered around a “Man versus Machine” motif, and to give their albums titles like *Soul of a New Machine* (Roadrunner, 1992) and *Demanufacture* (Roadrunner, 1995). Even the band's name “Fear Factory” manifests this focus.

<sup>7</sup> In layman's terms, a down-tuned guitar is a guitar that has had its strings tuned to any pitch lower than standard E tuning. That is, each of a guitar's 6 strings is tuned to a corresponding note, which, in order from lowest (i.e. the thickest string) through to the highest (i.e. thinnest string), happens to be E, A, D, G, B, E, with standard E tuning. Whereas, Death Metal guitarists commonly tune their guitars as low as C, which results in every string being tuned two notes lower they would be in standard E tuning. Consequently, in order from lowest to highest, the six corresponding string notes become C, F, A sharp, D sharp, G, C.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, “Unspectacular Subculture?: Transgression and Mundanity in the Global Extreme Metal Scene,” in Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris eds, *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.108.

<sup>9</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

by someone who has just “gargled with hydrochloric acid”<sup>11</sup> at one end of the spectrum, through to maniacal, screeching screams and shrieks at the other. Thus, making them the most apt and primal vocalization of Death Metal’s inherent aggression.

### *Black Metal*

Unlike Death Metal, in Black Metal the aim seems to be generating a distinctly atmospheric feel to the music, with all of the band’s raw aggression more often than not being channeled towards that end. Nevertheless, Black Metal too is predominantly an extremely fast and aggressive style of music. Consequently, it’s often even more relentless pace is similarly set by percussion. The drums in Black Metal, however, often give precedence to a more decided, constant/monotonous and simplistic double bass beat – as opposed to employing the “Hyper double-bass blast beats” that are characteristic of Death Metal. The effect: a less penetrating, if still dominant, purring. Or, perhaps more accurately: a relentless, overriding drone. Moreover, during those intervals when the pace slackens, in Black Metal you are far more likely to encounter beats that seem consciously designed to generate an almost haunting resonance than anything approximating an industrial sound.

Riff wise, generating a distinctly atmospheric feel to the music necessitates the more chaotic style of riffing characteristic of Death Metal taking a back seat to tremolo picked chord progressions and riffs. For it is only the incessant blurring of sound so generated that seem capable of producing their peculiar spectrum of sound, which has cold and grim situated at one end and proud and triumphant at the other.

As atmospheric a sound as the combination of an incessant double bass drum beat and tremolo picked riffs can create, in isolation it can often sound quite thin. Fortunately,

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<sup>11</sup> Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, p.51; Somewhat amusingly, “Death-metal vocalizing” is sometimes even described “as Cookie Monster singing, if not in tribute to, at least in acknowledgement of the ‘Sesame Street’ puppet that blurts in a guttural growl, his words discharged so rapidly that they tend to collide with each other.” Jim Fusilli, “That’s Good enough for Me: Cookie Monsters of death-metal music,” in *Opinion Journal* (February 1, 2006), URL: <http://www.opinionjournal.com/la/?id=110007902>

this potential problem has largely been overcome by the use of keyboards, whose ability to thicken up Black Metal's sound and augment its distinctly atmospheric aspirations have increasingly served to render them an almost indispensable feature of the sub-genre. In fact, their usage has become so prevalent that Deena Weinstein, in her influential book *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, appears to regard their use as the defining instrumental feature between Black Metal and Death Metal music. For she wrote: "To a death-metal base, black metal added swirling layers of cosmic keyboard soundscapes..."<sup>12</sup> However, despite being highly illustrative of our point, this assertion is somewhat misleading. For it neglects the fact that a number of Black Metal's most influential acts have traditionally taken a very minimalistic approach to writing and recording Black Metal – an approach that largely shuns the sort of embellishment that the keyboard can provide. After the release of their first album, *Soulside Journey*,<sup>13</sup> which was a well produced Death Metal album that uncharacteristically featured sporadic keyboard accompaniment, Darkthrone, in particular, switched to writing and recording increasingly minimalistic Black Metal albums.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, by the time they were recording their fourth album, *Transilvanian Hunger*,<sup>15</sup> they found themselves in a four track studio that physically wouldn't have been able to effectively record much more than your basic vocal, drum and guitar tracks.<sup>16</sup> This aside, Weinstein's assertion could perhaps have been passed over without further mention if it were not for the fact that its simultaneous description of the sound produced by the sub-genre's keyboardists bears a greater resemblance to what might be dubbed a hippy's description of drugged-out musical experiences than anything one would ever find on any Black Metal album. A more accurate way to describe the sounds exhibited by Black Metal keyboarding then, would be to say that they range from the relatively simply provision of sombre chords, which loom behind the guitar riffs, through to the more conspicuous provision of grandiose overtures and orchestral-sounding accompaniment.

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<sup>12</sup> Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, p.289.

<sup>13</sup> Darkthrone, *Soulside Journey* (Peaceville, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting that, with their 1991 album, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* (Peaceville), Darkthrone effectively "became the first high-profile death metal act to publicly switch allegiance from death metal to the black metal camp." Michael Moynihan & Didrik Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Venice, CA: Feral House, 1998), p.218.

<sup>15</sup> Darkthrone, *Transilvanian Hunger* (Peaceville, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Darkthrone the Interview: Chapter 4, *Transilvanian Hunger* (Peaceville, 2003).

As was the case with Death Metal, with Black Metal too we can freely say that it is the vocals “which would strike the casual listener before anything else.”<sup>17</sup> However, in place of the beast-like vocal spectrum found in Death Metal, in Black Metal we encounter a more hellish spectrum of sounds, dominated by what can only adequately be described as rasped and screeched attempts to sound as “demonic” as possible – with the occasional high pitched tortured scream apparently being thrown in for good measure. Consequently, the effect Black Metal’s vocal spectrum serves to generate is not so much primal as it is malignant – making it the perfect vehicle for the subgenre’s unholy fervor.

### **Dominant Lyrical Themes and Foci**

It is in no way the purpose of this brief sub-section to provide an analysis of individual band’s lyrics. That particular task will be reserved for the relevant sections and subsections of the thesis proper. Rather, this sub-section will simply provide an outline of the dominant lyrical themes and foci of both Black Metal and Death Metal music, so as to facilitate a better understanding of the short history of the two sub-genres that is to follow. Unfortunately, as was the case with our attempt to delineate audible definitions of, and distinctions between, Black Metal and Death Metal, the delineation of immutable distinctions between the lyrical themes and focuses of the two sub-genres is also rendered impossible by overlaps. Nevertheless, some helpful generalizations can still be made.

#### *Death Metal*

Describing the lyrical focus of Extreme Metal bands in general, Keith Kahn-Harris averred that they “focus largely on death, mutilation, the occult and misanthropic denunciations of humanity.”<sup>18</sup> And when looking at Purcell’s more specific attempt to formulate general lyrical categorizations for Death Metal, we can see that they fall largely within this compass: gore/horror/porn; Satanism/occultism/anti-Christian; sociopolitical

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<sup>17</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.9.

<sup>18</sup> Kahn-Harris, “Unspectacular Subculture?: Transgression and Mundanity in the Global Extreme Metal Scene,” p.108.

commentary; independence themes; and war/apocalypse themes.”<sup>19</sup> Of these diverse themes, however, it is the gore/horror/porn categorization that is by far the most dominant, with the Satanism/occultism/anti-Christian categorization coming in a somewhat distant second.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning with bands and lyrics belonging to the more dominant gore/horror/porn categorization, it will probably come as no surprise to learn that they draw much of their subject matter and inspiration from the “slasher movie violence of the 70s and 80”<sup>21</sup> and the exploits of real life serial killers, cannibals and sadists. Consequently, they have been able to serve up “songs detailing infinite varieties of murder, torture, rape, and dismemberment”<sup>22</sup> in a never-ending rotation; wherein fact and fiction are unreservedly combined and distorted in what appears to be a conscious, albeit unstructured, effort to give voice to every conceivable act of human depravity and degradation. Thus, we find songs with such self explanatory titles as Cannibal Corpse’s “Stripped, Raped and Strangled,” “Fucked with a Knife,”<sup>23</sup> “Devoured by Vermin,” “Mummified in Barbed Wire”<sup>24</sup> and “Dismembered and Molested;”<sup>25</sup> Devourment’s “Baby Killer,” “Molesting the Decapitated,” and “Self-Disembowelment;”<sup>26</sup> and Disgorge’s “Exhuming the Disemboweled” and “Sodomize the Bleeding.”<sup>27</sup>

Turning our attention to the small minority of Death Metal bands whose lyrics fall into the Satanism/occultism/anti-Christian categorization, we find little evidence of attempts articulate what might be considered coherent and consistent philosophies; nor are there to be found any note-worthy attempts to draw on the wealth of amenable material extant in the works of such seemingly obvious sources of inspiration as Nietzsche, Crowley, Rand and LaVey. Rather, what we find are an assortment of

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<sup>19</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.39.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Moynihan & Didrik Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Venice, CA: Feral House, 1998), pp.27-29.

<sup>21</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.27.

<sup>22</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.27.

<sup>23</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *The Bleeding*, (London: Metal Blade Records Inc, 1994), tracks.3 & 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *Vile* (London: Metal Blade Records Inc, 1996), tracks.1 & 2.

<sup>25</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *Gallery of Suicide* (London: Metal Blade Records Inc, 1998), track.6.

<sup>26</sup> Devourment, *1.3.8* (Holland: Displeased, 2004), tracks.1, 8 & 9.

<sup>27</sup> Disgorge, *She Lay Gutted* (Unique Leader, 1999), tracks.3 & 5.

blasphemous tirades, and attempts to “convey deep criticisms of Christianity,”<sup>28</sup> casually interspersed by occult themes extracted from several of the fake *Necronomicons* inspired by the fictional writings of Howard Phillip Lovecraft. On Deicide’s album *Once Upon the Cross*, for instance, we find the blasphemous critique of God’s supposed double standards in “Christ Denied,” wherein, upon his death, Christ ascends to the gates of heaven only to be denied access because he is the bastard son of Mary born of her infidelity with God.<sup>29</sup> Then, only four tracks later we find “They are the Children of the Underworld,”<sup>30</sup> whose demonic subject-matter is extracted not from Judeo-Christian sources as we might suspect, but from the Lovecraftian and Mesopotamian mythological hybrid popularly known as the Simon edition *Necronomicon*.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Morbid Angel’s album *Altars of Madness* finds such self-explanatorily titled songs as “Blasphemy” in the company of a track entitled “Lord of all Fevers and Plague,”<sup>32</sup> whose contents have also been pieced together from Simon’s edition, and in which the Mesopotamian demon Pazuzu is enjoined to rise and spread disease.<sup>33</sup>

### *Black Metal*

Lyrically, Black Metal has traditionally had its closest affinity with those Death Metal bands whose lyrics fall into Purcell’s Satanism/occultism/anti-Christian categorization. In fact, as Moynihan suggests, many people see Black Metal as being “essentially intertwined” with Satanism,<sup>34</sup> and thus, by implication, with both an anti-Christian

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<sup>28</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.41.

<sup>29</sup> Deicide, *Once Upon the Cross* (New York: Roadrunner Records, 1995), track.2; This, of course, is an interesting conjecture. However the basic theology doesn’t hold up. For marital infidelity, or adultery, requires two important ingredients, which the Gospel of Matthew: 1: 18-25, clearly records were absent during Christ’s conception: 1) that at least one of the people supposedly committing adultery are actually married; and 2) that the sexual act actually takes place.

<sup>30</sup> Deicide, *Once Upon the Cross* (New York: Roadrunner Records, 1995), track.6.

<sup>31</sup> Simon., ed, *Necronomicon* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), pp.161-163; For accurate English translations of the Babylonian and Assyrian Myths appropriated by Simon’s edition of the *Necronomicon*, see Stephanie Dalley, trans & ed, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Morbid Angel, *Altars of Madness*

<sup>33</sup> Simon., ed, *Necronomicon* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), pp.109, 124, 154-185; In point of fact, according to Mesopotamian demonology, the Assyrian Pazuzu was “the personification of the southwest wind, a demon with four wings, a bat’s head, and a scorpion’s tail.” Gerald Messadie, *A History of the Devil*, trans Marc Romano (New York: Kodansha America, Inc, 1997), p.103.

<sup>34</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.192.

outlook and occultism. However, over the years an increasing number of its Scandinavian proponents have been violating the integrity of this unholy Satanism/occultism/anti-Christian triad through the non-uniform and eclectic appropriation of themes and elements from the Norse and Teutonic Mythologies of their Northern European forebears, Viking culture, fascism, Nazism, nature, and the romantic vision of Nationalism that results from their combination. The result has been the gradual emergence of a lyrical spectrum that ranges from pure/uncontaminated Satanism at one end, through to strong anti-Christian sentiments, grounded in a desired return to the ways and faith of the usurped heathen past, at the other. The mean of this spectrum has, almost necessarily it might be argued, been a seemingly unconscious attempt at what can only be described as a pop-culture Hegelian synthesis – out of which has “developed a mythology in which Satanism was constructed as part of a pagan history of resistance to the conquest of Christianity.”<sup>35</sup> Despite this synthesis’ importance, however, it still vies for dominance with the pure/uncontaminated Satanism end of the spectrum. Accordingly, it will be useful to provide brief outlines of them both.

Of those bands that have largely restricted the focus of their lyrics to pure/uncontaminated Satanism, Dark Funeral and Emperor are relatively representative, if somewhat divergent, examples. For the lyrics of both these bands exhibit the partial inversion and distortion of Zoroastrianism’s dualistic thought that unconsciously underlies this end of the lyrical spectrum.<sup>36</sup> In laymen’s terms, of course, this translates into an ostensible belief that, while at present the forces of good and evil are engaged in a relatively even struggle, in the end the forces of evil will triumph; in contrast to orthodox Zoroastrian thought, which avers that it is in fact the forces of good that will emerge victorious from the final struggle.<sup>37</sup> In the case of Dark Funeral, this finds rather crude and unimaginative expression in “The Arrival of Satan’s Empire,” which appears to amount to little more than an attempt to narrate an alternative outcome to the war in

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<sup>35</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” p.99.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Boyce, “Zoroastrianism,” in John R. Hinnells ed, *A New Handbook of Living Religions* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), pp.243-244.

<sup>37</sup> For a concise and accessible account of how Zoroastrian thought contributed to the development of the Christian concept of the Devil see Jeffrey Russell’s, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); see also Messadie’s, *A History of the Devil*.

heaven recorded in Revelation 12: 7–9. For, in this particular track, “Father Satan” is counseled that the time has come to gather his legions and take the throne of Heaven by force – which he then proceeds to do.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, Emperor refrains from promulgating alternatives to biblical narrative. Instead, their dualism is exuded in the course of their preference for exalting Satan. Thus, in “Inno a Satana,” whose quasi-biblical language reads like something extracted from the pages of the King James Bible, we find him being praised as him “whose spirit lieth upon every act of oppression, hatred and strife,” he who ultimately has “the power to force any light in wane.”<sup>39</sup>

Among those bands that “developed a mythology in which Satanism was constructed as part of a pagan history of resistance to the conquest of Christianity,”<sup>40</sup> there are two themes in particular that appear to be the standard fare. The first are nostalgic lamentations over a lost, pre-Christian age. Such lamentations, however, rarely confine themselves to the realm of mere nostalgia. Rather, they commonly find themselves bound up in the concomitant feelings of disgust at the state of mental, physical and environmental impurity that the spread of Christianity, modernity, population growth and immigration has led to in Northern Europe – or more specifically Scandinavia in general and Norway in particular. Norwegian Black Metalers, Satyricon, for instance, epitomize this type of lament in their song “Mother North,” in which they marvel at the complacency of their fellow countrymen, who seem largely indifferent to what Satyricon effectively construe as being the rape and defilement of their home:

Mother North – how can they sleep while their beds are burning?

Mother North – your fields are bleeding

Memories...The invisible wounds

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<sup>38</sup> Dark Funeral, *Diabolis Interium* (Fremont, CA: Necropolis Records, 2001), track.1. Given Christianity’s association of matter with evil and darkness and spirit with good and light, it is tempting to read such alternative outcomes to Christian grand narrative as also constituting inversions of Manichean dualism. For, as Jeffrey Burton Russell notes in, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp.164-165, Manichaeism maintained that in the third age, after the final war between light and darkness had been waged, spirit would at last be liberated from matter forever.

<sup>39</sup> Emperor, *In the Night side Eclipse* (United Kingdom: Candlelight, 1994), track.9; An impressive orchestral version of this particular song can be found on Emperor’s mini disc *Reverence* under the title “Opus a Satana.”(United Kingdom: Candlelight, 1996), track.3.

<sup>40</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,”p.99.



pictures that enshrine your throne (gone?)...  
Phantom North – I'll be there when you hunt them down.<sup>41</sup>

The second theme that bands of this ilk focus on is embodied in triumphant assertions that a demonic pre-Christian age will be reclaimed,<sup>42</sup> and the world conquered, by the servants of evil. This, of course, is a decidedly more straight forward affair than heart-felt lamentations; as Immortal make evident in their song “Triumph,” which proffers the following exemplar of promise and inspiration-filled apocalyptic prophecy:

Battle all the lands  
It's the triumph of the ages  
Empires fall by hands  
In the triumph of the ages  
Black demonic hordes  
Journey against the earth  
Coming from the *North*  
Speeding on a gathering wind<sup>43</sup>

### **A Brief History of Black Metal and Death Metal Music**

If Tony “Abaddon” Bray, a member of Black Metal’s English founders, Venom, is to be believed, the genesis of a number of Heavy Metal’s more extreme sub-genres names/referents may ultimately be able to be traced back to one of their early interviews. For as he recalls:

We were interviewed once and somebody said, ‘Venom’s obviously not a Heavy Metal band. You don’t sound like Heavy Metal and you don’t look particularly Heavy Metal; you look like punks with long hair.’ We said Venom *is* very Heavy Metal – it’s Black Metal, it’s Power Metal, it’s Speed Metal, it’s Death Metal. And all of these sub-genres had never been heard of before. All of

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<sup>41</sup> Despite Satyricon’s reverential reference to their homeland as “Mother North,” there is no evidence of a pantheistic dimension to their lyrics. Satyricon, *Nemesis Divina* (Modern invasion, 1996), track.3.

<sup>42</sup> It obviously not without a sense of irony that by virtue of making the triumphant assertion that the demonic pre-Christian age will be reclaimed, such lyrics not only conform/commend themselves to, but actually vindicate, Christianity’s practice of demonizing the pre-Christian Pagan deities and religions it encountered during its dissemination. Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Longman, 1995), p.30.

<sup>43</sup> Italics mine. Immortal, *Damned in Black*, track.1.

the sudden one band is considered a Speed Metal band, one is considered a Death Metal Band, and another is considered a Black Metal or a Power Metal band. What we meant is that Venom is *all* of these things, and all of these genres could emanate from Venom. We didn't mean for it to happen, but that's how it turned out.<sup>44</sup>

In most cases, of course, the actual effect of this statement's contribution to providing names for a number of Extreme Metal's sub-genres is extremely difficult to measure. Venom's responsibility for giving Black Metal its name, however, was brought beyond dispute with the release of their second album in 1982 entitled *Black Metal*.<sup>45</sup> The referent Death Metal, on the other hand, was not to receive a more substantial origin until 1984, at which time it appeared almost simultaneously in two geographically distant locations. The first these was continental Europe, where a German Metal label, Noise Records, employed it as the title of a compilation they released featuring the bands Hellhammer (later metamorphosed into Celtic Frost), Dark Avenger, Running Wild and Helloween. Originally planned to be entitled *Black Mass*, Hellhammer's Thomas Fischer talked Noise into settling on *Death Metal*, which had supposedly been the name of a fanzine (fan made magazine) he had formerly produced.<sup>46</sup> "Subsequently, the Death Metal label was applied to any bands that played extremely fast and heavy music lacking any semblance of melody."<sup>47</sup>

The second place that would provide the referent Death Metal with a more substantial origin in 1984 was North America, where the Californian band Possessed would entitle their first demo *Death Metal*. In spite of this, those who credit Possessed with actually coining the term "Death Metal," commonly only trace the event back to

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<sup>44</sup> Italics in original. Op. cit. Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.23.

<sup>45</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.12-13.

<sup>46</sup> Regrettably, the real significance of this Fanzine is impossible to gauge from Purcell's work. For while she makes explicit reference to it, she fails to provide even an approximate range of dates within which it was produced. *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.53. Moreover, the information appears to be unavailable through other sources.

<sup>47</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.53.

1985. For that was the year their demo's title track "Death Metal" would reemerge as the closing track of their debut Album *Seven Churches*.<sup>48</sup>

But, there is more to any genre or sub-genre than its name. Thus, in order to gain a better understanding of the roots of both Black Metal and Death Metal, it is important to look back, as Moynihan and Soderlind have done, to a peculiar early 20<sup>th</sup> century Delta Bluesman and then proceed to the present. For despite the fact that Black Metal and Death Metal have largely eschewed the melodic and Blues-originated features of their Heavy Metal father,<sup>49</sup> it is back to that Bluesman that the oldest element of both sub-genres – the diabolical element – might ultimately be traced. Moreover, it will enable us to locate both Black Metal and Death Metal as part of what has been an ongoing quest for ever more extreme forms of music.

While Blues songs are rife with reference to the denizens of Hell, it is the life and work of that 1930s songwriter, guitarist, and singer, known as "The King of the Delta Blues," Robert Johnson, that is most significant. This is because, as legend has it, he "is said to have sold his soul to the Devil at a crossroads in the Mississippi Delta"<sup>50</sup> in exchange for his extraordinary musical ability. Initially a mere rumor, "Johnson's lyrics claiming partnership with Satan did nothing to contradict the stories."<sup>51</sup> In "Me and the Devil Blues," for instance, Johnson sings about being called on by Satan, who then casually accompanies the bluesman on his way to give his woman a gratuitous beating.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Johnson became the "Doctor Faustus"<sup>53</sup> of early twentieth century America, and in the process engendered a more direct link between popular music and trafficking with the Devil than the Christian/conservative fear that listening to particular types of music might

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<sup>48</sup> Possessed, *Seven Churches* (Combat Records, 1985); Albert Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2004), pp.69-70.

<sup>49</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, "The 'failure' of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene," p.99.

<sup>50</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.2.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph L. Monzo, "Use of Microtones in the Vocals of Robert Johnson," with "Just Music analysis of Drunken Hearted Man," in *Encyclopaedia of Tuning* (Tonalsoft Inc, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Robert Johnson, "Me and the Devil," in William McKeen ed, *Rock and Roll: An Anthology* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), pp.52-53.

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, John D. Jump ed (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1969).

incite indulgence in one's evil carnal appetites had done – a fear that Jazz had evoked less than two decades earlier.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, in Johnson's talk of "beating his woman," we might have something of a precursor to the gratuitous violence that now abounds in Death Metal.

During the 1950's the amalgamation of European and African American musical sensibilities gave birth to Rock and Roll. "The former," as Weinstein notes, "provided the schmaltz and the latter the blues."<sup>55</sup> However, despite Chuck Berry's proud insistence that Beethoven roll over in his grave and inform Tchaikovsky of Rock and Roll's nativity,<sup>56</sup> when all was said and done this genre would prove to be a relatively tame enterprise. It nevertheless bequeathed to its descendants an overall increase in tempo, and a sensual vitality that had perhaps most famously been expressed in Elvis's indulgent pelvic manipulations.

As the sixties wore on and "Rock and Roll" gave way to the reductionist "Rock," a new breed of musical references to things diabolical began to rear their heads. To this day, of course, the most renowned of such efforts is the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil," which appeared on their 1968 album *Beggar's Banquet*. Its enduring significance, as Paul Green suggests, lies in having supplanted "[t]he miseries of the 'blue devils'" with a "cool sympathy – even liking – for the devil."<sup>57</sup> The Stones' contribution to Rock in general, and Satanic-orientated Rock in particular, however, transcends the audible bounds of this bona fide masterpiece. That is, their deliberate efforts to cultivate a "Satanic image" aside, which included "wearing Devil masks in promotional photos" and "conjuring up sinister album titles like *Their Satanic Majesties Request* and *Let it Bleed*,"<sup>58</sup> the decadent and rebellious image they projected, in many ways, served as an archetype for the genre. Mick Jagger, especially, was "Rude, vulgar,

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<sup>54</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> "Schmaltz," a Yiddish term, which literally rendered means "chicken fat," is used figuratively to refer to the sentimental and overemotional styles of pop crooners, and more generally to the way in which those styles are promoted and projected. Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, pp.11-12.

<sup>56</sup> Chuck Berry, "Roll Over Beethoven," op cit Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, p.12.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Green, "Pop Music and the Occult" in *Fate and Fortune*, No. 3 (London: Marshall Cavendish Ltd, 1974), p.2.

<sup>58</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.3.

and cynical in his public manner...openly admitted his use of drugs, and was blatantly and aggressively sexual on stage.”<sup>59</sup>

Nevertheless, the Rolling Stones can in no way be considered to have produced what might be considered the Rock era’s most pure Satanic Rock. Rather, this honour is shared by the bands Coven and Black Widow, whose respective albums *Witchcraft*<sup>60</sup> and *Sacrifice*<sup>61</sup> exhibit consistent and unabashed Satanic themes throughout. Guiding us through the track listing for *Sacrifice*, for instance, Green avers:

...the album moves from a statement of magical intent *In Ancient Days/Way to Power* to an invitation *Come to the Sabbat*, presents a *Conjuration*, offers a *Seduction*, stages an *Attack of the Demon* and ends with a *Sacrifice*.<sup>62</sup>

*Witchcraft*, similarly, sports such self explanatory track titles as “Black Sabbath,” “Pact with Lucifer,” “Dignitaries of Hell,” and even rounds off with a thirteen minute “Satanic Mass.” Moreover, Coven is said to have devised a stage show in which a Satanic Mass was employed as a kind of bridge way between songs. Visually spectacular, this comprised of such elements as having one of their roadies hanging from a cross above an altar, a candle lit stage, the recitation of an unholy benediction in Latin, and the Crowleyian proclamation: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.”<sup>63</sup> It will come as no surprise, then, that Coven’s efforts not only provide an early precedent for

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<sup>59</sup> Green, “Pop Music and the Occult”, p.6.

<sup>60</sup> Coven, *Witchcraft: Destroys Minds and Reaps Souls* (Mercury Records, 1969).

<sup>61</sup> Black Widow, *Sacrifice*, (CBS, 1970).

<sup>62</sup> Italics in original. Green, “Pop Music and the Occult”, p.5.

<sup>63</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.6; It should, of course, be noted here that, despite popularly being credited as a Satanist, Crowley was in fact a ceremonial magician. However, as an avid publicity monger, “Crowley enjoyed the notoriety he gained in the popular press and openly associated the Biblical ‘666’ and ‘Great Beast’ titles with himself. Hence, to some extent he was responsible for the popular belief that he was genuinely involved in devil worship.” Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), p.144; For a brief exegesis of the Crowleyian precept that “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law,” see Jean La Fontaine’s, “Satanism and Satanic Mythology,” in Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds, *Witchcraft & Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p.92; For a more in depth, albeit somewhat overly sympathetic, survey of his work and ideas, see Gerald Suster’s, *The Legacy of the Beast: The Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser Inc, 1989).

some Black Metaler's own live theatrics, but would put many of them to shame.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, in the end, because both Coven and Black Widow's work failed to generate a strong musical impact or fan-base, their influence appears to have remained very peripheral.

1969 saw the release of Led Zeppelin's debut album *Led Zeppelin I*<sup>65</sup> and, arguably, with it, the birth of Heavy Metal. Of course, the final word on whether or not this honor belongs more properly to Led Zeppelin or Black Sabbath is yet to be uttered. In either case, at the very least it must be acknowledged that Led Zeppelin "stood at the vanguard of the heavy metal blues."<sup>66</sup> That said, for our purposes, their significance is to be found in their having drawn on Tolkienian fiction and Celtic and Norse mythology in their lyrics. For in utilizing references to Norse mythology, in particular, they exemplify one of the basic themes that have come to preoccupy many Black Metal bands.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, while their efforts in this regard might be a touch flowery in their articulation, the "Immigrant Song," in particular, even manages to embody something of the conquering/triumphant spirit that provides much of the subject matters underlying allure for Black Metal's more Heathen orientated proponents:

...We come from the land of the ice and snow,  
From the midnight sun where the hot springs blow.  
The hammer of the gods will drive our ships to new lands,  
To fight the horde, singing and crying: Valhalla, I am coming! ...  
On we sweep with threshing oar, Our only goal will be the western shore ...  
How soft your fields so green, can whisper tales of gore,  
Of how we calmed the tides of war. We are your overlords...<sup>68</sup>

If Led Zeppelin initiated that loud aggressive mutation of the blues that characterized Heavy Metal, then Black Sabbath perfected it. In so doing, however, they did not up the tempo as we might expect. Rather, they "slowed the contemporary

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<sup>64</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.6.

<sup>65</sup> Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin I* (Atlantic, 1969).

<sup>66</sup> David P. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), p.182.

<sup>67</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.4.

<sup>68</sup> Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin III*, (Atlantic, 1970), track.1.

framework of Blues-based Rock down to a lurching, sinister pace which perfectly suited their lyrical themes of insanity, war ... alienation,<sup>69</sup> diabolism and the occult – all of which would come to be cemented as staples of the genre. Nevertheless, it is not so much Black Sabbath's sound as its origin/inspiration that is of most interest to us. For like the Band's name, which was "borrowed from the title of a 1964 Boris Karloff movie,"<sup>70</sup> their sound was inspired by the Horror genre in Film. Consequently, it provides something of a musical precedent for Death Metal's horror-filled lyrics. However, unlike the majority of Death Metal Band's lyrics, Black Sabbath's gloomy sound did not arise out of an overt desire to glorify all things evil and macabre, but rather out of a desire to express their plight – much of which was bound up in feelings of both marginalization and alienation.<sup>71</sup> Ozzy Osbourne, in particular, made this evident when he averred:

Now you consider everyone's all jolly and tip-toein' around, stoned on acid, havin' Woodstock and all love, peace, sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, and all that's great... But for us guys living in this *hole* in the world [Birmingham], it wasn't that way. And Tony [Iommi] thought 'wouldn't it be interesting to put this horror vibe to a musical thing.' And then we started to write doomy music, we used to call it. This death music. Doom music.<sup>72</sup>

Nor were the lyrical themes of insanity, war, alienation, diabolism and the occult employed by Black Sabbath aimed at glorifying evil or the macabre. On the contrary, they were commonly employed as a means for social and political commentary and critique. The song, "War Pigs," for instance, only made mention of witches gathering at Black Masses by way of analogy in the course of articulating the band's contribution to the antiwar sentiment of the era: "Generals gathered in their masses, just like witches at Black Mass's. Evil minds that plot destruction. sorcerers of death's construction."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.4.

<sup>70</sup> Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*, p.182.

<sup>71</sup> Consequently, as Green suggests, the themes drawn on by Black Sabbath can be read as constituting something of "an intuitive response to the mood of their audience – often youths from the large industrial conurbations, who perhaps felt that a sour pessimism was the only valid reaction to the pressures and crises of modern life." "Pop Music and the Occult," p.5.

<sup>72</sup> Italics in original. Op. cit. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*, p.183.

<sup>73</sup> Black Sabbath, *Paranoid* (Warner Bros, 1970), track.1; Interestingly, "War Pigs" was actually originally intended to be the album's title track. However, because it was feared that that particular title might generate undue hostility towards the album "due to the Vietnamese war," its second track was awarded the honour instead. "Paranoid-Black Sabbath," URL:<http://www.black-sabbath.com/discog/paranoid.html>

Nevertheless, as Moynihan and Soderlind note, “Black Sabbath’s flirtation with evil, filtered to their fans through a haze of barbiturates and Quaaludes, cemented them as a band tapped into the dark current.”<sup>74</sup>

Throughout the 1970’s Heavy Metal would undergo the process of crystallization that delineated its boundary’s as a genre. Seeking to historicize this process, and more generally the development of the genre as a whole, Weinstein has stratified it into five eras: its eruption, 1969–1972; the onset of crystallization, 1973–1975; its full crystallization and golden age, 1976–1979; and finally its fragmentation into sub-genres, 1979–1983.<sup>75</sup> Date wise, of course, the origins of both Black Metal and Death Metal fall squarely within the bounds of the last of Weinstein’s five eras or strata. Though, like their father Heavy Metal before them, it would be several years before either Black Metal or Death Metal would be close to completing their own processes of crystallization. Heavy Metal’s two major sub-genres, on the other hand, were both firmly in place by 1983–1984.<sup>76</sup> The first of these, Lite Metal, was characterized by a focus on, and development of, Heavy Metal’s melodic element. Through the medium of bands like Def Leppard and Van Halen, its major accomplishment or profanity lies in creating a highly commercial, and thus commodified, strand of Metal that those who had no taste for “traditional heavy metal music” could palate.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is of no real significance to this discussion. The same, on the other hand, can not be said of its counterpart, Speed/Thrash Metal. For, as its name suggests, its overriding departure from Heavy Metal was a considerable increase in Tempo, which both Black Metal and Death Metal would seize hold of and increase. In fact, as several of Purcell’s informants “see it, Death Metal” especially, “was the product of Thrash Metal bands attempting to outdo one another in terms of *speed*, technicality, and overall extremity.”<sup>78</sup>

Behind Speed/Thrash Metal’s radicalization of its father’s tempo, was an attempt to rescue Heavy Metal from the corrupting extravagances being engendered by its

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<sup>74</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.5.

<sup>75</sup> Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, p.21.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.45.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, pp.45-47.

<sup>78</sup> *Italics mine*. Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.53.



increasing commercial success; an attempt “to reclaim Metal for youth and especially for males by creating a style that is completely unacceptable the hegemonic culture.”<sup>79</sup> For mass appeal ultimately spells death for the exclusivity of any subcultural phenomena. Thus, Weinstein has justly termed Speed/Thrash Metal’s efforts Fundamentalist, and, through the use of very Puritan comparisons, aptly likened its movement’s proponents to such key 16<sup>th</sup> century Christian reformers as Martin Luther and John Calvin:

Both movements charged that the established form had become corrupt through extravagance and both supported a return to the essential message, stripped bare of all adornment. In their clothes, their relationship to their followers, and their discourse, speed/thrash bands and early protestant leaders parallel one another. In the case of speed/thrash metal, fancy stage wear and elaborate props that set performers apart from their audience are replaced by street clothes...and a simple stage. Similarly, the Protestant ministers exchanged the ornate clothing of the church notable for a simple uniform and huge, ornate cathedrals for small-scale, simple churches. The distance between the artists and their fans was physically, emotionally, and attitudinally erased, just as the Protestants narrowed the distance between the minister and the communicants. Speed/thrash metal is a movement to go back to the basics, just as Protestantism stressed a return to biblical essentials.<sup>80</sup>

Following Weinstein, Kahn-Harris has asserted that Extreme Metal as a whole arose as fundamentalist “responses to the excesses and popularity of 1980’s heavy metal.”<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, while not altogether untrue, this assertion is somewhat misleading, and appears to have been used as a blanket that would easily cover the need to deal with complexities that did not bear directly on his own arguments at the time. As regards lyrical content, for instance, Speed/Thrash Metal can certainly be seen to have stripped back Heavy Metal’s lyrical staples of insanity, war, alienation, diabolism and the occult, and rigorously renewed attempts at social and political commentary and critique. Metallica, in particular, who are widely regarded as being the founders of Speed/Thrash Metal, delivered a sombre angry message through their albums: “[*Master of Puppets* was

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<sup>79</sup> Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, p.48.

<sup>80</sup> Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*, pp.49-50; For brief biographies and outlines of the lives and accomplishments of Luther and Calvin respectively, see Tim Dowley ed, *The History of Christianity* (England: Lion Publishing, 1977), pp.362-363, 380-381.

<sup>81</sup> Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” p.99; Kahn-Harris, “Unspectacular Subculture?: Transgression and Mundanity in the Global Extreme Metal Scene,” p.108.

about manipulation, *Ride the Lightning* was about death and dying, and [...And] *Justice [for All]* talked about the American dream and how that doesn't always work out any more."<sup>82</sup> The same claim, however, can not be made for either Black Metal or Death Metal. For as we have already seen, their approaches to the same or similar lyrical themes have been more or less antithetical to Speed/Thrash Metal's.

Also presenting a problem for Kahn-Harris's blanketing all Extreme Metal as fundamentalist, are Black Metal bands' live performances. Primarily, this is because they can essentially be regarded as a form of performance art. For while they commonly take place on a "simple stage" absent of any "elaborate props," "fancy stage wear" that serves to set the performers apart from both their audience and their everyday selves is more or less the norm. True, the members of the audience too are commonly clad in black, and may even sport corpse paint<sup>83</sup> from time to time, but few will be found adorned with the huge spiked arm bands, gauntlets, knee high boots or various other extreme items of ornamentation and clothing worn by performers. And while security issues and the practical necessity of avoiding accidental carnage no doubt largely account for this fact, in the end it still serves to contradict Kahn-Harris's assertion.

Perhaps most importantly, though, Kahn-Harris's assertion that Extreme Metal as a whole arose as fundamentalist responses to Heavy Metal"<sup>84</sup> obscures the fact that the Norwegian Black Metal of the late 80's and early 90's coalesced and developed more as a quasi-Fundamentalist/Puritan response to Death Metal's growing popularity worldwide than anything else. Hence the reason why, when we look back at the histories of many of Norway's key Black Metal bands and band members, we commonly find that they started

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<sup>82</sup> James Hetfield, op. cit. Szatmary, *Rockin' in Time: A Social History of Rock-and-Roll*, pp.281-282.

<sup>83</sup> As will probably be guessed, the term corpse paint is use to refer to the practice of painting one's face in such a way as to give the appearance of being a corpse. As Moynihan & Soderlind note, this is a theatrical practice whose seeds, in the case of Metal, can probably be traced "back to how Kiss or Alice Cooper appeared during their giant stage spectacles of the 70's." *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.36.

<sup>84</sup>Kahn-Harris, "The 'failure' of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,"p.99; Kahn-Harris, "Unspectacular Subculture?: Transgression and Mundanity in the Global Extreme Metal Scene," p.108.

out either as or in Death Metal bands.<sup>85</sup> However, disillusioned by both the increasing amount of mediocre material being released by record labels looking “to cash in on the Death Metal trend”<sup>86</sup> and the sub-genre’s overall lack of authenticity, the soon to be Black Metalers consciously set about contriving a more authentic form of musical extremity:

[For t]he leaders of the Norwegian scene realized—wisely—that in order to grab the attention of minds and souls they would need to willfully take things one step further. The fanciful violence and bloodlust of Death Metal wasn’t anything in itself—it must be made real, and become a means to an end, if it was to hold greater purpose. Otherwise it was nothing more than the audio equivalent of a comic book for kids to aimlessly gloat over.<sup>87</sup>

At any rate, with referents in place and a rich lineage of elements to work with, both Black Metal and Death Metal would journey towards their own crystallization throughout the 80’s. In the case of Death Metal, among the most important steps in this journey would be taken in late 1983—early 1984 by a Michigan proto-Thrash Metal band originally known as Tempter, who, in a quest to become more hardcore than their contemporaries, contributed to the development of Death Metal in two important ways. First, they marked a move away from the personal and political themes dominating the Speed/Thrash genre by drawing “lyrical inspiration from the goriest horror and slasher films they could find.”<sup>88</sup> Then, in 1984, the band changed their name to Genocide and combined their horror-inspired lyrics with an increasing musical gravitation towards a more Deathish sound.<sup>89</sup> A year later the drafting of Dave Grave (Dave Hollingshead) for drum duty would set the band’s second contribution to the sub-genre in motion. For after an initial struggle to adjust to the band’s rapid tempos, Hollingshead would raise the speed expectancies of Death Metal drumming to an unprecedented level. However, the band would not create “an international impact in the extreme music underground”

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<sup>85</sup> Mayhem and Dark Throne, for instance, both started out as Death Metal bands, while the bands Emperor and Immortal were formed from members of the Death Metal bands Thou Shalt Suffer and Old Funeral respectively. Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.35, 38-39.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.31.

<sup>87</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.32.

<sup>88</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, pp.52-53.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.54.

<sup>90</sup>until 1986, when, having become the fastest band in the world, they recorded their first proper demo tape, *The Stench of Burning Death*, which made its way abroad as far as England.<sup>91</sup>

The third important step for Death Metal would also come in 1985 with the release of the Californian band Possessed's debut Album, *Seven Churches*,<sup>92</sup> which was the first proper LP to feature what would become standardized as Death Metal's growling beast-like vocals.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, when taken in conjunction with the band's name, its opening track, "The Exorcist," may even provide a hint as to the initial inspiration for the sub-genre's peculiar vocal style: the demonically articulated profanities spewed forth by the possessed young Regan (Linda Blair) in William Friedkin's cinematic adaptation of William Peter Blatty's novel *The Exorcist*.<sup>94</sup>

All that now remained was for Death Metal's guitarists to raise the bar of technicality and distinction. Among the most significant early efforts to answer this challenge was initiated by Chuck Schuldiner on Death's 1987 debut *Scream Bloody Gore*,<sup>95</sup> and continued on through the band's subsequent releases like *Leprosy*<sup>96</sup> in 1988. In fact, Schuldiner's increasingly technical riffing would establish the young Floridian as among the most emulated members of the sub-genre's avant-garde. Joining him in this status would be Morbid Angel's Trey Azagthoth, whose almost unfathomably "contorted rhythms" and "demented soloing" had only been available in bootlegs of their shelved 1986 *Abominations of Desolation* LP,<sup>97</sup> and their 1987 demo *Thy Kingdom Come*, prior to their 1989 release, *Altars of Madness*.<sup>98</sup> Across the Atlantic, the UK's answer to Schuldiner and Azagthoth would be provided by Bill Steer, whose impressive guitar

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<sup>90</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.58.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, pp.57-58.

<sup>92</sup> Possessed, *Seven Churches* (Combat Records, 1985).

<sup>93</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.69.

<sup>94</sup> William Friedkin, *The Exorcist* (Warner Bros, 1973); William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>95</sup> Death, *Scream Bloody Gore* (Combat Records, 1986).

<sup>96</sup> Death, *Leprosy* (Combat Records, 1988).

<sup>97</sup> This shelved 1986 LP was not to receive an official release until some five years later in 1991. Morbid Angel, *Abominations of desolation* (Earache, 1991).

<sup>98</sup> Morbid Angel, *Altars of Madness* (Earache, 1989); Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.56,59.

work featured on such influential late 80's European releases as Napalm Death's *Scum* (1987) and Carcass's *Reek of Putrefaction* (1988) and *Symphonies of Sickness* (1989).<sup>99</sup>

By 1989, all of Death Metal's elements were in place. Thus, following Weinstein's heavy Metal strata, we might say that the onset of Death Metal's crystallization was over, and its full crystallization and golden age had begun. In 1990 this golden age would gain impetus with the release of debut albums by future heavy weights, Cannibal Corpse<sup>100</sup> and Deicide,<sup>101</sup> and with the British independent record label Earache's three year Stateside licensing and distribution deal with Combat Records.<sup>102</sup> In fact, the immediate success of Earache's first official stateside releases on December 7<sup>th</sup> 1990, which simultaneously included Morbid Angel's *Altars of Madness*, Carcass' *Symphonies of Sickness*, Entombed's *Left Hand Path*, and Godflesh's *Street Cleaner*,<sup>103</sup> could be said to mark the first significant step towards Death Metal's brief foray into the mainstream.

While the relative commercial success Death Metal was enjoying was further confirmed and reflected in the three-year North American licensing deal that Earache entered into with Sony Music on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1993, the sub-genre's most conspicuous brush with mainstream culture came in 1994 with Cannibal Corpse's cameo appearance performing "Hammer Smashed Face" on Jim Carrey's successful comedy *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, by the mid nineties both the small independent labels that had initially signed and supported Death Metal bands and the major labels that had begun

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<sup>99</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.56-58.

<sup>100</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *Eaten Back to Life* (Metal Blade Records Inc, 1990).

<sup>101</sup> Deicide, *Deicide* (RC/Roadrunner Records, 1990).

<sup>102</sup> Combat had initially started out simply buying a few albums from Earache to distribute in the States. However, soon realizing they were relatively good sellers, "they suggested a licen[sing] deal for the whole label." Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.156.

<sup>103</sup> It is likely that two important factors combined to make Earache's first official stateside releases under license by Combat Records immediate successes. The first is that they had already been released in the UK. Thus, by the time the albums were released in the States, there already existed a compelling body of positive reviews and feedback that could serve to augment the anticipation of US fans. The second is that this delay in release dates often resulted in Combat releasing nine months worth of UK releases over as few as three months in America, "which might have added to the intensity of releases." Ibid, pp.166-167.

<sup>104</sup> Apparently something of a fan of the sub-genre, Cannibal Corpse's cameo on the movie came about purely as a result of Carrey having insisted that it feature a Death Metal band. Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.66; Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, pp.188-189.

distributing their music had all but abandoned the sub-genre. Not having received any new product “since the autumn of 1994,” for instance, “Sony formally terminated its North American distribution deal with Earache in September of 1995 – just two years into [their] three-year agreement.”<sup>105</sup> At much the same time, Roadrunner’s Death Metal acts, like “Malevolent Creation, Pestilence, Suffocation, Cynic, Gorguts, Immolation and Sorrow, [were] either being dropped” from the label “or disbanding altogether.”<sup>106</sup>

Interestingly, with a view to accounting for the sub-genre’s “fall from grace,” a number of factors have been identified, which, taken collectively, reveal a reasonably comprehensive picture. Foremost amongst these, on the part of the fans, is that the proponents of underground music have traditionally been very anti-mainstream. Thus, as the music grew in popularity it was simultaneously alienating the very consumer base that had originally given it the stamp of credibility. This process of disillusionment was then accelerated, as was suggested above in reference to future Black Metalers, by the increasing amount of mediocre material being released by record labels looking “to cash in on the Death Metal trend.”<sup>107</sup> Speaking of bands like Gorguts and Sorrow, for example, Roadrunner’s Monte Conner acknowledges that they should never have really been signed.<sup>108</sup> Augmenting this problem, were good bands who willingly abandoned their earlier extremity as Death Metal moved nearer to the mainstream, opting rather to slacken their tempo/pace, run their guitars through cleaner distortion, and incorporate a bit of melody into their songs – Death’s *Individual Thought Patterns* (1993),<sup>109</sup> Carcass’ *Heartwork* (1993),<sup>110</sup> and Entombed’s *Wolverine Blues* (1993),<sup>111</sup> being foremost amongst albums evincing such abandonment. Unfortunately, in the end, not only did they become too “glossy for the underground kids to like anymore,” they remained “too heavy

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<sup>105</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.203.

It would appear that this lack of new product was in part the result of the growing tensions and animosity between Earache chief Digby Pearson and several of the bands on his roster; which, rather ironically, were being generated by their desire to wriggle out of their contractual obligations to his label and deal with Sony directly. Ibid, pp.185-202.

<sup>106</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.204.

<sup>107</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.31.

<sup>108</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.204.

<sup>109</sup> Death, *Individual Thought Patterns* (Roadrunner,1993).

<sup>110</sup> Carcass, *Heartwork* (Earache, 1993).

<sup>111</sup> Entombed, *Wolverine Blues* (Earache,1993).

for the commercial kids”<sup>112</sup> to like either. Consequently, the market became saturated with “crap” nobody wanted, and hence that could in no way generate the unrealistic levels of consumption that labels were beginning to expect.<sup>113</sup>

Following Death Metal’s brief, fleeting success and brush with the mainstream it retreated back into the underground to begin its struggle to regain its credibility with its alienated fan base. Throughout 1996, it all but appeared that Death Metal was ready to receive the last rites, with a few notable releases, like Arch Enemy’s *Black Earth*,<sup>114</sup> Cryptopsy’s *None so Vile*<sup>115</sup> and Vader’s *De Profundis*,<sup>116</sup> apparently being all that stood between the sub-genre and oblivion. Then, in 1997, the sub-genre’s health took a turn for the better and its complete convalescence was all but assured with new releases from heavy weights Deicide and Obituary. In fact, given the context, the title of the latter’s release, *Back from the Dead*,<sup>117</sup> inadvertently takes on a meaning that extends beyond the band’s own come back.

Despite a steady chain of releases by both old and new bands alike, since 1997 Death Metal has largely remained underground.<sup>118</sup> Thus, in 2006, the prediction Purcell made while still in the process of writing her work in 2002 holds true: it “is likely to stay underground.”<sup>119</sup>

Through their efforts to retrace the most significant steps in Black Metal’s journey towards crystallization, Moynihan and Soderlind have unearthed a quintessential “unholy trinity” comprised of the bands Venom, Mercyful Fate and Bathory.<sup>120</sup> The first of these, Venom, have already been acknowledged as Black Metal’s English founders/referent providers. However, Venom would bequeath far more to its descendants in the way of

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<sup>112</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, pp.200-201.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, pp.203-220.

<sup>114</sup> Arch Enemy, *Black Earth* (W.A.R., 1996).

<sup>115</sup> Cryptopsy, *None so Vile* (W.A.R., 1996).

<sup>116</sup> Vader, *De Profundis* (Impact, 1996).

<sup>117</sup> Obituary, *Back from the Dead* (Roadrunner, 1997).

<sup>118</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, pp.225-244.

<sup>119</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.66; Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.75.

<sup>120</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.10.

elements that would eventually cohere in Black Metal's crystallization than a mere name. Most significantly, they endorsed "Satanism to a degree which would have caused wet dreams for mediaeval inquisitors."<sup>121</sup> Lyrically, this produced precedents for everything ranging from simple blasphemous tirades through to those perversions/inversions of Biblical narrative, and Manichaeic and Zoroastrian dualism that proffer the ostensible belief that, while at present the forces of good and evil are engaged in a relatively even struggle, in the end Satan will lead the forces of evil to triumph. "Heaven's on fire," from Venom's 1982 release *Black Metal*, even offers something of a mocking combination of these themes, when, having directed the attention of the righteous up to a blazing Heaven, it begs:

...if God is so almighty  
then why is he enslaved in heaven's hell by Satan?  
The universe his slave  
Satan rides the skies  
look up you'll see his eyes  
disguised as endless stars  
to keep an eye on endless wars  
do you believe in God  
he's chained up like a dog  
and every hour he screams  
Satan rules supreme.<sup>122</sup>

In addition, Venom has contributed much to what has become the Black Metal aesthetic. In pictures of the band, in particular, we find that, much like today's Black Metalers, the members of Venom were regularly clad in tight black clothing, spiked arm bands and gauntlets, knee high boots and various other extreme ornamental items.<sup>123</sup> That is, in a style of clothing that can best be described as an eclectic combination of Punk, Glam and Goth. In fact, their retro early 80's "cheesiness" and absence of corpse paint

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<sup>121</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.12.

<sup>122</sup> Venom, *Black Metal* (Neat, 1982), track.9.

<sup>123</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.11, 12, 13.



aside, there is little, which, at first glance, would serve to distinguish them from their modern-day counterparts.

Finally, Venom's use of evil sounding stage names has also been taken up with enthusiasm by its descendants. This may seem a trivial matter, but it actually serves to compliment the intimidating pretensions of the Black Metal aesthetic. Moreover, from an analytical perspective, the names chosen by individual band members can provide useful hints as to the specific sources they've drawn on while composing their lyrics. For example, "Abaddon," Tony Bray of Venom's pseudonym of choice, is found in both the last book of the Bible (Rev 9:11) and book IV of Milton's *Paradise Regained*; the former using it as a referent for the angel of the Abyss<sup>124</sup> and the latter for the name of the Abyss itself.<sup>125</sup> Thus suggesting the sources and impetus for the determined Satan, the revisions of apocalyptic prophecy, and subsequent inverse dualism, that are the focus of songs like "At War With Satan"<sup>126</sup> and "Heaven's on fire."<sup>127</sup>

Unfortunately for some Black Metalers, these self-imposed sobriquets have occasionally proved dark portends of future tragedy. For instance, on April 8, 1991, the 21-year-old Swedish-born Per Ohlin took up a shot gun that had been lying around the house and "discharged himself abruptly from this mortal coil."<sup>128</sup> At the time of his death, he had been a member of Norway's seminal Black Metal act, Mayhem, for some three years – his pseudonym was "Dead."<sup>129</sup>

Along with the release of Venom's second album *Black Metal*, 1982 would also see Denmark's Mercyful Fate debut with their self titled mini-LP, which, as Moynihan and Soderlind have noted, was followed up by two more musically "advanced albums,

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<sup>124</sup> According to the text, Abaddon is the Hebrew name for the "angel of the Abyss," and its Greek equivalent is Apollyon. Both, according to the foot note, mean Destroyer. *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p.872.

<sup>125</sup> John Milton, "Paradise Regained," in The Modern Library ed, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Milton* (New York, Random House, 1950), p.452.

<sup>126</sup> Venom, *At War With Satan* (Neat, 1984), track.1.

<sup>127</sup> Venom, *Black Metal* (Neat, 1982), track.9.

<sup>128</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.62.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, pp.45-62.

*Melissa* (1983) and *Don't break the Oath* (1984).”<sup>130</sup> “[B]rimming with stories of magical rites, nightmarish fantasies of the consequences of broken pacts, and declarations of Satanic allegiance,”<sup>131</sup> these albums were essentially using their lyrics to endorse Satanism like their contemporaries Venom. However, Mercyful Fate differed substantially from Venom in that their vocalist, King Diamond, was actually a committed LaVeyan Satanist.<sup>132</sup> Ideologically, of course, Diamond’s lyrics are incongruent with the type of Satanism promulgated by LaVey in his *Satanic Bible*, which does not promote a belief in Satan as an objective reality,<sup>133</sup> but rather is primarily concerned with advocating the gratification of people’s natural desires – a concern that lead Jeffrey Russell to point out that, for the most part, contemporary Satanists are mere hedonists.<sup>134</sup> Mercyful Fate’s song “Come to the Sabbath”<sup>135</sup> even goes so far as to blur the distinction between LaVeyan Satanism and more traditional ideas about Satanism by working elements of its ritual proceedings, such as the recitation of Enochian keys,<sup>136</sup> into a description of a witches Sabbath.<sup>137</sup> However, both to his credit and in defense of this incongruence, when criticized by the tabloids for promoting “evil subjects,” Diamond “was always [simultaneously] willing to declare his personal dedication to the LaVeyan brand of Satanism” and clarify “that the outlandish and gruesome imagery in some of his

<sup>130</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.14.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>132</sup> LaVeyan Satanist or Satanism, are referents used to designate adherents of the form of Satanism formulated by the late Anton Szandor LaVey, who founded the First Church of Satan in San Francisco in 1966, and is commonly held to be the father of contemporary Satanism. Jeffrey B. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2000),p.144.

<sup>133</sup> Anton Szandor LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p.62

<sup>134</sup> Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*,p.144.

<sup>135</sup> Mercyful Fate, *Don't Break the Oath* (Roadrunner Records, 1984), track.9.

<sup>136</sup> The Enochian Keys are calls or incantations composed in the Enochian language, which in occult circles is held to be of unknown vintage or origin. In reality, however, it originated with John Dee, royal astrologer to Elizabeth I, and Edward Kelly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who formulated it into a system of magic that allegedly enabled its practitioners to communicate with “angels and spirits, and travel through various planes, or *aethyrs*, of consciousness.” Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts on File, 1989), p113. The Keys are nineteen in number, and, in his *Satanic Bible*, LaVey gives us his own Satanically orientated translation of the Keys, which he deems “[t]he unexpurgated version.” pp.155-272.

<sup>137</sup> Sabbath’s were nocturnal assemblies that late mediaeval and renaissance demonologists alleged witches attended to worship the Devil. For relatively representative descriptions of the Sabbath’s obscene/absurd proceedings, see Henry Boguet’s *An Examine of Witches*, trans E. A. Ashwin, ed M. Summers (London: John Rodker, 1929) pp.55-61; Jean Bodin’s, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans R. A. Scott, R. A. Scott & J. L. Pearl (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), pp.112-121; Nicolas Remy’s, *Demonolatry*, trans E. A. Ashwin, ed M. Summers (Montana: Kessinger Publishing Company, 2003), pp.57-66; and Francesco Maria Guazzo’s, *Compendium Maleficarum*, trans E. A. Ashwin, ed M. Summers (London: John Rodker, 1929), pp.33-50.

lyrics was” designed to entertain, and thus was “nothing to be taken seriously.”<sup>138</sup> Despite this, Diamond still serves as a bridge between Rock and Heavy Metal’s cultural Satanism<sup>139</sup> and Organized Satanism that would influence later Black Metalers overt desire to merge theory with practice in its “expression of an ‘essential’ identity”<sup>140</sup>

Owing much of its initial sound, lyrical themes and aesthetic to Venom, it is the final band in Moynihan and Soderlind’s “unholy trinity,” the Swedish group Bathory, which, over the course of their first six albums, unconsciously created the blueprint for the crystallization of Black Metal in the majority of its myriad facets.<sup>141</sup> This process began in 1984 when, having received a positive response to the two track contribution they had made to the compilation album *Scandinavian Metal Attack*, the band were asked to record a full length album.<sup>142</sup> For, in addition to sporting diabolism a la Venom and Mercyful Fate, and an altogether rawer and more frenzied instrumentation, their self titled debut<sup>143</sup> also featured what would become Black Metal’s trade mark Demoniactal vocals. The formula established by this highly influential album would essentially be repeated in the band’s 1985 follow up, *The Return*,<sup>144</sup> and their 1987 release, *Under the Sign of the Black Mark*.<sup>145</sup> However, Bathory’s fourth album, *Blood Fire Death* (1988), would see the band change its focus from diabolism to the Norse and Teutonic Mythologies of its Northern European forebears to accommodate its front man, Quorthon’s, burgeoning interest in Asatru.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.15.

<sup>139</sup> Derogatively, Jeffrey Russell has asserted that Rock and Metal’s cultural Satanism involves little serious Satanism, but rather “occasional invocation of the Devil’s name along with some drug abuse and apparent respect for the Satanic values cruelty, ugliness, insensitivity, depression, violence, coarseness, self-indulgence, and joylessness.” *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988),p.262.

<sup>140</sup> Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,”p.99.

<sup>141</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.22.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp.16-17.

<sup>143</sup> Bathory, *Bathory* (Under One Flag, 1984).

<sup>144</sup> Bathory, *The Return* (Under One Flag, 1985).

<sup>145</sup> Bathory, *Under the Sign of the Black Mark* (Under One Flag, 1987).

<sup>146</sup> “Asatru, which translates to ‘loyalty to the Æsir [the pantheon of pre-Christian Nordic Gods],’ is the modern word for the revival and reconstruction of the religious beliefs of the Norse and Teutonic Northern Europeans.” Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.19.

Providing the first hint of this change, to what is essentially Romanticism, was the album's cover, which sports the Norwegian artist Peter Nicolai Arbo's depiction of the Valkyries<sup>147</sup> and phantasmal legion of the dead being spurred on the "Wild Hunt"<sup>148</sup> by the god Thor.<sup>149</sup> And the title of the first track, "Odens (sic) Ride Over Nordland,"<sup>150</sup> effectively confirms this hint. Later, the Viking sea burial depicted on the cover of the band's 1990 release, *Hammerheart*, announced its thematic intention to continue on where *Blood Fire Death* left off. Musically, however, the album marks "an epic restructuring. Most of the songs clock in at ten minutes a piece, the vocals are clearly sung and even surrounded by chanted choral backdrops."<sup>151</sup> Bathory's sixth effort, *Twilight of the Gods* (1991), would similarly share the focus of its predecessors *Blood Fire Death* and *Hammerheart*, but would also unintentionally provide an antecedent for future Black Metal bands' affinities with Nazism. For the album contains a track entitled "Under the Runes," whose veiled reference to the sig or S rune employed as "the trademark of Heinrich Himmler's *Schutzstaffel* or SS"<sup>152</sup> divisions of Nazi Germany, was a deliberate provocation. The track's title, however, was not, as it leads us to suspect, the product of any real Nazi sympathy on Bathory's part. Rather, it arose out of the band's knowledge that such a reference would evoke endless questioning, and thus provide them with numerous opportunities to talk about Scandinavia's pre-Christian religion and mythology in which the runes have their origin.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> In Scandinavian Mythology the Valkyries were the handmaidens of the god Odin, whose job it was to conduct the souls of slain heroes from the battle field to Valhalla, the celestial hall of slain Heroes. There the Valkyries would wait on their charges while they spent eternity in joy and feasting. J. C. Cooper, ed, *Brewer's Book of Myth and Legend* (Oxford: Helicon, 1994), p.295.

<sup>148</sup> The Wild Hunt was not so much a hunt in the strictest sense of the term, but rather a procession through the countryside characterized by reveling and destroying. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*, pp.48-49.

<sup>149</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.18-22.

<sup>150</sup> Bathory, *Blood Fire Death* (Under One Flag, 1988), track.1.

<sup>151</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.20; The choral backdrops are not created by an actual choir, but rather by numerous overdubs of the band's vocalist Quorthon. Bathory, *Hammerheart* (Noise, 1990).

<sup>152</sup> Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts on File, 1989),p.286.

<sup>153</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.20-21; "According to myth, the runes were created by the Norse god Odin (also Woden or Wotan), the one-eyed chief of the gods and god of wisdom and war. Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*,p.285.

Despite the significant steps made by Moynihan and Soderlind's "unholy trinity" in Black Metal's journey towards crystallization, it was the late Euronymous (Oystein Aarseth), of the Norwegian band Mayhem, who would preach the doctrines of extremity, authenticity, and uncompromising evil that would proselytize many of the sub-genre's most significant names and bands – establishing Norway as the epicenter of contemporary Black Metal in the process.<sup>154</sup>

Originally a raw and primitive Death Metal band, by the time Mayhem recorded their debut mini-album, *Deathcrush*,<sup>155</sup> and released it on Euronymous's poorly run record label Posercorpse (later renamed Deathlike Silence Productions)<sup>156</sup> in 1987, the band had cultivated a sound that would serve as the benchmark for Black Metal's musical extremity. Featuring primitive double kicking, frenzied tremolo picked riffs and markedly more demoniacal vocals than any of Bathory's early efforts, the extremity of this release ensured that it reached cult status in the Metal underground. Lyrically, however, the release still betrayed the band's Death Metal roots. The title track "Deathcrush," for instance, speaks of crushing some one's skull and killing them with an axe;<sup>157</sup> while "Necrolust" details one man's love of necrophilia.<sup>158</sup>

While the release of the *Deathcrush* EP would facilitate the powerful role Euronymous was to command among the disenchanting fans of the Extreme Metal scene, it was the opening of his specialist record store, Helvete,<sup>159</sup> in 1991 that would cement it. For functioning "as an expression of Euronymous himself – it became the focal point of the [Black Metal] scene."<sup>160</sup> And given that by this time Death Metal was beginning to achieve a certain degree of commercial success abroad, with its first steps towards its brief foray into the mainstream having been taken, it will come as no surprise that

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<sup>154</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.33-39.

<sup>155</sup> Mayhem, *Deathcrush* (Posercorpse, 1987).

<sup>156</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.47, 63.

<sup>157</sup> Mayhem, *Deathcrush* (Posercorpse, 1987), track.2.

<sup>158</sup> Mayhem, *Deathcrush* (Posercorpse, 1987), track.5.

<sup>159</sup> Helvete is "the Norse word for Hell." Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.63.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, pp.38-39.

Euronymous's doctrines of extremity, authenticity, and uncompromising evil, as well as his growing anti-Death Metal sentiments, would find expression in laments about the commercial realities of running the business:

The original idea was to make a specialist shop for metal in general, but that's a long time ago. Normal metal isn't very popular anymore, all the children are listening to "death" metal now. I'd rather be selling Judas Priest than Napalm Death, but at least now we can be specialized within "death" metal and make a shop where all the trend people will know that they can find all the trend music. This will help us earning money so that we can order more Evil records for the evil people. But no matter how much shitty music we have to sell, we'll make a Black Metal look for the shop....<sup>161</sup>

While the immature tone of such statements makes it difficult to understand how anybody could have taken their author seriously, Euronymous's influence would be great enough to see Norway's most high profile Death Metal band, Darkthrone, publicly switch allegiance to Black Metal in 1991 with the release of their second album *A Blaze in the Northern Sky*.<sup>162</sup> The most significant album since Mayhem's *Deathcrush*, *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* also marks the point from which the Black Metal sub-genre would begin to see a proliferation of influential releases. 1991, for instance would also see the release of Immortal's self titled debut EP on listenable Records,<sup>163</sup> which they would follow up the following year with their first full length album *Diabolical Fullmoon Mysticism*.<sup>164</sup> 1992 would also see Burzum's self titled debut.<sup>165</sup> 1993, however, would be the best year yet, with the release of Darkthrone and Immortal's third offerings, *Under a Funeral Moon*<sup>166</sup> and *Pure Holocaust*,<sup>167</sup> Burzum's second effort, *Aske*,<sup>168</sup> and Satyricon's debut album *Dark Medieval Times*.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps most importantly, though, 1993 would also see

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<sup>161</sup> Op. cit. Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.63-64; This, of course, ultimately frames Helvete as a Capitalist's resolve to exploit more popular forms of Metal in order to fund and evangelize extreme evil. In reality, however, despite its functioning as a focal point for the Black Metal scene, Helvete never did particularly well economically. Ibid, p.64.

<sup>162</sup> Darkthrone, *A blaze in the Northern Sky* (Peaceville, 1991).

<sup>163</sup> Immortal, *Immortal* (Listenable Records, 1991).

<sup>164</sup> Immortal, *Diabolical Fullmoon Mysticism* (Osmose, Productions, 1992).

<sup>165</sup> Burzum, *Burzum* (Deathlike Silence Productions, 1992).

<sup>166</sup> Darkthrone, *Under a Funeral Moon* (Peaceville, 1993).

<sup>167</sup> Immortal, *Pure Holocaust* (Osmose, Productions, 1993).

<sup>168</sup> Burzum, *Aske* (Deathlike Silence Productions, 1993).

<sup>169</sup> Satyricon, *Dark Medieval Times* (Moonfog Productions, 1993).

the release of Emperor's self titled debut EP,<sup>170</sup> where the skillful blending of Keyboards with Black Metal's existing elements could be argued to have served two functions. The first of these was to signal the fact that the sub-genre's onset of crystallization was well and truly over, and its full crystallization and golden age begun. The second, was to raise its level of musicianship – a level Emperor would further raise and reify the following year with the release of their first full length album, *In the Nightside Eclipse*.<sup>171</sup>

Unfortunately, it would not be Black Metal's increasingly impressive levels of musicianship that would see it become the Extreme Metal undergrounds sub-genre of choice when Death Metal began to experience its fall from grace during the mid-nineties. Rather, it would be the prestige generated by the extra-musical activities of several of its members, which, among other things, consisted of a string of church burnings and two Murders.

The first church that is believed to have been torched by Black Metalers was the Fantoft stave church. Situated "five miles south of Bergen on the west coast of Norway,"<sup>172</sup> on June 6, 1992, this particular church was reduced to little more than a smoldering skeleton. "Strongly suspected as the culprit"<sup>173</sup> is Burzum's lone member, Varg Vikernes (aka Count Grishnackh), who would later be convicted of having torched Oslo's Holmenkollen Chapel, Skjold Church in southern Hordaland, and Asane Church in Bergen over the course of the year following the Fantoft incident. Nevertheless, in point of fact, it must be noted that a conviction for this seminal burning is still outstanding.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> This 12" EP was also released the same year, under the same label, as one half of the *Emperor/Hordanes Land* split with Enslaved, Emperor, *Emperor* (Candlelight, 1993).

<sup>171</sup> Emperor, *In the Nightside Eclipse* (Candlelight Records, 1994).

<sup>172</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.78.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p.78.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, pp.78-89; An important point that needs to be made about these burnings is that, in the end, they are more a reaction against an idea than reality. For while "Norway's official religion is Protestantism, [which is] organized through a Norwegian Church under the State" and has "a membership encompassing approximately 88% of the...population," "only about 2-3% of the population are involved enough to attend regular church services." In fact, there is a saying in Norway that avers that most of the population will only visit a "church on three occasions in their lives – and on two of them they will be carried in." Ibid, p.40.

The first of the two murders would also take place in 1992, when, on August 21, on his way home in the evening to his parents' house in Lillehammer, Emperor's Drummer, Faust (Bard Eithun), was approached by cruising homosexual Magne Andreassen. For perceiving in Andreassen's approach an opportunity to indulge his homicidal desire, and determining to capitalize on it, Faust agreed to take a walk with Andreassen into the nearby woods where he knew he would be able to stab him to death without any witnesses.<sup>175</sup> Remarkably, Eithun would remain at large until just over a full year later, when the arrest of Varg Vikernes for the second, and more significant of the two murders, would lead the police to undertake "a huge investigation of the whole [Black Metal] scene."<sup>176</sup>

The discovery of Euronymous's slaughtered body "in the stairwell of his apartment building on August 10, 1993,"<sup>177</sup> announced the second murder. Vikernes has maintained that the murder of Black Metal's Norwegian figurehead was purely a result of self defense. However, the testimony of his accomplice, Snorre Westvold Ruch (aka Blackthorne), and Vikernes' subsequent conviction for first degree murder, laid bare the premeditated nature of the act.<sup>178</sup> Despite this, Vikernes' true motivation for killing Euronymous remains elusive. Quite naturally, though, there have been a number of noteworthy speculations. At the time of the killing, for instance, relations between Euronymous and Vikernes had apparently been strained for some time, with the former owing the latter a significant amount of money in royalties from the sales of the Burzum albums that had been released on Deathlike Silence Productions. However, "Vikernes denies there was any monetary motive behind his actions."<sup>179</sup> Others, like Emperor's Ihsahn, believe that, at least to some degree, it eventuated out of a fight for leadership: "In some way they both wanted power, and to be the leading man. They had both done a lot; Grishnackh started the church burning, but Euronymous had the shop and kind of started the scene up. They were both important people for the progression of the

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<sup>175</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.105-112.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p.113.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.121-129.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p.116.



scene.”<sup>180</sup> Vikernes’ accomplice, however, attributes a big part of it to simple envy: “...he was envious of Bard [Eithun], because Bard had killed a man. Varg hadn’t done that.”<sup>181</sup>

In any case, in the wake of Euronymous’s untimely demise, a huge investigation into the whole Black Metal scene was initiated by Norwegian authorities. For Bard Eithun this would ultimately result in a fourteen year sentence for the Andreassen murder; for Vikernes, in a twenty-one year sentence for three church burnings and the slaughter of Euronymous; a lesser eight year sentence for Vikernes accomplice, Snorre Westvold Ruch; and several years a piece, in minimum security institutions, for people like Emperor’s Samoth, who, while having burned churches, had cooperated with police.<sup>182</sup>

Unfortunately, for the authorities, their apparent victory would ultimately serve to make inspirational martyrs of Black Metal’s more extreme sons. In particular, the day Vikernes was set to be sentenced two more Norwegian churches were set ablaze.<sup>183</sup> And although death and incarceration had combined to put several of the sub-genres most prominent acts on hiatus, the material they had recorded prior to this inconvenient turn of events, but had yet to release, would be there to represent them. In particular, 1994 would see the release of Emperor’s *In the Nightside Eclipse*<sup>184</sup> and Mayhem’s *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas*.<sup>185</sup> Perhaps more importantly, though, major bands like Darkthrone and Satyricon were there ready with their respective 1994 releases, *The Shadowthrone*<sup>186</sup> and *Transilvanian Hunger*,<sup>187</sup> to cash in on the sub-genre’s growing infamy and drive it forward. Darkthrone, in particular, would spur on further controversy prior to the release of *Transilvanian Hunger*, when it asked its label, Peaceville, to print the following

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<sup>180</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.116.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p.128.

<sup>182</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.135-136.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p.135.

<sup>184</sup> Emperor *In the Nightside Eclipse* (Candlelight Records, 1994).

<sup>185</sup> Mayhem, *De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* (Deathlike Silence Productions, 1994).

<sup>186</sup> Satyricon, *The Shadowthrone* (Moonfog Productions, 1994).

<sup>187</sup> Darkthrone, *Transilvanian Hunger* (Peaceville, 1994).

declaration on its sleeve notes: “We would like to state that *Transilvanian Hunger* stands beyond any criticism. If any man should attempt to criticize this LP, he should be thoroughly patronized for his obvious Jewish behaviour.”<sup>188</sup> For, as Kahn-Harris explains:

Peaceville Records had its roots in the 1980’s anti-fascist punk scene and could not simply ignore this statement. Yet neither was it willing to overtly censor the band. The compromise it came up with was to agree with Darkthrone’s request, but to refuse to promote or advertise the album. A statement was issued to the press explaining the incident and the label’s position on it and explicitly distancing itself from the bands opinions.<sup>189</sup>

The band quickly yielded, and determined rather to have the untargeted, albeit more telling, phrase “Norsk Arisk Black Metal” (“Norwegian Aryan Black Metal”) printed boldly across the sleeve instead.<sup>190</sup>

Not surprisingly, by the time Death Metal appeared to be nearing its creative and commercial demise in 1995, Black Metal had become the Extreme Metal Underground’s music of choice.<sup>191</sup> Its stranglehold on the Extreme Metal Underground, however, would be short lived. “Experiencing much the same saturation as death metal did years before,”<sup>192</sup> by the end of 1997 Black Metal’s popularity had subsided. Thus, with the playing field leveled, it would be forced to make its way through to the present in both simple and markedly less conspicuous coexistence with Death Metal and the rest of the Extreme Metal sub-genres.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Op. cit. Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,”p.104.

<sup>189</sup> Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,”p.104.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid; for miniaturized facsimiles of the relevant press releases and album cover, see Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, pp.304-307.

<sup>191</sup> Mudrian, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal & Grindcore*, p.218.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, pp.225-226.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, pp.225-226.

## A Complementary Dichotomy of Evil

The primary purpose of this brief section is to explain the rationale behind this thesis' combined treatment of Death Metal and Black Metal by suggesting that, when combined, the former's focus on violence and gore and the latter's focus on varying degrees and forms of diabolism provide us with a complementary dichotomy of evil. It will in no way concerned with establishing whether or not Black Metalers and Death Metalers are truly evil people with evil characters, or whether or not acts committed by individual members of either sub-genre, like church burnings, were genuinely evil. Nor will it be concerned with establishing whether or not the lyrics and imagery employed by Black Metal and Death Metal bands are an accurate reflection of their personal beliefs, or with what the true intention behind fabricating such lyrics might be. These, and similar questions, will all be dealt with either explicitly or implicitly in the relevant sections below. What will be focused on here are the veneers of evil forged by Black Metal and Death Metal's subject matter, which are purveyed to us through as diverse a range of ocular and auricular mediums/commodities as albums, album art, music videos, posters, flags, patches and clothing. For, in the end, in our highly mediaized contemporary world, the substance or truth that underlies the medium's veneer has ultimately lost much of its relevance – it is what is seen, what is heard, what is immediately brought to bear on the senses and can invoke some sort of emotional response or inspire that has become important. In short, then, it is the intention of this section to proceed on a slightly altered/augmented version of the premise established by Chris Jenks during the course of his treatment of transgression when he averred: “the meaning of an act [or, in this case, medium] does not reside solely within the intentionality of the actor [or medium's creator], indeed, in most instances it resides within the context of the act's [or medium's] reception.”<sup>194</sup>

That said, when we look at Black Metal and Death Metal's subject matter we find that their complimentary nature lies principally in two distinct facts. The first of these is that they are both largely predicated on distinct and opposing worldviews; the second, is that they both deal with what can be termed moral evil, which, concomitantly, becomes

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<sup>194</sup> Brackets added. Chris Jenks, *Transgression* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.8.

variously characterized. For by virtue of exhibiting distinct and opposing world views, and thus variously characterizing moral evil, not only do Black Metal and Death Metal reveal the possibility of divergent definitions, perceptions and explanations of evil, they also, in a sense, constitute reflections of the opposing secular and religious poles of a broader spectrum of evil.

### *Worldviews*

In the case of Black Metal, the world view exhibited is predominantly a Satanic one, and thus supernatural and multidimensional in nature. Satanism, however, can in no way be considered as an independent world view, but rather must be seen as being “parasitic on Christianity, in that Satanists consciously define themselves in opposition to Christians and characterize their practices by contrasting them with Christian practices.”<sup>195</sup> As Black Metal makes evident, however, this does not mean that individual forms of Satanism cannot be selective in their parasitism. For while it might set itself up against Christianity in general, Black Metal’s lyrical focus on the Devil and the Demonic suggests that the particular type of Christian world view on which it has been most parasitic is a very traditional, or perhaps more specifically late mediaeval Catholic one. Although, this is hardly surprising given that the multidimensional, mystical, magical universe of mediaeval Catholicism abounded more profoundly than any earlier or later Christian worldview with the presence and influence of the Devil, Demons, Witches and all things supernatural.<sup>196</sup>

By contrast, with the exception of the small minority of Death Metal bands whose subject matter falls into the Satanism/occultism/anti-Christian categorization outlined above, the world view exhibited by Death Metal is largely a secular one. Accordingly, it is decidedly more contemporary and one-dimensional in nature than the Satanic world view exhibited by Black Metal. Nevertheless, it does not so much eschew the

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<sup>195</sup> Jean La Fontaine, “Satanism and Satanic Mythology,” in Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, eds, *Witchcraft & Magic in Europe: The Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999),p.88.

<sup>196</sup> Alan Macfarlane, “The Root of all Evil,” in David Parkin ed, *The Anthropology of Evil* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985),p.60.

supernatural as suggest two significant reasons for neglecting it. The first is that it falls largely outside the scope of its subject matter. That is, because Death Metal draws much its subject matter and inspiration from the Slasher movies of the 70s and 80s, it naturally reflects the genre's trademark penchant for depicting real-life human monsters in contemporary settings. This penchant, of course, can ultimately be traced back to the exploits of that infamous Plainfield Wisconsin serial killer and necrophile, Ed Gein, whose arrest in 1957 brought real-life horror to bear on small town America, and provided the inspiration/raw material for such horror classics as Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), Jeff Gillen's *Deranged* (1974), Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), and Johnathn Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991).<sup>197</sup> In fact, "Insofar as 'Psycho' initiated the craze for 'slasher' movies, Gein is revered by horror buffs as the prototype of every knife-, axe-, and cleaver-wielding maniac who has stalked America's movie screens for the past"<sup>198</sup> forty-odd years. The second, and perhaps more expedient reason for Death Metal's preponderate neglect of the supernatural, is that the heinous nature of the murder and violence depicted by Death Metal becomes all the more so without recourse to Demonic inspiration to explain it. For, diabolical influence ultimately only serves as a mitigating circumstance that detracts from appeals to personal responsibility, enabling us to avoid having to make "sense of actions that we cannot or do not want to explain in familiar [human] terms."<sup>199</sup>

This brings us to the type/nature of the evil dealt with by both Black Metal and Death Metal.

### *Moral Evil*

Simply put, the notion of moral evil is predicated on the voluntary activities of moral agents. That is, people possessing rational and free natures.<sup>200</sup> Therefore, by both defining and positing itself in deliberate opposition to Christianity, in Black Metal the

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<sup>197</sup> Stephen Jones, ed, *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror* (New York: HarperPrism, 1997),pp.22-36.

<sup>198</sup> *Ed Gein: The Real American Psycho*, URL: <http://www.houseofhorrors.com/gein.htm>

<sup>199</sup> Adam Morton, *On Evil* (London: Routledge, 2004),p.22.

<sup>200</sup> Berard L. Marthaler, et al, eds, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Vol. 5 (New York: Gale, 2003), p.490.

types of voluntary activities that most characterize the notion of moral evil largely center on ostensible opposition to the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition arising out of a conflict of principles or wills. As such, they fall squarely under the rubric of moral evil as it is defined by the Christian religion, where the focus and impact of such activities become unequivocally spiritual. For, in Christian discourse, moral evil is synonymous with moral fault or sin, which is broadly defined as any activity voluntarily engaged in by a moral agent that is contrary to the divine law or will,<sup>201</sup> and potentially spells eternal damnation for the unrepentant. Not surprisingly, then, Christianity's avowed monotheism sees all moral evil explained by theologians as being the product of a disordered will.<sup>202</sup> Black Metal's underlying dualism, however, could never allow it to explain its moral evil as anything less than an exercising of true freewill. Emperor's vocalist Ihsahn, in particular, makes abundantly clear, when, in the course of the hymn-like lyrics for their song "The Loss and Curse of Reverence," he avers:

...The emptiness of earthborn pride  
Hath stirred my faithful heart  
Which guided me to darker paths  
Far away from their pestilent ways  
Cleansed was I from deceitful grace  
Yet put to scorn was I  
By those unclean  
Enslaved by ignorance  
They blindly spat upon the deity of hate  
Awake is the darkest fiend  
By the fallen one I shall rise....<sup>203</sup>

By contrast, for Death Metal, with its lyrical focus on every conceivable variety of murder, rape, sadistic torture, dismemberment and cannibalism, the types of voluntary activities that most characterize the notion of moral evil are those that cause physical suffering. As such, they fall squarely under the rubric of moral evil as it is secularly and contemporarily defined, where the focus and impact of such activities become

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<sup>201</sup> Marthaler, et al, eds, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup>, p.490.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Emperor, *Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk* (Candlelight, 1997), track.5.

unequivocally temporal. For, in secular discourse, moral evil is defined as that “evil that occurs when an intelligent being knowingly and deliberately inflicts suffering upon another sentient being.”<sup>204</sup> Not surprisingly, then, in secular discourse a moral agent’s engagement in such activities is not believed to stem from a disordered will in the way it is in Judeo-Christian discourse. Rather, it is variously explained as having its roots in nature/genetics, nurture/environment, or a disordered psyche, depending on whether the person providing the explanation is a proponent of Biology, Sociology or Psychology.<sup>205</sup> Unlike Black Metal, however, which has cause for objecting to the theological explanation of moral evil as the product of a disordered will, Death Metal has no concerted cause to object to any of these various secular explanations for the types of activities that make up much of its subject matter. For whereas Black Metal’s subject matter ostensibly promotes the wholesale subversion of a Christian moral and social ideal, Death Metal’s subject matter does little more than depict and glorify random/unrelated acts of violence, which are predominantly predicated on incomprehensible motives. Serial killers, in particular, as Adam Morton notes, “do things that risk their lives and their freedom, and their sense of their own human value, for the sake of a sense of release and sexual gratification that could more safely be got from pornography.”<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, p.1. By employing the qualifier “intelligent being,” Russell’s definition is actually phrased so as to enable it to extend to embrace supernatural/spiritual beings. Here, then, it is cited in secular abstraction, so as to conform to the less eloquent and concise secular definition of moral evil provided by Robert Audi, ed, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.610. Accordingly, the qualifier “intelligent being” should be read as being synonymous with “human being;” If the work of David Pocock is anything to go by, modern secular society’s understanding of moral evil may be taken to be partially synonymous with its understanding, and hence application, of the referent evil in general. For he writes: “The modern, secular, sense of the word ‘evil’ refers almost exclusively to physical suffering.” “Unruly Evil,” in David Parkin ed, *The Anthropology of Evil* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p.48.

<sup>205</sup> Jeffrey Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp.26-31.

<sup>206</sup> Morton, *On Evil*, p.74.

Chapter two  
The Nature and Essence of Black Metal and Death  
Metal

The primary purpose of this brief section is to deconstruct several of the more important dimensions exhibited by Black Metal and Death Metal, and to thereby gain some insight into their nature and essence. Of course, given that we have already outlined both sub-genres' dominant lyrical themes and foci, on the most superficial of levels such an exercise might seem superfluous. In reality, however, it is only through some sort of understanding of how their music and imagery are constructed (i.e. of the ways in which the sources they draw on are appropriated, manipulated and amalgamated), and of the reality underlying their articulation, that over the proceeding sections we will be able gain a well rounded appreciation of Black Metal and Death Metal's potential social effects and the alternative form of escapism they provide.

The dimensions to be deconstructed are: the eclectic, the hyperreal, the romantic, the futuristic and the superficial. Of these, the romantic and the futuristic are not common to both Black Metal and Death Metal. Accordingly, they will not occupy their own sub-sections, but will rather be treated in contrast to each other under the same sub-section.

### **The Eclectic Nature of Black Metal and Death Metal**

Succinctly put, eclecticism is “[t]he principle or practice of taking one’s views [or ideas] from a variety of philosophical and other sources;”<sup>1</sup> the aim being to appropriate and combine their best, or most expedient, elements.<sup>2</sup> Not surprisingly, then, as Flew & Stephen note, the practice of eclecticism is commonly made manifest in its practitioners failure to make a “strenuous effort to create intellectual harmony between [the] discrete elements” they appropriate, or, conversely, in their creative attempts at a syncretism.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Antony Flew & Stephen Priest, eds, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Pan Books, 2002),p.112.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994),p.114.

<sup>3</sup> Antony Flew & Stephen Priest, eds, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*,p.112.



the case of Death Metal, however, the practice of eclecticism is not so much made manifest through a failure to effectively reconcile its subject matter's discrete elements as through the absence of the necessity to do so. For its simple focus on depicting and glorifying random/unrelated acts of violence and horror, as opposed to attempting to articulate both a coherent and consistent philosophy, leaves Death Metal free to engage in the practice of eclecticism as openly/overtly as its individual proponents see fit.

Among the Death Metal bands who have taken the overt practice of eclecticism to its unabashed extremity in both their depiction and glorification of fictional violence are New York's horror lords, Mortician. For, as fervent fans of the Horror genre, not only do they regularly betray their lyrical sources by employing samples from the individual horror movies that inspired them as intros to their songs, virtually all of their song titles and album names appear to have either been directly inspired by or taken verbatim from different horror movies. It would be difficult to go past Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*,<sup>4</sup> for instance, as the source of inspiration for the title of their 1999 release, *Chainsaw Dismemberment*<sup>5</sup> – especially given that its cover sports a chainsaw wielding silhouette standing at the back door of an old farm house looking out into the yard at its bound, gagged and dismembered victims. Further, the title of their 1995 release, *House by the Cemetery*,<sup>6</sup> is clearly taken verbatim from Lucio Fulci's film of the same name;<sup>7</sup> while its fourth track, "Driller Killer,"<sup>8</sup> owes its moniker to Abel Ferrara's *The Driller Killer* (1980).<sup>9</sup>

Providing the non-fictional answer to Mortician's efforts in this respect is Chicago's Macabre. Often referring to their style of Death Metal as "murder metal,"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Vortex Inc, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Mortician, *Chainsaw Dismemberment* (Relapse, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Mortician, *House by the Cemetery* (Relapse, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> In point of fact, Lucio Fulci's, *House by the Cemetery* is actually only the name that was given to the film for its U.S. release in 1984. It was originally released in Italy in 1981 as *Quella villa accanto al cimitero*. "Quella villa accanto al cimitero (1981)," URL: <http://imdb.com/title/tt0082966/>

<sup>8</sup> Mortician, *House by the Cemetery*, track.4.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: A Critical History of the Horror Movie From 1968* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988),p.95.

<sup>10</sup> *Murder Metal* is also the title of the full length album the band released in 2003. (Decomposed Records, 2003).

each of their songs centers on the exploits of, and is often named after, a particular murderer or serial killer. The titles of several of their albums are similarly taken from the name or sobriquet of a specific killer. Their 1993 single, *Night Stalker*,<sup>11</sup> for instance, takes its name from the sobriquet of Richard Leyva Ramirez; that Los Angeles transient who enjoyed breaking into the homes of his victims and raping and killing them.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, their 2000 release, *Dahmer*,<sup>13</sup> takes its name from that infamous “Cannibal of Milwaukee,” Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer. However, while *Night Stalker* contains tracks about several other killers, such as “Sniper in the Sky,”<sup>14</sup> which is based on the University of Texas tower sniper, Charles Whitman, and, “Is it Soup Yet,”<sup>15</sup> which is based on the soup Daniel Rakowitz is said to have made with his girlfriend/room-mate, Monica Beerle’s, severed head,<sup>16</sup> *Dahmer* is a concept album. That is, in essence, it is a 26 track biography that begins with Dahmer’s childhood fascination with the cadavers and viscera of animals in “Dog Guts”<sup>17</sup> and ends with his father’s refusal “to grant permission for his [dead] son’s brain to be studied for scientific purposes”<sup>18</sup> in the “The Brain.”<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Mortician and Macabre, however, the majority of Death Metal bands eclecticism is far less overt. Accordingly, it is commonly only the general motif or dominant element of a particular type of horror movie or killer that is easily discernable in an album or individual song; or, perhaps more importantly, that is even appropriated or

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<sup>11</sup> Macabre, *Night Stalker* (Relapse, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Serial Killer Crime Index, [URL:http://www.serial-killer.org/serialkillers/R/Ramirez\\_richard\\_levya.htm](http://www.serial-killer.org/serialkillers/R/Ramirez_richard_levya.htm); It is worth noting that while the media may have dubbed him the “Night Stalker,” Ramirez preferred to think of himself as the “Night Prowler,” which is actually the title of an AC/DC song he is reported to have adopted “as his personal anthem.” Michael Newton, *The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers* (New York: Checkmark Books, 2000), p.195.

<sup>13</sup> Macabre, *Dahmer* (Decomposed Records, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Macabre, *Night Stalker*, track.4.

<sup>15</sup> Macabre, *Night Stalker*, track.2.

<sup>16</sup> According to Tien-Shun Lee, after killing Beerle, Rakowitz boiled her remains in a soup, which he ladled out “to homeless people in Tompkins Sq. Park” in New York. “Butcher of Tompkins Sq.’ hopes to gain his release,” in *The Villager*, Vol. 73, No.7 (June 16-22, 2004),URL: [http://www.thevillager.com/villager\\_59/butcheroftompkinsq.html](http://www.thevillager.com/villager_59/butcheroftompkinsq.html)

<sup>17</sup> Macabre, *Dahmer*, track.1.

<sup>18</sup> “Jeffrey Dahmer,” in Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, URL:[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey\\_Dahmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Dahmer)

<sup>19</sup> Macabre, *Dahmer*, track.26.

blended into a particular album or song. Cannibal Corpse's George "Corpsegrinder" Fisher, for instance, acknowledged as much about his own band's lyrics when he averred:

We're not crazy, we just love horror movies and that's what inspires them (the lyrics). We don't have any songs about any particular horror movie, they're just ideas that we think, 'Hey that might make a good movie' or 'That sounds really brutal.'<sup>20</sup>

As well as when, talking about Cannibal Corpse's Slasher style lyrics, he asserted:

Any of the slasher-stuff could be stuff that you see from Jason of Friday the 13th or from Freddie Krueger. That's where some of our lyrics come from, and sometimes also from gore movies and zombie movies.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, irrespective of whether an individual Death Metal band's eclecticism is overt or not, the true spirit of the practice lies in only appropriating and combining the best, or most expedient, elements from any given sources. The corollary of this is that the majority of elements thus appropriated and combined become decontextualized. That is, extracted from the narrative/context in which they were originally situated and then employed without reference to the rules, termination or end that their original narrative/context either demanded from or imposed upon them. And, for the majority of Death Metal bands, it would be undesirable for things to be otherwise. For the lyrical pictures they enjoy painting of the subject matter they appropriate rarely coincide with the pictures presented of it in its original context. Despite notable exceptions, like *House of 1000 Corpses*,<sup>22</sup> *Dawn of the Dead*,<sup>23</sup> and *Zombie Flesh Eaters*,<sup>24</sup> for instance, in most horror movies the evil antagonists or macabre elements that Death Metalers enjoy glorifying are ultimately overcome – sometimes even sequel after sequel, as in the

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<sup>20</sup> "Interview: George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher–Cannibal Corpse," in *Metal Refuge*, URL:<http://www.metalrefuge.com/interviews/ccgeorge.html>

<sup>21</sup> "Cannibal Corpse," in *Vampire Magazine*, URL: <http://www.vampire-magazine.com/interviews.asp?id=109&searchstring=cannibal>

<sup>22</sup> Rob Zombi, *House of 1000 Corpses* (Lions Gate Films, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> This note refers to Zack Snyder's remake of George Romero's 1978 original. *Dawn of the Dead* (Universal, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Lucio Fulci, *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (Variety Film, 1979).

*Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series.<sup>25</sup> However, when we consider songs like Mortician's "Redrum,"<sup>26</sup> which is obviously inspired by Stanley Kubrick's cinematic adaption of Stephen King's novel *The Shining*,<sup>27</sup> we find explicit references to the "Rotting corpse...Rising up, from the tub," the "Little girls, chopped and hacked," the "Blood dripping from the walls," and the memorable moment when the door is smashed with an axe, but nothing about Jack Nicholson's frozen fate. Similarly, underlying the majority of decontextualized lyrical recounts glorifying the grisly activities of individual serial killers and mass murders is the banality of the fact they were caught, confessed and variously sentenced to death, life imprisonment or confinement in a psychiatric facility/hospital. But this never gets noted. Instead, their acts of violence are routinely divorced from their consequences. Even Macabre's concept album, *Dahmer*,<sup>28</sup> which appears to provide a superficial exception to the rule, only bothers to make reference to Dahmer's post incarceration biographical details because, in a sensational incident that could be construed as poetic justice, he was bludgeoned to death by fellow inmate Christopher Scarver while on work detail,<sup>29</sup> where after, as mentioned above, permission was sought to have his brain studied for scientific purposes.<sup>30</sup>

In the end, then, despite the absence of a need on Death Metal's part to create any sort of coherent and consistent philosophy, it would seem that it is not without a unifying principle of sorts. For there is a sense in which its simple decontextualization-facilitated focus on depicting and glorifying random/unrelated acts of violence and horror can be regarded as constituting a concerted commitment all of its own. And, in the end, this is not really surprising. After all, whether in film or reality, horror is a term that in its

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Jones, ed, *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror* (New York: HarperPrism, 1997), 65-68, 155-162, 132-140.

<sup>26</sup> Mortician, *Mortal Massacre* (Relapse Records, 1993), track.4.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley Kubrick, *The Shining* (Warner Bros, 1980); Stephen King, *The Shining* (New York: Doubleday, 1977).

<sup>28</sup> Macabre, *Dahmer* (Decomposed Records, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, track.24; Scarver, who believed "himself to be the 'son of God,'" was allegedly "acting out his 'father's' command" when he killed Dahmer on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 1994. Newton, *The Encyclopedia of Serial Killers*, p.48.

<sup>30</sup> Macabre, *Dahmer*, track.26.

strictest sense does not so much describe a subject as a response.<sup>31</sup> Or, put another way, an end that can be achieved by a multiplicity of different means.

Unlike Death Metal, Black Metal is both predominantly and explicitly ideologically based. By contrast, then, its practice of eclecticism is actually commonly made manifest in the failure of individual band's to make a "strenuous effort to create intellectual harmony between [the] discrete elements" they appropriate, or, conversely, in their creative attempts at a syncretism. British Black Metalers, Cradle of Filth, in particular, could even be argued to provide us with examples of both. For, despite the fact that Satan figured more prominently in their 2003 album, *Damnation and a Day*,<sup>32</sup> their music has traditionally centered on Pagan Goddesses, which they have drawn from a wide variety of sources. These Goddesses, however, have not been appropriated into Cradle of Filth's Satanic pantheon with their integrity intact, but, rather, have had their traditional mythologies perverted to varying degrees by being portrayed as being both sensuous and vampiric. In particular, they have appropriated Astarte from the Phoenicians;<sup>33</sup> Artemis and Hecate from the Greeks;<sup>34</sup> Ishtar and Ereshkigal from the Babylonians<sup>35</sup> and the Roman Diana.<sup>36</sup> The obvious ideological contradiction that inheres in this attempted syncretism, of course, is that, despite portraying themselves as evil, Cradle of Filth have appropriated both good and evil deities from the same pantheons. Ereshkigal and Ishtar, for instance, are both of Babylonian origin and are Queens of the Underworld and Heaven respectively. Admittedly, if you take into consideration Christianity's early suggestion that all Pagan deities and practices are affiliated with the Devil,<sup>37</sup> combined with the band's lyrics asserting that they are "bound

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen Jones, ed, *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror* (New York: HarperPrism, 1997),p.16.

<sup>32</sup> Cradle of Filth, *Damnation and a Day* (Sony Music, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Cradle of Filth, *The Principle of Evil made Flesh* (London: Cacophonous Records, 1994), track.2; Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, pp.16-17.

<sup>34</sup> Cradle of Filth, *The Principle of Evil made Flesh*, tracks.2&5; Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, pp.102-103, 155-156.

<sup>35</sup> Cradle of Filth, *The Principle of Evil made Flesh*, tracks.2&5; Cradle of Filth, *Dusk and Her Embrace* (Music For Nations, 1996), track.6; Donald Mackenzie, *Myths of Babylonia and Assyria* (London: Gresham Publishing Company, 1976), pp.53-54.

<sup>36</sup> Cradle of Filth, *The Principle of Evil made Flesh*, track.11; Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*, pp.46-49.

<sup>37</sup> As Brian P. Levack notes, it was actually Christianity's practice of consigning the various Pagan religions it encountered as it spread to the "Kingdom of Satan" that has given us such rich and varied

by other laws to the service of the enemies of God,”<sup>38</sup> the above contradiction perhaps becomes reconcilable. For, given that Christianity has oppressed the worshipers of both good and evil Pagan deities alike, it is their common enemy.<sup>39</sup> However, the practical consequence of reconciling the ideological incongruency in this way is that it gives final definition, delineation, and therefore truth, to the Christian interpretation (the implications of which will be discussed in the final section of this thesis).

Needless to say, not all Black Metal bands exhibit the lack of subtlety in their eclecticism that makes Cradle of Filth’s failure to create intellectual harmony between the discrete elements they have appropriated, as well as their creative attempts at a syncretism, so conspicuous. This is especially true of bands that merely appropriate the ideologies or philosophies underlying other religions or sources, as opposed to appropriating their deities or characters and demonizing them. The music and imagery employed by the now disbanded Norwegian Black Metal band Emperor, for instance, reflects a belief that Satan, darkness and evil are both supreme and majestic. However, their only explicitly revealed source for their concept of Satan as their exalted Emperor is John Milton’s 17<sup>th</sup> century epic poem, *Paradise Lost*.<sup>40</sup> Although, this is not betrayed by the band’s lyrics, but rather by the artwork exhibited throughout the CD booklet that accompanies their 1997 release *Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk*.<sup>41</sup> For it is all derived from the 19<sup>th</sup> century illustrations produced by Gustave Dore as visual depictions of Milton’s masterpiece.<sup>42</sup> In particular, the rear cover of the CD booklet sports Dore’s depiction of the mighty Lucifer standing proudly in council in Hell before his legions of rebel Angels trying to rally them to revenge after having been cast out of Heaven. As proudly as he is depicted though, alone Milton’s Satan is but a pale shadow of the apotheosis of evil lauded by Emperor in “Inno a Satana,” who is praised as being he “whose spirit lieth upon every act of oppression, hatred and strife,” he who ultimately has

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depictions of the Devil in Christian art. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Longman, 1995), p.30.

<sup>38</sup> Cradle of Filth, *The Principle of Evil made Flesh*, track.9.

<sup>39</sup> Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, pp.29-34.

<sup>40</sup> John Milton, “Paradise Lost,” in The Modern Library ed, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Milton* (New York, Random House, 1950), pp.90-394.

<sup>41</sup> Emperor, *Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk* (Candlelight, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Arco Publishing’s, *A Dore Gallery* (New York: Arco Publishing, 1974), pp.103, 104.

“the power to force any light in wane.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, along with the myriad of rebellious Angels who chose to follow him, Milton’s Satan was easily expelled from heaven by the Messiah;<sup>44</sup> and is ultimately reduced to being the lowliest of villains, when, clearly lacking the power to attack God directly, he determines to exact revenge for his fall via the weaker creation Man.<sup>45</sup> His exaltation to the Glorious Entity depicted by Emperor, then, can only be the result of an amalgamation with the partial inversions and distortions of Zoroastrian and Manichean dualistic thought that, as mentioned above, underlie the more decidedly Satanic end of Black Metal’s lyrical spectrum.

Of course, when combined with the fact that Black Metal exhibits a lyrical spectrum that ranges from pure/uncontaminated Satanism at one end, through to strong, Pagan-predicated anti-Christian sentiments at the other, the variation exhibited between the way in which Cradle of Filth and Emperor practice their eclecticism reveals the absence of ideological ecumenicalism that is characteristic of the sub-genre as a whole. For while Cradle of Filth may have appropriated deities from a number of different Pagan pantheons, its efforts to recast them in a Satanic light places them at the same uncompromisingly Satanic end of the lyrical spectrum occupied by Emperor, and thus demonstrates the ideological variations and ambiguities that can be subsumed under its “Satanic” rubric. Naturally, the corollary of this is that not even the decontextualization that occurs during the practice of eclecticism can serve Black Metal as a kind of unifying principle as it does with Death Metal. For the varying range of ideological commitments that span the lyrical spectrum precludes such a possibility. Black Metal’s cohesion, then, it would seem, can ultimately be reduced to a single shared predilection – the strong anti-Christian sentiment that under-girds its entire lyrical spectrum.

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<sup>43</sup> Emperor, *In the Night side Eclipse*, track.9.

<sup>44</sup> Milton, “Paradise Lost,” pp.244-247.

<sup>45</sup> Francis C. Blessington, *Paradise Lost: Ideal and Tragic Epic* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), p.38.

## The Hyperreal Nature of Black Metal and Death Metal

Simply put, hyperreality is a term that is used to “indicate the ‘loss of the real,’ where distinctions between surface and depth, the real and the imaginary no longer exist.”<sup>46</sup> Put another way, “The world of the hyperreal is where image and reality implode.”<sup>47</sup> It is “a world of ‘simulation’ [and simulacra], where images no longer simply serve to reflect or pervert basic realities, but rather either serve to mask the absence of basic realities or, as their “own pure simulacrum,” bear “no relation to any reality whatever.”<sup>48</sup> In essence, then, the world of the hyperreal is a reality of excess, where “signs and meaning float” around in self-reference – a world/reality that “is literally hyped up by advertisers and others.”<sup>49</sup>

In the case of both Black Metal and Death Metal, the notion of hyperreality is primarily made manifest in the practice of eclecticism. For, what is decontextualising and amalgamating elements appropriated from such a diverse range of sources as horror movies, serial killers, mass murders, Christian grand narrative, Pagan deities and philosophies, if not a negation of a strict distinction between the real and the fantastic that can cause time and place to become difficult to identify and fix? After all, as we have seen, Emperor’s Satan is essentially an amalgamation of a *seventeenth century* work of *English* fiction (Milton’s *Paradise Lost*) and form of dualism that stems from a *Middle Eastern* religion founded by a prophet who probably lived around *1200 BCE* (Zoroaster, or Zarathushtra),<sup>50</sup> which is revered by a band of *contemporary Norwegian* youths. Likewise, along with its cohorts, the Zombie clad in the patchwork cape of skinned

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<sup>46</sup> Stuart Sim, ed, *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought* (Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd, 1998), p.281.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p.281.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and Simulations,” in Mark Poster, ed, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Stanford University Press, 1988), p.170; According to Baudrillard, there are four successive phases of the image, of which, respectively, these are the third and fourth. By contrast, in the first phase, the image is simply the “reflection of a basic reality.” While, in the second, “[i]t masks and perverts a basic reality.” Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Marc O’Day, “Postmodernism and Television,” in Stuart Sim ed, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.112.

<sup>50</sup> Boyce, “Zoroastrianism,”p.237.



human faces that adorns the cover of Cannibal Corpse's 2002 release, *Gore Obsessed*,<sup>51</sup> simultaneously draws on the American and Italian Zombie flicks of the 70's and 80's; the fleshy garment the pseudo-transvestite, Buffalo Bill, busies himself piecing together throughout the course of Demme's 1991 cinematic adaption of *The Silence of the Lambs*; and thus, ultimately, the death masks skinned from female faces, furniture upholstered in human skin, and 'mammary vest' flayed from a female torso, that were found in the residence of Wisconsin native Ed Gein in 1957.<sup>52</sup>

It will perhaps come as no surprise, then, that at its most opportunistic the eclecticism-facilitated hyperreality exhibited by our two sub-genres can even serve to reaffirm and perpetuate historical fiction. This is especially true of bands, who, in order to create an aura of authenticity and historical continuity, present us with images that both build on and reaffirm and perpetuate the sensational myths that have been imposed on some of the past's more notorious personages or events. That is, bands who present us with images that mask "the absence of a basic reality."<sup>53</sup> Just such an image, for instance, is embodied in the cover art for the Satanic orientated Death Metal band Morbid Angel's 1993 release *Covenant*.<sup>54</sup> For amongst the various ritual paraphernalia it features that are obviously being employed to suggest that the band has just signed a pact with the devil (a lit candle, an open copy of Arthur Edward Waite's *The Book of Ceremonial Magic*,<sup>55</sup> a book bearing the band's emblem entitled covenant, a white-handled ritual dagger or athame, a quill and small glass vessel containing what appears to be blood) it features that all essential blood-inscribed parchment. However, this blood inscribed parchment, or pact, is not, as we are lead to suspect, a freshly forged one between the supposedly satanic members of Morbid Angel and the Devil. Rather it is a verbatim copy of the forged pact introduced into evidence at the trial of Father Urbain Grandier, parish priest of St Pierre-du-Marche, Loudon, France, who was sent to the stake in 1634 for allegedly

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<sup>51</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *Gore Obsessed* (Metal Blade Records Inc, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Jones, ed, *Clive Barker's A-Z of Horror* (New York: HarperPrism, 1997), pp.22-36; "Ed Gein: The Real American Psycho," URL: <http://www.houseofhorrors.com/gein.htm>;

<sup>53</sup> Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations," p.170.

<sup>54</sup> Morbid Angel, *Covenant* (Earache, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Arthur Edward Waite, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (New Jersey: Lethe Press, 2002). Originally published in London in 1911, *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* is a revision of Waite's earlier work *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts*, which was first published in Edinburgh in 1898.

causing a number of the nuns in the town's small Ursuline convent to become possessed.<sup>56</sup> A libertine priest, who, among other things, "openly made a mistress of one of his young penitents"<sup>57</sup> and was suspected of fathering an illegitimate child with the public prosecutor's daughter, Grandier was obviously no saint and had amassed his fair share of enemies. On the charge of having effected the nuns' diabolical possession, however, he maintained his innocence until the bitter end; even under pains of "torture so severe that the marrow of his bones oozed out of his broken limbs."<sup>58</sup> Contrary to his own testimony, then, and thus in vindication of the perpetrators of historical injustice, Morbid Angel's juxtaposition of Grandier's alleged pact with various other ritual paraphernalia suggests not only that it was efficacious, but that he was in fact guilty of the fictitious charges he went to the stake denying – the corollary being that his hyperreal legacy, and indeed the legacy of the black arts in general, lives on in the band and others.

A perhaps more justifiable series of images and lyrics that both build on and reaffirm and perpetuate the sensational myths that have been imposed on one of the past's more notorious personages are provided by British Black Metalers, Cradle of Filth. Their 1998 release, *Cruelty and the Beast*,<sup>59</sup> in particular, is a thematic album centered round the life of the infamous Hungarian/Slovakian<sup>60</sup> Countess, Elisabeth Bathory (1560-1614), who, according to the most sensationalized legends that have coalesced around her, both tortured and murdered some 650 servant girls for the purpose of bathing in their blood to preserve her own beauty.<sup>61</sup> In reality, however, as Thorne demonstrates throughout his important work *Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of the Blood Countess Elisabeth*

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<sup>56</sup> For copies of Grandier's pact, see Rossell Hope Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft & Demonology* (New York: Crown, 1959; reprinted, New York: Bonanza Books, 1981), p.377-378 and Guiley's, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, p.101.

<sup>57</sup> Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft & Demonology*, p.315.

<sup>58</sup> Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft & Demonology*, p.312.

<sup>59</sup> Cradle of Filth, *Cruelty and the Beast* (Music for Nations, 1998); The album's title appears to be both a dark play on the title of the well known fairy tale, Beauty and the Beast, and reworking of the quote found inside the album's case, which is attributed to Nietzsche: "There is no Beast without cruelty."

<sup>60</sup> As Gordon J. Melton notes, while "frequently cited as Hungarian, due in large part to the shifting borders of the Hungarian Empire, she [Elisabeth] was in fact more closely associated with what is now the Slovak Republic. Most of her adult life was spent at Castle Cachtice, near the town of Vishine, northeast of present-day Bratislava, where Austria, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic come together." *The Vampire Book: An Encyclopedia of the Undead* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1994),p.32.

<sup>61</sup> Tony Thorne, *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism* (London: Indigo, 2000), p.40; Interestingly, tracks 7 & 8 on *Cruelty and the Beast*, even sport guest vocals by Ingrid Pitt, the actress who played Elisabeth in Peter Sasdy's, *Countess Dracula*. (Hammer Horror, 1970).

*Bathory*, the true number of victims, the nature of their suffering, and degree of the Countess's complicity, and hence culpability, in the activities that were taking part under her roof remains shrouded in mystery.<sup>62</sup> What does appear clear, though, is that, as a wealthy widow in control of vast family estates, Elisabeth was "a victim of the greed of relatives and rulers who coveted her extensive landholdings"<sup>63</sup> and contrived her sensational arrest, trial and downfall in their efforts to obtain them.<sup>64</sup> Of course if one doesn't trouble oneself to look past the album cover, the band doesn't appear to have done anything more than present us with a comely depiction of Elisabeth's blood bathing. However, even a cursory glance through the art that furnishes the rest of the CD booklet reveals that the artistic license being exercised by the band has extended to recasting the Countess as a sensuous, velvet-clad, fang-bearing vampire.<sup>65</sup> That is, as an anthropomorphous monster whose evil stems not so much from a disordered psyche as from its very nature, which is to sustain itself "through drinking the blood of the living."<sup>66</sup> Consequently, in addition to reaffirming and perpetuating the most sensationalistic myths that have coalesced around Elisabeth's historical personage, *Cruelty and the Beast's* imagery serves to further obscure two important facts. The first of these is that, despite the fact that Elisabeth is alleged to have been unusually cruel, she

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<sup>62</sup> Tony Thorne, *Countess Dracula: The Life and Times of the Blood Countess Elisabeth Bathory* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> Thorne, *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism*, p.43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid; Elisabeth was arrested for her alleged crimes on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 1610, and, after several show trials at which she was not allowed to be present to defend herself, was sentenced to life imprisonment in solitary confinement. Bricked into a room in her castle at Cachtice, "without windows or doors and only a small opening for food and a few slits for air, Elisabeth survived three years before her death on 21 August 1614. Melton, *The Vampire Book: An Encyclopedia of the Undead*, p.33.

<sup>65</sup> Given that Elisabeth is alleged to have cannibalized some of her victims, Cradle of Filth's decision to portray her as a Vampire is hardly much of a stretch of the imagination – especially when combined with her alleged blood bathing. Nor, is it really novel. For, as Thorne notes, "Bathory has been appropriated [by others] as a sadist, dominatrix and lesbian seducer as well as appearing in vampire anthologies as a female counterpart to Vlad Tepes, the 'Historical Dracula.'" "In fact, "the legendary Elisabeth" permeates "Vampire literature and Vampire iconography." *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism* (London: Indigo, 2000), p.40.

<sup>66</sup> Melton, *The Vampire Book: An Encyclopedia of the Undead*, p.629; Biblically speaking, of course, the vampire is not only evil because it kills people, but also because its mode of subsistence – consuming blood – violates divine mandate. For, in the Old Testament, God states that: "Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood – I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood, nor may any alien living among you eat blood.'" (Leviticus 17: 10-12). In fact, the only exception is the consumption of the sacramental wine/Christ's blood in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is only really an exception for those who believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

was ultimately a product of her time. After all she lived in an age of casual cruelty, when the nobility exercised “the right of life and death over their peasants and servants,”<sup>67</sup> and “probably could have gotten away with torturing and killing peasant girls for ever.”<sup>68</sup> Her mistake was to start torturing and killing girls of noble birth.<sup>69</sup> And secondly, its imagery obscures the fact that, if only by virtue of falling victim to the machinations of those around her, in the end Elisabeth proved herself as frail and fallible a being as the rest of us – and thus but a pale shadow of the crystallized evil and immortal beauty that inheres in *Cradle of Filth*’s alluring simulacra.

The end result of the more decidedly opportunistic, eclecticism-facilitated, hyperreal imagery exhibited by Black Metal and Death Metal, then, is not simply the reaffirmation and perpetuation of historical fiction, but the effacement of history itself. That is, quite paradoxically, in the course of attempting to create an aura of authenticity and historical continuity for the bands, such imagery ends up doing little more than engendering a ‘loss of the real.’ For like the nostalgia films treated by Fredric Jameson in his article “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,”<sup>70</sup> it is clear that the more opportunistic pseudo-historical imagery exhibited by both Black Metal and Death Metal does “not attempt to recapture or represent the ‘real’ past, but always make do with certain cultural myths or stereotypes about the past. They offer us what he calls ‘false realism,’” images about other images, “representations of other representations,”<sup>71</sup> and, perhaps more specifically, even myths about other myths. Moreover, by virtue of being posited as somehow being more real (or hyperreal), such imagery actually ends up negating the possibility of merely being read as simple reflections or perversions of the subject matter they have appropriated.

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<sup>67</sup> Thorne, *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism*, p.40.

<sup>68</sup> Raymond T. McNally, *Dracula was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania* (London: Hamlyn Paperbacks, 1985), p.48.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p.48.

<sup>70</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” in *New Left Review* No. 146 (1984), pp.53-92.

<sup>71</sup> John Storey, “Postmodernism and Popular Culture,” in Stuart Sim ed, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 2001), p.151.

Of course, in theory, while the hyperreal imagery engendered by the practice of eclecticism might tease our knowledge of the subject matter it appropriates, it cannot be considered to be dependant upon it. This is because, in the course of being posited as being somehow more real than the sources of its composite parts, and thereby negating the possibility of merely being read as simple reflections or perversions of them, hyperreal imagery takes on a distinct and independent nature that reduces it to being self-referential. Nevertheless, our appreciation of eclectic hyperreal imagery will always be enhanced by knowledge about its composite parts. For, such knowledge enables us to interact with the imagery, and thereby cultivate a more intimate relationship with it than would otherwise be possible as mere passive receptors of its meaning. And thus, in a very real way, their composite nature actually serves to endow the imagery exhibited by our two sub-genres with an endearing esoteric dimension – potentially concealed from all but the most zealous initiate/fan.

### **The Romantic Nature of Black Metal vs The Futurist Nature of Death Metal**

In contemporary usage, “the word ‘romantic’ has come to mean so many things that by itself it means nothing at all.”<sup>72</sup> In the world of art and literature, however, it is most commonly used to denote that European movement, which began in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and extended into the first 20 or 30 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in which the rational and intellectual ideals and rules of classicism and Neoclassicism gave way to an emphasis on the aesthetic and the emotional.<sup>73</sup> Amongst its proponents, this translated into a consistent championing of the “will, feeling, passion, intuition, and imagination against regulation by intellectual and practical disciplines.”<sup>74</sup> Or, as Georg Simmel argued, privileging “individuality, eccentricity, abnormal experiences and excess over common humanity and common sense, and valu[ing] personal authenticity, variously defined, over expediency and conformity to social rules and cultural models.”<sup>75</sup> Concomitantly, during

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<sup>72</sup> J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Penguin Books 1982), p.586.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid; Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, p.221.

<sup>74</sup> Deena Weinstein, “Art Versus Commerce: Deconstructing a (Useful) Romantic illusion,” in Karen Kelly & Evelyn McDonnell eds, *Stars Don’t Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p.58.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

this period the figure of Satan was overhauled and used by Romantics of a revolutionary disposition “to represent the rebellion of the individual against the powerful.” For, well aware that revolutions were ultimately “against kings and priests, Romantics admired Satan as the enemy of the greatest king and Priest of all, Christ himself.”<sup>76</sup> Needless to say, as a result Satan’s fall from Heaven was rearticulated as the product “of his daring to oppose the all-powerful, rather than in the more orthodox manner as the triumph of good over evil, and he became, by this strange twist, a symbol of human liberty”<sup>77</sup> – bought, as it were, “at the cost of his own ruin.”<sup>78</sup>

The corollary here, of course, is that any admiration for Satan on the part of the Romanticists “was not Satanic worship of evil, for the Romantic Devil was [clearly] not ‘the Evil One’ but good.”<sup>79</sup> That is a hero, who, while still able to “symbolize isolation, unhappiness, hardness of heart, lovelessness, insensitivity, ugliness, sarcasm and all that impedes the progress of the human spirit,”<sup>80</sup> is essentially an agent of positive change. In short, then, the ways in which Black Metal’s portrayal of Satan can be considered romantic requires some explaining.

Presenting the least problems for us are those bands that constitute the mean of Black Metal’s lyrical spectrum. That is, those bands who have “developed a mythology in which Satanism ... [is] constructed as part of a pagan history of resistance to the conquest of Christianity.”<sup>81</sup> For they paint as romantic a picture of themselves as indefatigable strugglers against an oppressive imperialistic, and hence tyrannical, Christianity as it is possible to paint. But, then, these 21<sup>st</sup> century pseudo-Vikings could hardly do otherwise. After all, one’s military prowess, whether real or imagined, is largely contingent upon the formidability of one’s enemy. Thus, even amongst those bands who believe that the powers of darkness will emerge victorious from the final

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<sup>76</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, “The Historical Satan,” in James T. Richardson, Joel Best & David G. Bromley eds, *The Satanism Scare* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1991), p.47.

<sup>77</sup> La Fontaine, “Satanism and Satanic Mythology,” p.88.

<sup>78</sup> Russell, “The Historical Satan,” p.47.

<sup>79</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, p.221.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p.223.

<sup>81</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” p.99.

apocalyptic battle with the powers of light, we find the threat Christ presents as the figure against which they will rally taken very seriously. In fact, in “The Dawn of a New Age,” the lyrics for which have been effectively placed in a CD booklet replete with pictures of the band waxing proud with their weapons and armour, Satyricon posit the question that appears to sum it all up: “For the great day of wrath is coming, and who shall be able to stand?”<sup>82</sup> Despite this, however, the extreme Nationalist, neo-fascist/Nazi overtones and rhetoric that pervades this part of the lyrical spectrum sees it fall short of achieving anything more than a superficial degree of congruence with romantic ideology. For, in the end, it bespeaks not so much of true liberation and freedom as of supplanting one form of oppression/tyranny with another.

Unfortunately, when it comes to discerning the romantic dimensions of the Satan portrayed by bands situated at the more purely Satanic end of the lyrical spectrum, things become a lot more complicated. For, in many ways, the picture they paint of the Prince of Darkness is the polar opposite of the truly romantic vision. After all, it is not the picture of the rebellious libertarian martyr, but rather, of the proud, deicidal and misanthropic adversary, who in the last days will rise up with his legions – both human and demonic – and emerge victorious from the final battle for supremacy with the powers of light.

Nevertheless, there are still four important dimensions to the music produced by bands that come under this end of the lyrical spectrum that can be considered as romantic. The first is its uncompromisingly dualistic worldview, which, having its basis in a partial inversion and distortion of Zoroastrianism’s dualistic thought, finds its most explicit manifestations in those lyrics that narrate alternative outcomes to the celestial battle recorded in the apocalyptic book of Revelation (12: 7–9). For, all metaphysical fantasizing aside, the dualistic notion of the existence/possibility of a clear cut division/distinction between good and evil/light and darkness is ultimately little more than a highly romanticized and distorted oversimplification of reality. James Lewis, for instance, makes this evident in his critique of Jeffrey Russell’s contemptuous dismissal of

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<sup>82</sup> The lyrics for this entire song are actually a perverted adaptation of Chapter Six from the Bible’s Book of “Revelation.” This line in particular is a slight alteration of verse 17. Satyricon, *Mother North* (Modern Invasion, 1996), track.1.

contemporary religious Satanism, which was predicated on the notion that, because “‘Satan is by definition evil’... contemporary Satanism’s effort to recover the positive Satan of the Romantic poets is ‘inherently meaningless’ because it ‘contradicts itself.’”<sup>83</sup>

For as Lewis notes:

The problem with this kind of analysis is that Western society is long past the stage in its cultural history where Satan and Satanism can unambiguously be equated with evil. The difficulties inherent in Russell’s assertion become evident as soon as one entertains its corollary, namely that Christ and Christianity are by definition good. However positively we might regard Christianity, few of us would be willing to characterize the influence of the Christian tradition as an unalloyed good. Although we might wish we could make such simple, straightforward associations, the fact of the matter is that the cultural images of Satanism and Christianity we have inherited are complex and often ambiguous.<sup>84</sup>

Of course, Black Metal’s uncompromisingly dualistic worldview often finds its most explicit manifestations in those lyrics that narrate alternative outcomes to the epic, apocalyptic battle recorded in the book of Revelation. Therefore, it is not without a sense of irony that it simultaneously undermines the possibility of its proponents utilizing the epic battle motif’s most visibly romantic dimension to its full effect: the underdog status afforded the side with the smallest physical presence, which is decidedly more amenable to a monotheistic worldview. For, on an ideological level, at least, a strict dualism posits Satan as a bona fide apotheosis of evil, and thus as a far cry from the puissant, but by no means omnipotent, angel that the Bible suggests fell victim to his own pride.<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, despite the relatively low number of ostensibly-Satanic Black Metalers world wide, we are forced to infer that, while Satan too might have his angelic hosts and human devotees, their aid in the final apocalyptic battle will ultimately be superfluous.

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<sup>83</sup> James R. Lewis, “Who Serves Satan? A Demographic and Ideological Profile,” in *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Vol. 6, No.2 (June 2001), p.1.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> (Isaiah 14: 12-15). In point of fact, as Russell notes, these particular verses are actually directed at “a king of Babylonia or Assyria,” but have been read by Christendom as metaphorically likening him to the Devil. Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, p.35-36; Here we are presented with a prime example of the lack of ideological/narrative coherence that pervades Black Metal. For, by suggesting that Satan is God’s equal, the uncompromising dualism that underlies the more Satanic end of Black Metal’s lyrical spectrum effectively negates our ability to accept the traditional account of Satan’s fall from grace as explaining God’s current ascendancy.



That said, it will still be conceded that there is a sense in which a certain amount of romanticism is inherent in any depiction of an epic battle or struggle between opposing forces – irrespective of the relative size, strength and ideological predilections of its participants, or even the final outcome.

The second important romantic dimension to the lyrics of bands that come under this end of the lyrical spectrum is embodied in the picture they paint of evil itself. For such bands routinely convey the sense that evil is somehow glorious, and hence laudable. And when thinking purely in terms of wars waged in heaven by proud, powerful and refractory fallen angels/demons, on a certain level such a perception of evil becomes understandable. After all, if the concept of evil and its chief instigator, Satan, lacked all allure, the Church would have gone out business years ago.<sup>86</sup> Hence the reason writers such as “Milton ... deliberately made Satan appear magnificent” in the early stages of their work. For, only if their audiences came to feel the “glamour of evil,” only if they are “attracted by Satan, can they recognize their own tendencies to evil and grasp the ignominy and pathos of Satan’s eventual ruin.”<sup>87</sup>

Such understanding, however, can not so easily be extended to Black Metal lyrics, whether real or imaginary, which glorify evil in its more temporal manifestations. That is, lyrics that, while still articulated through a Satanic worldview, come close to coalescing with Death Metal’s focus on depicting and glorifying random/unrelated acts of violence and horror. This is especially true of lyrics like those found in the title track from Marduk’s 1999 release, *Panzer Division Marduk*,<sup>88</sup> which, while seemingly only guilty of fantasizing about a triumphant Satanic crusade “against Christianity” and “worthless humanity” in general, can also be read as glorifying all of the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War. For, while in contemporary English usage, “Panzer Division” is used generically to refer to armored divisions in the German army, past or

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<sup>86</sup> The Satanic indignation engendered by this very fact, saw the late Anton LaVey formulate it into the last of his nine satanic statements: “Satan has been the best friend the church has ever had, as he has kept it in business all these years!” *The Satanic Bible*, p.25.

<sup>87</sup> Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History*, p.189.

<sup>88</sup> Marduk, *Panzer Division Marduk* (Osmose, 1999), track.1.

present,<sup>89</sup> in Germany, *Panzer* is also an abbreviation of the WWII German designation for the tanks, *Panzerkampfwagen*,<sup>90</sup> used by the German Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, while such lyrics might glorify evil in its more temporal manifestations, they are still able to maintain a romantic dimension by virtue of treating it so abstractly. That is, by either focusing more on the ideas, perpetrators, and occurrences of evil themselves, than on the suffering of the individuals that either are or were adversely affected by them, or by treating the suffering of those affected in a collective, as opposed to individual, way.<sup>92</sup> For, as Jeffrey Russell makes abundantly clear when speaking about the scholarly treatment of evil in general, in both cases our ability to identify with the suffering of victims in an intimate way is undermined:

Always if we are to make sense of evil, we must return from metaphor and metaphysic to the individual. Numbers only disguise reality. Six million Jews exterminated by the Nazis become an abstraction. It is the suffering of one Jew you understand, and your powers to extrapolate beyond that are limited. That is why Milton's Satan can seem so proud: the evil he personifies is disguised by abstraction. Ivan's one tortured child alone in the darkness reveals the true nature of the spurious glory of Satan, a glory that we only feel if we allow our minds, borne aloft by abstract considerations, to forget the suffering of the individual.<sup>93</sup>

And, of course, in most cases the effects of abstraction are aided by historical remove. The members of Marduk, for instance, along with the majority of their fans, are all

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<sup>89</sup> See, for instance, W. J. K. Davies, *German Army Handbook 1939-1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (New York: Arco Publishing, 1977); Heinz Guderian's, *Panzer Leader*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001); and Major General F. W. von Mellenthin's, *Panzer Battles: A Study of the Employment of Armor in the Second World War* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1956).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> One need only glance through the outline of futurism given below to see that, in its reference to modern mechanical warfare, Marduk's *Panzer Division Marduk* is highly futurist. However, in this respect, it constitutes an exception rather than the rule. For, in general, the sub-genre's notions about warfare/battle, too, are decidedly romantic – as is evident in its musicians' penchant for wearing spiked gauntlets, chain-mail, and other articles of makeshift armour in promotional videos and photos that commonly also feature them wielding mediaeval styled weaponry, like swords and battle axes. In fact, there are even album covers that exhibit this penchant, like Immortal's, *Sons of Northern Darkness* (Nuclear Blast, 2002), and Enslaved's, *Eld* (Osmose Productions, 1997).

<sup>92</sup> This notion of abstraction, then, differs substantially from the decontextualization practiced by Death Metal in the composition of its lyrics; which is concerned more with ignoring the fact that, whether they be real or fictional, perpetrators of evil commonly suffer extremely negative consequences for their acts.

<sup>93</sup> Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity*, p.21; Interestingly, Russell also notes that many of ideologies and institutions that have been used to legitimate evil throughout the course of human history, like "the Church," "Democracy," and "National Socialism," were themselves abstract human constructs. Ibid, pp.21-22.

children of the second post-WWII generation, and thus lack the power to either empathise or sympathise with its victims on the profound level that first hand experience engenders – a level that would surely circumvent any inclination to glorify their suffering, whether it be directly or indirectly.<sup>94</sup> Whereas, at even further historical remove is the event marked by the moniker of the Norwegian band 1349: the arrival of the plague in their homeland, which wiped out two-thirds of the population.<sup>95</sup>

The third important romantic dimension exhibited by the lyrics of bands that come under this end of the lyrical spectrum is found in the ostensible perception they have of their relationship with Satan. For, by virtue of their dualistic world view, it comes across as being one of mutual fidelity in a shared quest to subvert the powers of light/good once and for all. However, mutual fidelity and a common goal are hardly dimensions that can genuinely be considered to have featured in accounts of the relationships between Satan and his servants, past or present.<sup>96</sup> In Europe during the late medieval and early modern period (c. 1450-1750), for instance, what was believed to lead witches into confederacy with the Devil was not a shared aversion for God, Christ and Christians, but rather, as the French Demonologist and political theorist Jean Bodin noted in 1680, various forms of social or economic poverty:

What draws the wretched to the slippery precipice of the path of perdition...is a depraved belief which they have that the Devil grants riches to the poor, pleasure to the afflicted, power to the weak, beauty to the ugly, knowledge to the ignorant, honour to the scorned, and the favour of the great.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For Marduk's Norwegian fans, the effects of historical remove in this particular instance may even be augmented by the fact that their government collaborated with Germany. Although, having said this, "the Norwegian political leader who founded" Norway's pro-German government, Vidkun Quisling, was both "tried and executed for treason shortly after the war's end." Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.167.

<sup>95</sup> "1349," URL:

<http://www.metalarchives.com/index.php?PHPSESSID=35aeb184416ac72c5e56dc53dbd73853>

<sup>96</sup> This is actually quite surprising, given Christ's alleged response to the Pharisee's belief that he was exorcising Demons through the power of the prince of Demons, Beelzebub: "Every Kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divide against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (Mat 12: 25-26).

<sup>97</sup> Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans R. A. Scott, eds R. A. Scott & J. L. Pearl (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1995), p.155; This, of course, reads something like an inversion of the Sermon on the Mount found in Chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel; According to Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, if a witch were caught by the authorities, but had denied the faith both "with

The primary concern of the Devil, on the other hand, was allegedly working his servants' perdition. Thus, after having successfully induced them to live a thoroughly wicked and blasphemous life, he was at last believed to encourage his witches to commit suicide so that they would be deprived of any opportunity to repent, and thus "suffer eternal punishment"<sup>98</sup> in death. By contrast, within the confines of contemporary forms of religious Satanism, in particular those which have their roots in the teachings of the founder of the *First Church of Satan* and father of contemporary Satanism, the late Anton Szandor LaVey, the possibility of forming a relationship with Satan grounded in mutual fidelity and a common goal is negated by the denial of his objective existence. For as LaVey himself stated:

Most Satanists do not accept Satan as an anthropomorphic being with cloven hooves, a barbed tail, and horns. He merely represents a force of nature –the powers of darkness which have been named just that because no religion has taken these forces *out* of the darkness.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, unlike the three preceding romantic dimensions to the music produced by bands that come under this end of the lyrical spectrum, the fourth important romantic dimension is instrumental. In particular, it is embodied in the keyboard accompaniment that pervades much contemporary Black Metal. For, from the haunting chords that loom behind the guitar riffs through to the grandiose overtures that have set the tone for many a great track, keyboards infuse the Black Metal sound with a romantic – albeit dark, somber, often even gothic – sense of reverential wonder and awe irrefutably befitting its

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their lips and in their hearts" and given him their genuine homage, the Devil might endow them with the power of taciturnity to enable them to endure the greatest tortures without confessing. If on the other hand a witch had devoted themselves to him with their lips alone, he would expose them to "temporal afflictions" so that he would at least gain some profit from their despair, and then, after they had confessed, cause them to commit suicide in their cell before they could obtain spiritual pardon through contrition or sacramental confession. *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans and ed Montague Summers (London: John Rodker, 1928; reprinted, London: Bracken Books, 1996),p.102.

<sup>98</sup> Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, trans E. A. Ashwin, ed M. Summers (London: John Rodker, 1929; reprinted, New York: Dover Publications, 1988), p.130.

<sup>99</sup> LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, p.62. LaVey's assertion in this regard has since been confirmed by the work of James R. Lewis, who, through his efforts to construct a demographic and ideological profile of contemporary religious Satanists, was able to construct the following "statistical caricature": "the 'average' Satanist is an unmarried, white male in his mid-twenties with a few years of college. He became involved in Satanism through something he read in high school, and has been a self-identified Satanist for seven or eight years. Raised Christian, he explored one non-Satanist religious group beyond the one in which he was raised before settling into Satanism. His view of Satan is some variety of non-theistic humanism and he practices magic." "Who Serves Satan? A Demographic and Ideological Profile," p.12.

peculiar ideology. Hence the justification for track titles like Cradle of Filth's "A Gothic Romance (Red Roses for the Devil's Whore)"<sup>100</sup> and Dimmu Borgir's "Fear and Wonder."<sup>101</sup> Yet, it is hardly surprising that keyboards should get utilized in this way. For, independent of its accompanying lyrics, music does not so much convey an ideology as the emotions or sentiments that we want to associate with that ideology.<sup>102</sup> Thus, with Black Metal's associations with raw aggression effectively being conveyed and reinforced through the guitars and drums, it is almost only natural that the task of providing its more romantic dimensions an emotionally charged form of instrumental expression should fall on the keyboards (The corollary here being that it is they more than the guitars, drums and vocals, which, in true romantic fashion, serve to immunize Black Metal against regulation by intellectual and practical reservations by appealing to the feelings, passions and imaginations of its proponents).

In stark contrast to Black Metal, Death Metal lacks any real discernable romantic dimensions. Rather, its sound, dominant lyrical themes and foci are unequivocally futuristic. That is to say, they find analogical precedent, sanction and thus even promotion in that European literary movement whose emergence at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by advocating a "complete break with tradition and aimed at new forms, new subjects and new styles, all in keeping with the advent of a mechanistic age."<sup>103</sup> Foremost amongst its protagonists was Filippo Marinetti, who published his "Manifesto of Futurism" in Paris in 1909.<sup>104</sup> A volatile document, it challenges us to transcend our mediocre and complacent existences, bound up as they are in feelings of security, safety and acceptance, by making enemies of caution, wisdom, rationality, tradition, meditative contemplation and anything else that subverts a desire to "throw ourselves like pride-ripened fruit into the wide, contorted mouth of the wind!"<sup>105</sup> Or, to

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<sup>100</sup> Cradle of Filth, *Dusk and Her Embrace* (Music For Nations, 1996), track.4.

<sup>101</sup> Dimmu Borgir, *Puritanical Euphoric Misanthropia* (Nuclear Blast, 1999), track.1.

<sup>102</sup> And for this reason music will always provide an effective form of auxiliary expression for any emotionally charged message.

<sup>103</sup> Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p.281.

<sup>104</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," in R. W. Flint and A. A. Coppotelli trans and R. W. Flint ed, *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p.39.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, p.40.

put it another way, counsels us to make an enemy of the past and to refuse to look in any direction but forward – to live a vital, action filled existence and put our trust in progress, “which is always right even when it is wrong, because it is movement, life, struggle, hope.”<sup>106</sup> Concomitantly, it champions speed in every facet of life, from high speed travel through to impulsive decisions, and hence advocates aggressive impetuosity in all things:

1) We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness. 2) Courage, audacity and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry. 3) Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the punch and the slap. 4) We say that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed... 5) We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the Earth, along the circle of its orbit... 7) Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces, to reduce and prostrate them before man. 8) We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! ... Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the impossible? Time and space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created, omnipresent speed. 9) We will glorify war – the world’s only hygiene – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and the scorn of woman. 10) We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, we will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice...<sup>107</sup>

On the most obvious and purely technical level, then, Death Metal is futuristic in that it is among the fastest, most complex, aggressive and unpredictable forms of contemporary music available. What’s more, it’s a sub-genre, which, since its very inception, has continued in its quest for greater levels of extremity. While fast and brutal enough in their own right, for instance, early Death Metal albums like Cannibal Corpse’s 1990 release, *Eaten Back to Life*<sup>108</sup> and Deicide’s self-titled release of the same year,<sup>109</sup> pale not only in comparison with their creator’s subsequent releases, but with the vast

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<sup>106</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic,” in R. W. Flint and A. A. Coppotelli trans and R. W. Flint ed, *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p.82.

<sup>107</sup> Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” pp.41-42.

<sup>108</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *Eaten Back to Life* (Metal Blade Records Inc, 1990).

<sup>109</sup> Deicide, *Deicide* (RC/Roadrunner Records, 1990).

majority of later material produced by the sub-genre as a whole. In fact, over the past three of four years, releases like Nile's *Annihilation of the Wicked*,<sup>110</sup> Myrkskog's *Superior Massacre*<sup>111</sup> and Vital Remains' *Dechristianize*<sup>112</sup> have become so fast and heavy, while somehow managing to simultaneously exhibit extremely clean/clear production, that they almost stand in a class of their own. In a very real way, then, they could even be considered to bear witness to technical/technological advancement.

However, while Death Metal's most obvious affinity with futurism is gleaned from an instrumental perspective, in both its technical and technological senses, it is every bit as futuristic on a Lyrical, and thus ideological level. For, whether consciously or sub-consciously, by virtue of drawing much of their subject matter and inspiration from the "slasher movie violence of the 70s and 80"<sup>113</sup> and the exploits of real life serial killers, cannibals and sadists, Death Metal Lyrics can be read as constituting an assault on several of the more significant utopian/egalitarian aspirations/pipe-dreams that were so abhorrent to futurism.<sup>114</sup>

Primary amongst these is moralism, which, in its myriad forms, has always entailed social structures that impose restrictions on individual agency and enjoined people to foreground respect and dignity in both their own conduct and their treatment of others. For, whether real or imaginary, the serial killers, cannibals and sadists glorified by Death Metal are all, in effect, Nietzschean nihilists who have rejected society's morally and legally binding laws in order to pursue the gratification of their own desires.<sup>115</sup> That is,

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<sup>110</sup> Nile, *Annihilation of the Wicked* (Relapse Records, 2005).

<sup>111</sup> Myrkskog, *Superior Massacre* (Candlelight Records, 2002).

<sup>112</sup> Vital Remains, *Dechristianize* (Olympic Recordings, 2003).

<sup>113</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.27.

<sup>114</sup> Given the popularity of the Slasher film and the fact that, as Jenks notes in his work on *Transgression*, pp180-181, the serial killer has become something of a "post-modern celebrity," it is almost tempting to construe Death Metal's appropriating them for its subject matter as serving to constitute it as a form of pop-culture inverted Futurism. However, when we recall the decontextualization that occurs in Death Metal's practice of eclecticism and combine it with the sub-genre's overall lack of popularity, the possibility of such a reading is largely negated.

<sup>115</sup> In his important work, *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche poignantly defines nihilism thus: "what does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why' finds no answer. Trans. Walter Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), p.9.

genuine predators, who having effectively set themselves “beyond good and evil,”<sup>116</sup> with no regard for human dignity or the sanctity of human life, “exploit others to get what they want for themselves.”<sup>117</sup>

Similarly assaulted by the nature of the crimes, or, more specifically, by the depiction and glorification of criminality in Death Metal’s lyrics, is rationality. For, the very nature of the criminals they depict and glorify is bereft of the sort of rational motivation that might serve to explain, and perhaps even mitigate, their actions. That is, as former FBI Supervisory Special Agent Robert Ressler explained when talking about serial killers:

There’s murder and then there’s murder. There’s murder that I think the average person can see as not justified but understandable. For example, a guy might rob a bank and kill a guard. He just wants to get away with it. Or two guys fight in a bar and a knife comes out. There are all sorts of homicides along those lines.

But when you get pure unadulterated repetitive homicide with no particular motive in mind, and nothing that would make it understandable as a gain, you have something beyond rational motivation. You just have evil incentive and evil tendencies. I’ve had the feeling in interviews with these killers that there’s something beyond what we can comprehend. With someone like Gacy or Dahmer, you’re dealing on a different plane of understanding.<sup>118</sup>

Owing largely to their overtly misogynistic nature, Death Metal’s lyrics also constitute an affront to egalitarianism in general and feminism in particular. In fact, it would be difficult to find another musical genre that manifests the futurist intention to glorify “the scorn of woman” to quite the same degree – a degree no doubt unconceivable by Marinetti and his early 20<sup>th</sup> century cohorts. Sure, Rap might objectify woman and talk about “smacking them around” from time to time, and, given its substantially greater degree of popularity, undoubtedly possesses more potential to subvert both general social

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<sup>116</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Helen Zimmern (New York: Dover Publications, 1997).

<sup>117</sup> Katherine Ramsland, *The Science of Vampires* (New York: Berkley Boulevard Books, 2002), p.213.

<sup>118</sup> Ressler further notes that: “when they’re stalking people looking for a victim, capturing them, and locking them up – some of them were kept for days and weeks – the emotion is gone. It’s a coolheaded decision. It’s very methodical. There’s no rage and the goal is just to get the victim in various ways and then eliminate them.” Op. cit. Ramsland, *The Science of Vampires*, p.211.



values and the feminist endeavour. Nevertheless, when juxtaposed with the depraved varieties of female-focused violence depicted by Death Metal, the violence depicted in Rap seems totally and utterly banal. After all, Death Metal is the sub-genre that sports album titles like Funeral Rape's *A Chainsaw in the Cunt*,<sup>119</sup> Disgorge's *She Lay Guttred*,<sup>120</sup> and song titles like Gorgasm's "Charred Vaginal Effluence."<sup>121</sup> It even sports songs, like Devourment's "Tomb of Scabs," in which the uses and degradation of the female body would appear to extend beyond death:

One by one I watch them die, my tomb holds more than meets the eye  
From rape to torture, beatings too, they die but I have more to do  
My urges force me to violate  
These bitches in their butchered state  
Slicing throats while I inject my bloodsoaked member  
Cumming into their slaughtered womb<sup>122</sup>

Clearly only designed to appeal to, or cater for, a niche market, Death Metal can also be seen to constitute an assault on both "opportunistic and utilitarian cowardice;" which, in the music industry is marked by an overwhelming commitment to producing and packaging music and musicians that will appeal to the masses (or rather, by the production of generic "crap" that doesn't run too great a risk of failing to generate a label's projected sales figures, and hence revenue). For, ever since its brief brush and fleeting success with the mainstream, which, as mentioned above, alienated a large portion of its underground fan base, Death Metal has remained committed to maintaining its artistic integrity to a degree that often extends beyond the simple struggle to regain credibility. In 2002, for instance, this was made evident by Mortician when they announced that their upcoming release, *The Darkest Day of Horror*,<sup>123</sup> would be their last through Relapse Records. For, rather than proffering some trumpeted up – publicity/credibility generating – inadequacy on Relapse's part as the reason for their decision to begin recording and releasing their material themselves, Mortician issued the

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<sup>119</sup> Funeral Rape, *A Chainsaw in the Cunt* (Redrum Records, 2004).

<sup>120</sup> Disgorge, *She Lay Guttred* (Unique Leader, 1999).

<sup>121</sup> Gorgasm, *Masticate to Dominate* (Unique Leader, 2003), track.5.

<sup>122</sup> Devourment, *Butcher the Weak* (No Label, 2005), track.4.

<sup>123</sup> Mortician, *Darkest Day of Horror* (Relapse Records, 2003).

following statement in a preemptive effort to insulate the label against any potential negative backlash from the fans:

Before you all get started with the rumors and what not, here's the deal. There was nothing really wrong with what **Relapse** has done for us and no argument or fights, we just wanted a little more control over our next few releases and want to do things 100% our way. We'd like to thank **Relapse** and everyone there for the outstanding work they've done for Mortician throughout the years. We wouldn't be where we are if it wasn't for you.<sup>124</sup>

And more recently, in a similar decision, Devourment decided to self-release their second full-length album, *Butcher the Weak*,<sup>125</sup> despite their previous success with their first release, *Molesting the Decapitated*,<sup>126</sup> through United Guttural Records and the Displeased and Unmatched Brutality re-releases of their *1.3.8.* compilation.

As futuristic as its instrumental and ideological dimensions might be when viewed individually, in the end Death Metal is at its most futuristic when its respective parts and dimensions are all viewed together – irrespective of the fact that its instrumental dimensions might be more noticeably futuristic than its ideological ones. This is because it is only in its entirety that it truly presents us with an example of mediocrity and complacency transcended, and of their concomitant feelings of security, safety, and acceptance deposed. It is, after all, only when heard in its entirety that it repels the casual listener or popular audience, and thus staves off the immediate and overwhelming success “that normally crowns [the] dull and mediocre works”<sup>127</sup> produced by popular music.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> “Mortician News,” URL: <http://morticianrecords.com/default.cfm?SiteMenu=Editorial&PageID=129>

<sup>125</sup> Devourment, *Butcher the Weak* (Self Released, 2005).

<sup>126</sup> Devourment, *Molesting the Decapitated* (United Guttural Records, 1999).

<sup>127</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Pleasure of Being Booed,” in R. W. Flint and A. A. Coppotelli trans and R. W. Flint ed, *Marinetti: Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), p.112.

<sup>128</sup> As Marinetti amusingly notes, while “Not everything booed is beautiful or new,” “everything applauded immediately is certainly no better than the average intelligence and is therefore something mediocre, dull, regurgitated, or too well digested.” Ibid, p.115.

## The Superficial Nature of Black Metal and Death Metal

Succinctly put, the term superficial is used to denote things that are either situated on a surface or fail to penetrate much deeper than the surface. Accordingly, when used in relation to Black Metal and Death Metal, it becomes an epithet that bespeaks of a lack of congruence between their respective proponents' theories and practices. Or, to put it another way, of the divergence that exists between the hyperreal nature of the music produced by our two sub-genres and the intention/reality underlying it. And, on one level at least, this presents us with the depreciating possibility of ultimately reading them as little more than forms of postmodern kitsch – pretentious and inferior forms of art having their genesis in bad taste.<sup>129</sup>

In the case of Death Metal, of course, in its most obvious form this lack of congruence is born out by an absence in the media of widespread, ongoing reports of strings of bizarre deaths, multiple homicides, serial murders, rapes and acts of cannibalism being committed by, or attributed to, its artists and proponents. This, however, does not mean, nor should it be taken to suggest, that nobody who listens to Death Metal commits murder or any other criminal acts. After all, Jamie Rouse, the perpetrator of the Richland School shootings, which took place in Giles County, Tennessee, on November 15th, 1995, was a fan of Death Metal behemoths Obituary, Deicide and Morbid Angel.<sup>130</sup> And, in an act that is the very stuff of Death Metal Lyrics, in 1995 Death Metal enthusiasts Jacob Delashmutt, Joseph Fiorella and Royce Casey choked and stabbed fifteen-year-old San Luis Obispo, California, resident, Elyse Pahler,

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<sup>129</sup> G. W. Davidson, M. A. Seaton & J. Simpson eds, *The Wordsworth Concise English Dictionary* (Great Britain: Wordsworth Reference, 1994), p.532; see also, J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Penguin Books 1982), p.352.

<sup>130</sup> "Media Triggers Teenage Killer," in *The Evidence Against Media Violence*, URL: <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/grossman.htm>; also see "School Killers," in *Crime Library: Criminal Minds and Methods*, URL: [http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial\\_killers/weird/kids1/index\\_1.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/serial_killers/weird/kids1/index_1.html)

to death, “returning later to have sex with her corpse.”<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, as Purcell accurately notes, such incidents constitute exceptions rather than the rule.<sup>132</sup>

However, having said this, what inhibits the majority of Death Metal Musicians and fans from engaging in homicidal acts is not so much a fear of the potential legal repercussions of such acts as the fact that the ideas expressed in the lyrics rarely reflect the band’s real views. Hence the reason any genuine enquiry into why it is that Death Metal bands employ such lyrics is likely to be met with one or more of the following responses: they’re not meant to be taken literally or seriously, they’re just there for shock value, they simply express a love of horror movies, or, they serve as fitting accompaniment to the aggressive nature of the music.<sup>133</sup> And hence the reason members of Death Metal bands will often go out of their way to reveal this underlying truth when the occasion demands. That is, when it is either lost on or eludes the sub-genre’s more impressionable members, or becomes an issue for melodramatic, or even simply skeptical, outsiders. After clearly having received some distasteful fan submissions for the first Devourment DVD, for instance, vocalist Mike Majewski was careful to post the following guidelines on their official site when eliciting fan submissions for their second: “There can be no hardcore porn and DO NOT send footage of hurting or killing animals.... No porn or harm to animals will be accepted.”<sup>134</sup> The fact that these guidelines amounted to more than a simple desire to avoid censorship issues was then made evident when, in the course of discussing fan submissions for the second DVD on the official Devourment fan forum, Mike Majewski issued the following warning: “don’t fucken kill animals or I’ll come to your house and slap the shit out of your dumb ass.”<sup>135</sup> While, in an interview with Metal Refuge, Cannibal Corpse vocalist, George Fisher, relates an anecdote about a boy whose parents had been extremely apprehensive about their son attending Death Metal show/gigs; but who, having had a chance to speak with

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<sup>131</sup> “In their defence, the trio said they had needed to commit a ‘sacrifice to the devil’ in order to give their then band Hatred, the ‘craziness’ to ‘go professional.’” “Slayer: The Pahler Case Drags On,” URL: <http://www.metalhammer.co.uk/news/article/?id=38940>

<sup>132</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.81.

<sup>133</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.123-132.

<sup>134</sup> Emphasis on “DO NOT” in original. “Devourment News,” URL: <http://www.devourment.us/news.htm>

<sup>135</sup> “Devourment DVD 2 Fan Submissiond,” URL:

<http://devourment.proboards7.com/index.cgi?board=138&action=display&thread=1119483447>

him (Fisher) after a show one night, had become satisfied that, despite its graphic exterior/trappings, the sub-genre was comprised of relatively good people.<sup>136</sup>

The obvious question that presents itself here is: why do Death Metalers continue to either produce or subject themselves to lyrics that are incongruent with their personal beliefs? The answer, of course, takes us back to the sub-genre's futurist outlook/ethos, which, in its challenge to live a vital, action-filled existence and put our trust in progress, promotes a clear distinction between acting rationally and having a rationale: rationality, or rational thinking, being that which subverts or impedes progress, and having a rationale, or rather theoretical explanation or solution, being that which promotes its achievement. For, in Death Metal, this translates into an obligation to give the ongoing quest for greater levels of extremity (i.e. the rationale/extremist logic) precedence over any reservations one might have about its lack of congruence with their personal views/beliefs (i.e. rationality). (The social and functional dimensions/implications of this rationale will be discussed in the final section).

In contrast to Death Metal, the distinct self-conscious Black Metal scene that began to coalesce during the late 80's and early 90's "attempted to merge music and practice as an expression of an 'essential' identity."<sup>137</sup> In fact, as mentioned above, in many ways Black Metal developed more as a quasi-Fundamentalist response to Death Metal's growing popularity worldwide than anything else. For, disillusioned by both the increasing amount of mediocre material being released and the sub-genre's overall lack of authenticity, Black Metal's Norwegian avant-garde came to realize that "the fanciful violence and bloodlust of Death Metal wasn't anything in itself—it must be made real, and become a means to an end, if it was to hold greater purpose."<sup>138</sup> Yet, several murders and multiple church burnings later, like Death Metal, it can still be seen to lack a meaningful degree of congruence between its theories and practices.

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<sup>136</sup> "Interview: George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher—Cannibal Corpse," in *Metal Refuge*, URL:<http://www.metalrefuge.com/interviews/ccgeorge.html>

<sup>137</sup> Kahn-Harris, "The 'failure' of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene," p.99.

<sup>138</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.32; In more religious language, of course, this amounted to a realization that orthodoxy (right belief) needed to be grounded in orthopraxis (right practice or action).

The first indication that Black Metal lacks a meaningful degree of congruence between its theories and practices is provided by the simple fact that it exhibits a lyrical spectrum that ranges from pure/uncontaminated Satanism at one end, through to strong, Pagan-predicated anti-Christian sentiments at the other. Primarily, this is because it manifests an absence of ideological ecumenicalism within the subgenre as a whole. This in turn betrays the absence of any real pervasive desire to develop what could be considered an orthodox theology, and thus the absence of any well developed ideological commitment. Concomitantly, it is not uncommon to find a certain fluidity of belief (or casual apostasy) and an accompanying historical revisionism. Prior to being arrested for the murder of Oystein Aarseth, for instance, the notorious Varg Vikernes portrayed himself as a dedicated Satanist and his church burnings as Satanic acts. However, after his arrest, and subsequent betrayal (i.e., being testified against) by his Satanic comrades, he began to recast his own ideology and acts as heathen rather than Satanic. In fact, “He increasingly downplayed the more childish Black Metal trademarks of ‘evil for evil’s sake’ and a simplistic blasphemous attitude toward Christianity, and replaced these with a more thoughtful, encompassing point of view. Instead of being dedicated to Satan ... [he] was now a comrade of the Norse high deity Odin, ‘the one-eyed enemy of the Christian God.’”<sup>139</sup>

Following on from this absence of any well developed ideological commitment and the fluidity of belief it has engendered/enabled, we find that, even amongst Black Metalers who seemingly subscribe to similar views/ideologies, there has been a concerted failure to generate the level of organization necessary to elevate the status of their shared beliefs from pop-cultural dabbling to organized religion. Of course, for Black Metalers who, ostensibly at least, have traditionally aligned themselves with the more purely Satanic end of the lyrical spectrum, this translates into a failure to convert simple cultural Satanism into a form of organized religious Satanism. In effect, then, this failure relegates their beliefs to the status of what can only adequately be described as pseudo-Satanism. And, importantly, there are participants who ultimately argue that that is all it

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<sup>139</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.160.

has ever really been. When interviewed by Moynihan and Soderlind for *Lords of Chaos*, for instance, former member of the innovative Norwegian Black Metal band Ulver, Erik O. Lancelot, emphatically stated that:

The source of Black Metal is Venom: beer-drinking, base-minded rabble, icons of heavy Metal idiocy. The essence of Black Metal is Heavy Metal culture, not Satanic philosophy. Just look at our audience: the average Black Metal record buyer is a stereotypical loser: a good-for-nothing who was teased as a child, got bad grades at school, lives off social welfare and seeks compensation for his inferiority complexes and lack of identity by feeling part of an exclusive gang of outcasts uniting against a society which has turned them down.<sup>140</sup>

This, however, should not be taken to suggest that Black Metalers have never tried to cultivate the impression of being substantially more organized than they actually are. After all, not long after Euronymous had opened his specialist record store, Helvete (Hell) in 1991, (which, as mentioned above, became the focal point of the Norwegian Black Metal scene) the name “Black Circle” was coined to refer to people who hung out there.<sup>141</sup> A name that seemingly bespeaks of clandestine high level organization, it not only inspired a sense of mystery and intrigue in many of the shop’s young and impressionable customers, but was duly exploited by the Norwegian media as the full extent of Black Metal scene’s extracurricular activities was gradually brought to light over the course of 1993.<sup>142</sup> This exploitation was not, however, a simple one-sided product of media opportunism; although, as Bard Eithun accurately noted, “The media loves these big scandals and always try to make the most out of it.”<sup>143</sup> Rather it was initiated by an interview Varg Vikernes gave the *Bergens Tidende* daily newspaper, which was subsequently summarized in an article whose headline read “We Lit the Fires.” For, in addition to repeatedly quoting him as speaking in the plural “we” and “our” when articulating his alleged views, the article records that he explicitly revealed that a core group of six people was responsible for all eight of the recent church burnings

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<sup>140</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, p.199.

<sup>141</sup> According to Bard Eithun, this referent was coined buy the shops patrons themselves. Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Los Angeles, CA: Feral House, 2003), p.68.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

in Norway.<sup>144</sup> In reality, however, despite the seriousness of the activities, including church burnings and murders, engaged in by some of the people who hung around Helvete, the level of organization attributable to the “Black Circle” could almost be considered non-existent. After all, not only did the “Black Circle” lack any official members, membership cards, or hold official meetings,<sup>145</sup> as Samoth of Emperor remarked: “Most of the actions were more or less ‘let’s do it tonight’ kinds of things...It was not like ‘Knights of the Round Table’...there was no formal meeting before any act would take place.”<sup>146</sup>

A third, although far less conspicuous, indication that Black Metal lacks a meaningful degree of congruence between its theories and practices is born out by Keith Kahn-Harris in his important article, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene.”<sup>147</sup> For in the course of demonstrating that the transgressive discourses and practices engaged in by Black Metal are “reflexive in that they demonstrate a considerable awareness of the structuration and politics of [sub-cultural] scenes and the wider society,” and that they are “anti-reflexive in that they willfully seek to exclude that awareness from [Black Metal’s] scenic practice,”<sup>148</sup> he unveiled the lack of congruence that exists between most Black Metaler’s public and private spheres. In particular, drawing much of his evidence from the lack of congruence that exists between individual Black Metaler’s private treatment of non-Aryans/whites and the racist discourse<sup>149</sup> that is so prevalent within the Black Metal scene, he was led to conclude that:

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<sup>144</sup> Finn Bjorn Tonder, “We Lit the Fires,” in *Bergens Tidende* (Janrurary 20, 1993), front page; This article is reproduced in its entirety in Moynihan & Soderlind’s, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, pp.379-381

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, p.68.

<sup>146</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.103.

<sup>147</sup> Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” pp.95-111.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p.106.

<sup>149</sup> As Kahn-Harris accurately notes, “Racist discourses are part of a wider set of transgressive discourses that are drawn of within extreme metal, including Satainsim, the occult and extreme.” Ibid, p.105.



The central paradox of the black metal scene is that almost anything is publicly sayable and potentially useable in discourse, yet almost any difference and conflict can be privately worked through...This produces a radical split between the public and private spheres. In the public sphere, essential transgressive identities and implacable stances are proclaimed. In the private sphere, identities are multiple and contingent and differences can be negotiated and accommodated. The private sphere ironizes the public sphere.<sup>150</sup>

But if the lack of congruence exhibited between Black Metal and Death Metal's respective proponents' theories and practices can lead us to conclude that, in the end, our two sub-genres are highly superficial in nature, this raises the question: What is it exactly that they offer their consumers? Or, perhaps more accurately, how is it that they function, and thereby factor into, their proponents lives?

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<sup>150</sup> Kahn-Harris, "The 'failure' of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene," p.103; In this sense, of course, the "transgressive identities" and "implacable stances" proclaimed by scene members in the public sphere largely become a type of performance – a public/ostensible orthopraxis.

Chapter three

## Black Metal and Death Metal as purveyors of an Alternative form of Modern Escapism

### **Escapism**

When looking at strict dictionary definitions of the term “escapism,” it is difficult not to get the impression that it is an exceedingly negative activity, which is primarily engaged in by those who do not possess the psychological fortitude or strength of character “to face facts – the real world.”<sup>1</sup> And, more over, that it is principally a mental, as opposed to physical, activity. The following definitions of escapism, for instance, are relatively representative of the standard fare:

Habitual diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment as an escape from reality or routine.<sup>2</sup>

The tendency to seek, or the practice of seeking, distraction from what normally has to be endured.<sup>3</sup>

Shirking unpleasant facts and realities by filling the mind with pleasing irrelevancies.<sup>4</sup>

Pursuit of distraction and relief from (esp. unpleasant) reality, esp. through fantasizing, immersing oneself in frivolous entertainments, etc.<sup>5</sup>

An inclination to retreat from unpleasant reality, as through diversion or fantasy.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, the problem with these impressions, and thus by implication the dictionary definitions of escapism, is that they not only ignore and obscure the pervasiveness and

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<sup>1</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Heather Gay et al. ed, *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (Great Britain: Longman, 1984), p.500.

<sup>3</sup> J. A. Simpson & E. S. C. Weiner ed, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Vol. 5 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.387.

<sup>4</sup> Betty Kirkpatrick ed, *The Cassell Concise English Dictionary* (London: Cassell, 1989), p.449.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Deverson ed, *The New Zealand Oxford Pocket Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.362.

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Sinclair ed, *Collins Concise English Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2001), p.491.

full scope of the practice of escapism, they simultaneously posit several ungrounded assumptions. Thus, it will be useful to begin this chapter with their deconstruction.

Contrary to the impression gained by the dictionary definitions of escapism, it is not an activity engaged in solely by unfortunate wretches with feeble psyches. Rather, it is a disposition of mind, and hence impetus for action, that is endemic to humanity as a whole. In fact, as Yi-Fu Tuan notes, “a Human being is an animal that is congenitally indisposed to accept reality as it is.”<sup>7</sup> And, in the broadest sense, the truth of this is borne out by the very existence of culture. For, through its myriad facets – such as “the manufacture and use of certain tools,” and the contrivance and transmission of thoughts, beliefs, habits, customs, and various other “skills and artifacts”<sup>8</sup> – not only has it enabled us to escape many of nature’s everyday severities, it has largely enabled us to escape our own animality.<sup>9</sup>

The corollary of this is that escapism is by no means always a purely mental/perceptual activity, whereby escape from an unsatisfactory condition, or the real world, is invariably achieved by distracting oneself with “purely imaginative activity or entertainment” – such as going to the movies or playing role-playing fantasy games like *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Vampire: the Masquerade*. In fact, physical escape is often a necessary prerequisite for psychological escape. After all, people would not be able to escape the sense of dread inspired by the thought of having to endure winter each year if they had not thought to physically buy or build well insulated and heated dwellings to escape to. Nor can people often escape financial hardship or poverty with out first physically engaging in activity that will generate them more income.

Moreover, just as the practice of escapism extends to more than simply “filling the mind with pleasing irrelevancies” or “immersing oneself in frivolous entertainments,” it also extends to more than simply escaping reality or the real. In fact, simply positing escapism as an inclination or tendency to divert one’s attention from reality obscures two

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<sup>7</sup> Tuan, *Escapism*, p.6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp.5-76.

important facts. The first of these is that there is no universally shared reality, or rather concept of reality, to escape. For all concepts of reality are ultimately culturally constructed, and therefore often culturally specific. Hence the emphasis within certain academic disciplines, such as Sociology and Anthropology, on Cultural Relativism: The “method whereby different societies or cultures are analyzed objectively without using the values of one culture to judge the worth of another.”<sup>10</sup> And the existentialist insistence that since there is no discernable meaning inherent in our existence, we are free to construct our own.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the second important fact obscured is that some people actually want to escape to, not from, “reality.” Many people, for instance, find life living and working in a city or town somewhat inauthentic/unreal, and thus desire to escape the trappings of culture and get back to nature; which is seen as somehow being more real/authentic. At one end of the scale, of course, this desire gets manifested in “such familiar and minor undertakings as the weekend camping trip to the forest and, more permanently, the return to a rural commune way of life.”<sup>12</sup> Whereas, at the other end of the scale, this desire is made manifest in events as historically significant as the “European Settlement of North America.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, many of the world’s religions posit the idea that life in this world is little more than a trial to be overcome; that the real life or existence to which we can aspire lies elsewhere. In Hinduism, in particular, material existence is considered the product of *maya* (illusion),<sup>14</sup> to which we are bound by *samsara*. Essentially an “endless cycle of birth and rebirth [reincarnation],” “each soul is subject [to *samsara*] until it obtains liberation (*mukti* or *moksha*) in *Brahman*”<sup>15</sup> – “the

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill & Bryan S. Turner eds, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p.58.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Mautner ed, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp.186-188.

<sup>12</sup> Tuan, *Escapism*, p.18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Frank Gaynor ed, *Dictionary of Mysticism* (New York: Philosophical library, 1953), p.109.

<sup>15</sup> Simon Weightman, “Hinduism,” in John R. Hinnells ed, *A New Handbook of Living Religions* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.266.

impersonal absolute or world soul that underlies the phenomenal diversity of the universe and is, at once, both immanent and transcendent.”<sup>16</sup> In short: the “ultimate reality.”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, for our purposes at least, in the end escapism might more accurately and usefully be defined as the endemic human tendency to either engage in activity or take steps to “change or mask an unsatisfactory condition,”<sup>18</sup> situation or issue.

### **Mainstream Escapism and the “Good Guys Always Win” Motif**

Mainstream, or perhaps more accurately pop-cultural, escapism encompasses everything from staying at home playing PlayStation or engrossing oneself in a great novel, through to going out to the movies, clubs or rugby. Of these diverse forms of mainstream escapism, however, it is the novel, movie, PlayStation game, and other similar means of escape that are the most relevant for this study. For unlike many other forms of pop-cultural escapism, not only do they serve to divert our attention from unsatisfactory conditions, they offer us a wide range of vicarious experiences. In fact, it is becoming increasingly difficult to conceive of a situation, environment or plot twist that has yet to find its way in to a novel, game or film of some description. Thus, as much as these mediums provide means of escape from unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues, they also possess the potential to help us deal with them at a step’s remove.

Of course, the most well known way in which such mediums have traditionally been believed to help us deal with unsatisfactory conditions/situations at a step’s remove is by serving as a catharsis for negative emotions. A hypothesis that finds its first expression in Aristotle’s *Poetics*,<sup>19</sup> it originally taught that:

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<sup>16</sup> Weightman, “Hinduism,” p.282. Historically, there have been two main ways by which *moksha* or liberation could be achieved. The first of these was by renouncing, and this turning away from, “the world.” The second was by fulfilling one’s *dharma* (sacred duty), which in practical terms involved acting in accordance with the “right way of living” prescribed for one’s particular class in society. Ibid, p.267. For an interesting example of how the change in emphasis to the second of these two means of obtaining *moksha* was articulated in popular Hindu culture, see Barbara Stoler Miller, trans & ed, *The Bhagavad-Gita: Krishna’s Counsel in Time of War* (New York: Bantam Books 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Suster, *The Legacy of the Beast: The Life, Work and Influence of Aleister Crowley*, pp.112-113.

<sup>18</sup> Tuan, *Escapism*, p.31.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans G. F. Else (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970).

viewing tragic plays gave people emotional release (*katharsis*) from negative feelings such as pity and fear. The tragic hero in a Greek drama did not simply grow old and retire – he often suffered a violent demise. By watching the characters in the play experience tragic events, the viewer’s own negative feelings were presumably purged and cleansed. This emotional cleansing was believed to benefit both the individual and society.<sup>20</sup>

During the closing decade of nineteenth century, this Aristotelian catharsis hypothesis “was revived by Sigmund Freud and his associates,”<sup>21</sup> who conjectured that pent-up/repressed “emotions could build up in an individual and cause psychological symptoms, such as hysteria or phobias.”<sup>22</sup> In fact “Freud’s therapeutic ideas on emotional catharsis form the basis of the hydraulic model of anger,” which “suggests that frustrations lead to anger and that anger, in turn, builds up inside an individual, similar to hydraulic pressure inside a closed environment, until it is released in some way”<sup>23</sup> – like exploding in an “aggressive rage.” Hence the reason, “A. A. Brill, the psychiatrist who introduced Freud’s psychoanalytic techniques to the United States, prescribed that his patients watch a prizefight once a month to purge their angry, aggressive feelings into harmless channels.”<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately, however, while the Aristotelian catharsis hypothesis remains the most well known of the ways in which such mediums have traditionally been believed to help us deal with unsatisfactory conditions/situations at a step’s remove, it has also proved to be the most ill founded, and thus potentially dangerous. For, in reality, as the last forty years worth of empirical studies carried out by psychologists on the effects of violent media on aggression lay testimony, the hypothesis is actually more of a “self-

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<sup>20</sup> Brad J. Bushman and Craig A. Anderson, “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” in *American Psychologist*, Vol. 56, No. 6/7 (2001), p.480.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Brad J. Bushman, Roy F. Baumeister & Angela D. Stack, “Catharsis, Aggression, and Persuasive Influence: Self-Fulfilling or Self-Defeating Prophecies?,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (1999), p.368.

<sup>23</sup> Brad J. Bushman, “Does Venting Anger Feed or Extinguish the Flame? Catharsis, Rumination, Distraction, Anger, and Aggressive Responding,” in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 28, No. 6 (2002), p.725 As Bushman notes, “modern theories of catharsis are based on this” hydraulic model of anger. Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Bushman and Anderson, “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” p.480.

defeating prophecy;” whereby “The expectation elicits behavior that produces results opposite of what was expected.”<sup>25</sup> In short, contrary to the musings of Aristotle and Freud, exposure to violent media, serves to heighten, rather than alleviate, purge, or dissipate, states of anger and aggression.

Nevertheless, the enduring failure of both the mass media and the psychological research community to adequately educate the public on the current/accumulated state of scientific knowledge relating to “the causal link between exposure to media violence and aggression”<sup>26</sup> has meant that the virtues of Aristotelian catharsis hypothesis have continued to be championed – especially by proponents of the horror genre in both its filmic and fictional manifestations. Writing in 1981, for instance, in his *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King averred that: “Much of the horror story’s attraction for us is that it allows us to vicariously exercise those antisocial emotions and feelings which society demands we keep stoppered up under most circumstances, for society’s good and our own.”<sup>27</sup> While elaborating on/concurring with King’s sentiments several years later, McNally wrote:

The aim of any horror story appears thus to be the Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of our emotions of fear and pity. If one lets the real and fictional monsters roam through the pages of literature and history or across the silver screen one is, in effect, feeding the monsters within us, so they will not have to burst forth hungry and ravenous into real life. As we all know, it is a wise man who keeps his animals fed.<sup>28</sup>

And more recently, in 2000, in her contribution to *The Horror Reader*, Barbara Creed asserted that:

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<sup>25</sup> Bushman, Baumeister & Stack, “Catharsis, Aggression, and Persuasive Influence: Self-Fulfilling or Self-Defeating Prophecies?,” p.368; Interestingly, as Bushman and Anderson note, “One possible reason for the early interest in a link between media violence and societal violence is that violence in the United States began to increase fairly dramatically in 1965, exactly when the first generation of children raised on TV began to reach the prime ages for committing violent crimes.” And by which time approximately 93% of American homes had TV sets. “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” pp.478, 477.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.486.

<sup>27</sup> Op. cit. McNally, *Dracula was a Woman: In Search of the Blood Countess of Transylvania*, p.164.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p.164.

Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images/being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, once having been filled with perversity, taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat).<sup>29</sup>

For our purposes, however, the most significant contemporary endorsement of the Aristotelian catharsis hypothesis occurs in Purcell's *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*. For having endorsed the cathartic potential of horror movies, and noted that (as mentioned above) they provide much of Death Metal's subject matter and inspiration, she concludes that the hypothesis/theory "might be applied to some Death Metal songs as well."<sup>30</sup>

That said, the real/primary way in which mediums like novels, movies and PlayStation games can function to help us deal with unsatisfactory conditions/situations at a step's remove is essentially by providing us with what Isabel Cristina Pinedo has identified in her work on horror movies as a "bounded experience."<sup>31</sup> That is the potential to vicariously experience unsatisfactory conditions/situations within clearly defined temporal and spatial limits. (The novel, after all, has its last page, the PlayStation game its final level, and, after an hour and a half or so, the movies end credits finally roll. And, of course, while the spatial limits of the vicarious experience afforded by the novel are marked by its cover, the PlayStation game's is generally marked by the television screen and living room walls, and the movie's, similarly, by the silver screen and theatre walls).<sup>32</sup> For by virtue of providing us with a bounded experience, such mediums are able to expose us to the various unsatisfactory conditions/situations "implicit in everyday life" – and their accompanying feelings of fear, horror, anxiety, depression and disappointment – without the unsatisfactory conditions/situations actually materializing.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, "[h]aving successfully, [albeit safely and vicariously,] undergone the ordeal, we [are able

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<sup>29</sup> Barbara Creed, "Kristeva, Femininity, Abjection," in Ken Gelder ed, *The Horror Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.66.

<sup>30</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.177.

<sup>31</sup> Isabel Cristina Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp.38-41.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp.41-42.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.40.



to] experience a sense of relief and mastery, proportionate to the intensity of the ordeal.”<sup>34</sup>

Of course, some of the unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues encountered in daily life are even too difficult to deal with at a simple step’s remove; or, more specifically, to confront on a conscious level. Yet, even in such cases, the bounded experience provided by such mediums, especially in their horror variants, can render such conditions/situations and issues emotionally accessible, and hence digestible, by enabling us to confront them in a fantastic realm or manner.<sup>35</sup> In particular, this is often accomplished through such means as dehumanizing them or transmuting them into monsters. “In *Night of the Living Dead*,” for example, as Pinedo notes, “the mindless malevolence of a racist society (...[in America] and Southeast Asia) is transmuted into the rampage of a group of zombies.”<sup>36</sup> In a similar manner, Len Wiseman’s 2003 vampire/werewolf movie hit, *Underworld*,<sup>37</sup> can easily be read as a metaphorical expose of the elitist fears, anxieties and ignorance that have traditionally surrounded racial integration and mixed unions. For it posits the Lycans<sup>38</sup> (werewolves) as the base, beastly and rebellious former slaves of wealthy, cultured, aristocratic vampires, and centers around a plot –formed by several of the more integration-inclined members of each species – to end their centuries-old-feud by disposing of the pro-segregation vampire rulers and creating a vampire/werewolf hybrid.

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<sup>34</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.41.

<sup>35</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.184.

<sup>36</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.39; For interesting analyses of George A. Romero’s 1968 classic, *Night of the Living Dead*, see Mikita Brottman’s, “Improper Burials, Unburied Memories: ‘*Night of the Living Dead*’ Resurrected,” in Andy Black ed, *Necronomicon*, Book Two (London: Creation Books, 1998), pp.139-144, and R. H. W. Dillard’s, “*Night of the Living Dead*: It’s Not Like Just a Wind That’s Passing Through,” in Gregory A. Waller ed, *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), pp.14-29.

<sup>37</sup> Len Wiseman, *Underworld* (Lakeshore Entertainment, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> The term Lycan is obviously a contraction of lycanthrope, a term used to denote a person suffering from Lycanthropy: a mental disorder characterized by the belief one can metamorphose into a wolf, and exhibiting behavior to that effect. J. C. Cooper, ed, *Brewer’s Book of Myth and Legend* (Oxford: Helicon, 1994), p.168. A term deriving from the Greek *lykanthropos* (wolfman), lycanthrope, and by extension lycanthropy, appear to be linguistic repercussions springing from the myth about the Arcadian King, Lycaon, and the god Jupiter recorded in *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*. For in that myth, Lycaon attempts to test the god Jupiter’s omniscience by feeding him human flesh, for which he is punished by being transformed into a wolf. Charloette F. Otten ed, *A Lycanthropy Reader: Werewolves in Western Culture* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), pp.3, 223, 227-230.

It should, however, be noted that such fantastic/dehumanizing means of rendering unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues more emotionally accessible, and hence digestible, are not confined to use by the novelist, screen writer and game developer. Rather, it is a practice that finds antecedents in the ways in which humans have historically responded to real atrocity, evil, and misfortune. In modern times, of course, this finds expression in the practice of regarding “evil people,” such as mass murders, serial killers, rapists and child molesters, as “monsters” – a practice made possible by simultaneously denying such people “all admirable human attributes.”<sup>39</sup> In fact, serving to maintain a conception of human nature palatable to the masses, it is a practice that works of the premise that “just as the term ‘human’ or its translated equivalent in a society refers to a field of possibilities, so the term ‘evil’ when applied to monsters denotes a field of human impossibilities.”<sup>40</sup> By contrast, a decidedly religious antecedent, which has served throughout history into the present, is found in the concept of Demonic inspiration/influence, which, as mentioned above, ultimately serves as a mitigating circumstance that detracts from appeals to personal responsibility. Thus, enabling us to avoid having to make “sense of actions that we cannot or do not want to explain in familiar [human] terms.”<sup>41</sup>

Another way in which the bounded experience provided by such mediums can serve to help us vicariously master unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues, or simply make them more emotionally accessible, is through repeated exposure. For, repeated exposure to such mediums, especially to a specific genre of film, game or fiction, “constitutes a process of socialization that seasons the audience member,”<sup>42</sup> gamer, and reader, and endows them with what Pinedo terms “insider knowledge.” That is, an intimate familiarity with such things as “narrative motifs ... character types ... camera work and musical codes that warn of impending violence.”<sup>43</sup> In fact, with serial

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<sup>39</sup> Pocock, “Unruly Evil,” p.51.

<sup>40</sup> Parkin, “Introduction,” p.12.

<sup>41</sup> Adam Morton, *On Evil* (London: Routledge, 2004),p.22.

<sup>42</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.44.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.44.

games, films and novels, in particular, like the *Resident Evil* <sup>44</sup>series, Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*,<sup>45</sup> and the *Halloween* movies,<sup>46</sup> the degree of insider knowledge can be exceptionally high. This is because they endow the serial player, audience, and reader, with very specific, privileged information about key characters, plotlines, and the geographical spaces in which they play out. As such, repeated exposure possesses the potential to provide "a measure of security" that works of the premise that "If we understand ... [any given medium], if we have some idea of what to expect, it becomes less menacing and we can [all the more easily] brave it."<sup>47</sup>

Of course, even within the confines of a single isolated game, movie or book, the gamer, audience member or reader occupies something of a privileged position, whereby they become privy to information not shared by all the characters within the particular medium. However, the value of such micro level insider information does not so much lie providing us with a corresponding measure of security as it does in drawing our attention to the multiple perspectives often provided by such mediums. That is, to the fact that such mediums often provide us with more than a simple one-dimensional-understanding of the unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues they portray; that they, in fact, often provide us with more of a spectrum of vicarious experience and understanding through having us identify with multiple characters. And this is significant, because it is a device that makes a substantial contribution to such medium's ability to make the conditions/situations and issues they deal with more emotionally accessible, and to their ability to help us to gain a degree of mastery over them, simply by providing us with a more well rounded take on them. True, many novels and older character based PlayStation games are very one-dimensional in nature – insofar as their narratives are extremely linear and related through a single perspective. Taken in isolation, for example,

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<sup>44</sup> See for instance, *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom, 1998), *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom, 1999), and *Resident Evil: Code: Veronica X* (Capcom, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> See for instance Anne Rice's, *Interview with the Vampire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), *The Vampire Lestat* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), and *Queen of the Damned* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> See for instance, John Carpenter's, *Halloween* (Compass International Pictures & Falcon Films, 1978), Rick Rosenthal's, *Halloween II* (De Laurentiis & Universal Pictures, 1981), and Dwight H. Little's, *Halloween IV: The Return of Michael Meyers* (Trancas International Films Inc, 1988).

<sup>47</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.45; In a sense, then, the acquisition of insider knowledge actually serves to domesticate the medium.

most of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* are merely fictional autobiographies of individual vampires;<sup>48</sup> while the first five *Tomb Raider*<sup>49</sup> games don't allow the possibility of playing as anyone other than the "tomb raider" herself, Lara Croft. Newer games, however, like *Killzone*<sup>50</sup> and *Resident Evil: Outbreak*<sup>51</sup> regularly offer the possibility of playing as different characters and concomitant experiential variation; while many other novels form a coherent narrative out of a bricolage of characters experiences. Bram Stoker's noteworthy 1897 classic, *Dracula*, in particular, accomplishes this through the clever use of a variety of fictional documents, which ranges from personal diary entries and letters through to newspaper clippings.<sup>52</sup> By contrast, movies have always invariably provided us with multiple perspectives, led their audiences into vicarious relationships and identifications with different characters, whether advertently or inadvertently, simply by virtue of employing multiple camera angles. For while more distanced shots, situated, as it were, outside of the action, may simply serve to constitute the audience member as voyeur,<sup>53</sup> as soon as the camera finds itself in the midst of the set things change. By having the camera looking over a hero's and then a criminal's shoulder, for instance, we involuntarily become comrades and accomplices respectively. Whereas, if the camera is used to substitute the individual gaze of these two character types, we become, in a sense, the hero or criminal themselves.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In particular see Rice's, *Interview with the Vampire, The Vampire Lestat, Pandora: New Tales of the Vampires* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), *The Vampire Armand* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), *Vittorio the Vampire: New Tales of the Vampires* (York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), and *Blood and Gold: The Vampire Chronicles* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> *Tomb Raider* (Eidos Interactive, 1996), *Tomb Raider II* (Eidos Interactive, 1997), *Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft* (Eidos Interactive, 1998), *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* (Eidos Interactive, 1999), *Tomb Raider: Chronicles* (Eidos Interactive, 2000).

<sup>50</sup> *Killzone* (Guerrilla, 2004).

<sup>51</sup> *Resident Evil: Outbreak* (Capcom, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (London: Constable, 1897); Not surprisingly Jeanne Kalogridis preserves this particular narrative technique in her "The Diaries of the Family Dracul" trilogy," which comprises of *Covenant with the Vampire* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1994), *Children of the Vampire* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995) and *Lord of the Vampires* (London: Headline Feature, 1996), and "expands on the text of *Dracula*, by providing a 'prequel'" to its narrative that finally begins to overlap with it in the third book. *Lord of the Vampires*, p.XII.

<sup>53</sup> As J. P. Telotte shows, even this voyeurist perspective often becomes subjective. The opening tracking shot of Halloween, for instance, lodges "its audiences perspective firmly in the subjective, voyeuristic view of six-year-old Michael Myers, who watches from outside his house as his sister and her boyfriend 'make out.'" "Through a Pumpkins Eye: The Reflexive Nature of Horror," in Gregory A. Waller ed, *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p.116.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.114-128; Interestingly, as Slavoj Zizek suggests in "In His Bold Gaze My Ruin is Writ Large," (extract), in Ken Gelder ed, *The Horror Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000) this forced identification

Finally, such mediums can function to help us deal with unsatisfactory conditions/situations at a step's remove, simply by employing what might be termed the "good guys always win" motif; which is largely predicated on an underlying moral that no matter how great the adversities encountered throughout the course of our lives may be, so long as either we or our cause be just, through perseverance and sheer will power we can prevail. Traditionally, of course, this motif has found its purist form of expression in films that conform to the classical – as opposed to postmodern – paradigm, which is characterized by narrative closure and clear cut boundaries between "good and evil, normal and abnormal, [and] human and alien."<sup>55</sup> For example, like the vampire horrors produced by Hammer during the sixties and seventies, most of which, unlike contemporary postmodern takes on the vampire (as embodied in the cinematic adaptation of Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*),<sup>56</sup> left little room to doubt that the vampire was an evil monster that had to be – and was – destroyed at all costs.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, while less pure in expression, films that conform to the postmodern paradigm commonly exhibit the "good guys always win" motif too. For while they invariably blur the lines between "good and evil, normal and abnormal, [and] human and alien,"<sup>58</sup> and eschew narrative closure to the point where they will occasionally allow adversity to triumph, they commonly employ at least two types of amenable open endings. The first of these is the temporary thwarting of adversity, as when, in the end, "the monster appears to be vanquished, [but] the film concludes with signs of a new unleashing."<sup>59</sup> For example, like at end of *Halloween*, when, having unloaded several rounds into Myers (Nick Castle), causing him to fall from a second storey balcony, Dr. Loomis (Donald Pleasence) looks over the railing to discover that his body has risen from its resting place on the

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with different characters is often less that subtle. In fact, he goes so far as to say that the change in focus from Marion to Norman Bates in Hitchcock's 1960 effort *Psycho*, which is wrought through Marion's surprise demise in the infamous shower scene, is so abrupt that it serves to sever the narrative line in such a way that "it is easy to imagine *two* 'rounded-off' stories, quite consistent in themselves, glued together in *Psycho* to form a monstrous whole." p. 75

<sup>55</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.15.

<sup>56</sup> Neil Jordan, *Interview with the Vampire* (Warner Bros,1994).

<sup>57</sup> See for instance Terence Fisher's, *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* (Hammer, 1965), and Roy Ward Baker's, *The Vampire Lovers* (Hammer, 1970).

<sup>58</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.31.

grass below and is no longer anywhere to be seen.<sup>60</sup> For a victory, however temporary its effects, is a victory nonetheless.<sup>61</sup> The second is when “the outcome is uncertain;”<sup>62</sup> as, for instance, is the case at the end of the original version of *Dawn of the Dead*, where Peter (Ken Foree) and Francine (Gaylen Ross) are finally forced to escape/flee their Zombie beleaguered shopping mall stronghold by helicopter with nowhere to go.<sup>63</sup> For, a fate unknown is still a fate of potential hope.

### **Embracing an Evil Alternative**

Like PlayStation games, novels, movies, and similar other mainstream mediums, Black Metal and Death Metal also provide a means of escape from unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues. However, while they similarly possess the potential to help us deal with unsatisfactory conditions/situation and issues in an indirect manner, the efficacy of the wide range of vicarious experience they tender to that end does not lie in enabling us to work through them at a simple step’s remove. Rather, it lies having us both identify with and embrace the perceived source of much hardship, oppression, strife, anxiety and fear: evil itself, in its myriad manifestations. Or, to put it another way, in having us both accept and radically embrace the fact that, in reality, the “good guys” *don’t* “always win.” In the case of Death Metal, of course, in stark contrast to most horror-based novels, movies and PlayStation games, this translates into an invitation for strict identification with the perpetrator – as opposed to the victim.<sup>64</sup> And this evil identification is made all the easier through the decontextualisation that Death Metal’s eclecticism engenders. For as we saw in the section on eclecticism, it sees perpetrators and acts of fictional evil extracted from the narrative/context in which they were originally situated and then employed without reference to the rules, termination or end that their original narrative/context either demanded from or imposed upon them. The

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<sup>60</sup> Carpenter, *Halloween*.

<sup>61</sup> And, of course, in the case of serial horrors like, *Halloween*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, this temporary thwarting of adversity never actually translates into Michael, Jason or Freddy’s eventual triumph, but rather into subsequent thwarting.

<sup>62</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.16

<sup>63</sup> In fact, in the DVD version of this 1979 classic, this final scene is aptly entitled “Escape to Nowhere.” George A. Romero, *Dawn of the Dead* (Umbrella, 2004), scene.23.

<sup>64</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.172.

corollary of this being that attention to the fact that the perpetrators they enjoy glorifying are often ultimately overcome – sometimes even sequel after sequel, as in the *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* series<sup>65</sup> – is circumvented, and the possibility of multiply or dual identification with the victims and their fear and suffering largely negated. In the case of Black Metal, on the other hand, this embracing of evil more commonly translates into identifying with either the “evil one” (the Devil) himself or one of his demons or minions, and is made all the easier by the promise of the eventual triumph of evil over good inherent in its strict inversion of Zoroastrian dualism.

Concomitantly, in contrast to many mainstream mediums of escape, the ability of the vicarious experiences offered by our two sub-genres to help us deal with unsatisfactory conditions/situation and issues in an indirect manner essentially lies in two things; the first of which is situating us beyond their grasp. Or rather, in tacitly instilling us with the belief that on some level if we become, identify, or align ourselves with evil it cannot befall us. And in this sense they merely function as extreme, albeit vicarious, forms of displacement – the practice of “displacing [potential subjection to] whatever is bad from self to others;”<sup>66</sup> which, in one of its most common manifestations, spectatorship, enables us to see “others in a shipwreck or car accident” and say to ourselves: “fate has struck else where. I am here not elsewhere; as a spectator I will always be safe.”<sup>67</sup>

Of course, Black Metal and Death Metal’s extreme variation on the practice of displacement, whereby the effects of evil are evaded by identifying with their source,<sup>68</sup> should not be considered without musical/lyrical precedent or parallel. For “by turning death, madness, and violence into archetypes,” ever since their origin in the late seventies, Goths have similarly “depersonalize[d] their connection to horrific events,” and positioned “themselves [more] as reporters or tour guides of the macabre” than “its

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<sup>65</sup> Jones, ed, *Clive Barker’s A-Z of Horror*, pp. 65-68, 155-162, 132-140

<sup>66</sup> Tuan, *Escapism*, p.134.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> In the case of Black Metal, of course, this extreme variation on the practice of displacement sets itself against the belief promulgated by late medieval and early modern European Demonologists (alluded to above in the section on Romanticism) that the Devil ultimately works the perdition of all his human servants. Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum*, p.130.

victims.”<sup>69</sup> In fact, in a rather extreme example, even when working “her own memory of an encounter with a child molester into a song,” Siouxsie, of Siouxsie and the Banshees, “casts herself not as nine-year-old Susan Ballion, but as the sex offender, ‘Candyman’ himself, who intones, ‘Oh trust in me my pretty one/come walk with me my helpless one.’”<sup>70</sup> However, in contrast to Goth music past and present, in Black Metal and Death Metal the focus/intention behind such reporting or tour guiding is the glorification of evil and the macabre – and hence grotesque one-upmanship. The corollary being that by consistently and relentlessly infusing us with such graphic descriptions and images of evil the tribulation and suffering endured by people, like the victims and survivors of sex crimes, is ultimately made to seem trivial.

The second thing that the efficacy of the vicarious experiences offered by our two sub-genres lies in is their potential to help us regain a sense of power and control over our lives. For, rather than lull us into remaining passive acceptors/victims of capricious fate, they invite us to both identify with and become active agents of change. And this is hardly surprising, given that the various people, monsters and spiritual entities they depict are commonly beings who have cast off the shackles of social or celestial propriety and convention imposed on them and willed themselves an existential meaning/purpose of their own contrivance. The Devil and his demons are, after all, the arch-rebels against divine authority, who, ever since their fall, are believed by some to have diligently and defiantly busied themselves with the despoilment of God’s creation. Similarly, serial killers are murders who not only lack the sort of *rational* motivation that might serve to explain, and perhaps even mitigate, their actions, but assert their own autonomy at the expense of extinguishing the autonomy of others. While the old Zombie is a taboo breaking quasi-cannibal<sup>71</sup> who is portrayed as existing in defiance of the finality of death.

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<sup>69</sup> James Hannaham, “Bela Lugosi’s Dead and I Don’t Feel So Good Either: Goth and the Glorification of Suffering in Rock Music” in Karen Kelly and Evelyn McDonnell, eds, *Stars Don’t Stand Still in the Sky: Music and Myth* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p.84.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> In point of fact, as an unidentified radio announcer points out on in the scene “Pure Motorized instinct,” from *Dawn of the Dead*, Zombies are not cannibals in the strictest sense of the term. For, as he notes, “cannibalism, in the true sense of the word, implies an intra-species activity. These creatures [the Zombies] cannot be considered human. They prey on humans; they do not prey on each other. That’s the difference. They attack, and they feed only, on warm human flesh. Romero, *Dawn of the Dead*, scene.12.



Of course, in the case of Black Metal, this vicariously generated sense of power and control over one's life is subtly facilitated by a worldview that eschews, and thus provides a means of escape from, capricious fate. For, by virtue of being parasitic on Christianity, the Satanic worldview espoused by Black Metal is one that – at least until such time as the powers of light are finally subverted – is tacitly bound up in a supernatural order of cause and effect; wherein the evil suffered in this life gets construed as one's recompense for sin (moral evil). And wherein, in theory at least, through controlling one's actions one can control the amount of hardship/suffering they are subjected to over the course of their life. Accordingly, for those willing to identify with it strongly enough, Black Metal's Satanic world view presents the possibility of framing/exalting any personal suffering or hardship that manages to evade escape through evil identification as the pangs of a would-be martyr who is prepared to suffer for the cause. In short, in a very real way, it is a highly mechanistic worldview that is "psychologically much more appealing [and palatable] than" its secular/enlightened alternative.<sup>72</sup>

By contrast, in the case of Death Metal, this vicariously generated sense of power and control over one's life is facilitated, and potentially augmentable, by the very real possibility of going beyond simple identification with the perpetrator and actually playing into the human tendency to deny those it deems monsters such "admirable human attributes"<sup>73</sup> as compassion, mercy, or the ability to either empathize and sympathize with the suffering of others. That is, by the possibility of cultivating, or rather opening oneself up to, what can only be described as a functional, situation-specific sociopathy; whereby, when facing unsatisfactory conditions/ situations or issues, the people and events generating them can simply be denied emotional investment and re-framed as mere objects and obstacles to be overcome. Although, in practice, as the lack of media worthy crimes committed by Death Metalers indicates they understand, this would clearly be an inherently dangerous mindset to adopt to any serious degree. For, as Morton notes, while the sociopath "takes no pleasure at harming or humiliating others," he or she is

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<sup>72</sup> Macfarlane, "The Root of all Evil," p.60.

<sup>73</sup> Pocock, "Unruly Evil," p.51.

nevertheless indifferent if the pursuit of their “own ends results in harm or humiliation to another.”<sup>74</sup>

Of course, moving beyond talking in terms of mere potential, there are several important, easily identifiable ways in which both Black Metal and Death Metal have manifestly functioned to enable many of their proponents to regain a sense of power and control over their lives, and thereby escape unsatisfactory conditions. Foremost amongst these has been their ability to facilitate the transmutation of many of their proponents’ worldly status/identity from marginal by default to autonomous transgressor. For, if we combine Erik O. Lancelot’s extremely negative, albeit concise, summary of the stereotypical Black Metaler recorded above with the stereotypical description of the typical Death Metaler found in Purcell’s work,<sup>75</sup> we find that we are dealing with a group of people who have been unable or unwilling to prosper/prevail in contemporary society through conventional means. They are not generally, for instance, the guys who do well at school or sports, get the girl, have a popular social circle, or have great careers or career prospects. Accordingly, prior to becoming involved in either the Black Metal or Death Metal sub-cultures, their marginal status was something that was, in a sense, foisted on them. However, by virtue of becoming members of either the Black Metal or Death Metal sub-cultures, they willingly begin to both identify with and glorify their transgressive discourses – in effect becoming transgressors themselves. And this is an important distinction with definite social implications. For, as Chris Jenks notes:

We cannot, without eroding the power and import of the concept [of transgression] ...conceive of a transgressive act where the individual was driven to it by the past, by forces out of his or her control. This would be a life of marginalization not a life on the edge. If boundaries, prohibitions and taboos are to be tested in a transgressive manner then the relationship between the perpetrator and the act must be willful and intended, not accidental or unconscious.<sup>76</sup>

Another important way in which both Black Metal and Death Metal have functioned to enable many of their proponents to regain a sense of power and control

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<sup>74</sup> Morton, *On Evil*, p.49.

<sup>75</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.185.

<sup>76</sup> Jenks, *Transgression*, p.177.

over their lives, is by allowing them to assume a primary identity of their own choosing, and thereby enabling them some measure of escape from the generic identities imposed on them by their socio-economic background/class or race. Significantly, not only do they furnish their proponents “with an identity [that comes] complete with clothes and hairstyle; [t]hey also offer a peer group that has few requirements for entry.”<sup>77</sup> Would-be Black Metalers and Death Metalers do not, for instance, “need to be scholars or athletes, or even have musical talent”<sup>78</sup> to gain acceptance by the other members of their respective sub-cultures. Granted, in the strictest sense, Black Metal and Death Metal can not exactly be considered unique in this regard. For, as Andy Bennett notes, ever since the advent of post-WWII consumerism, “the increased spending power of the young” has offered them “the opportunity to break away from their traditional class-based identities” by “facilitating and encouraging experimentation with new, self-constructed forms of identity.”<sup>79</sup> However, in contrast to other sub-cultures or youth cultures, with Black Metal and Death Metal the sense of power and control gained through the simple act of choosing one’s own identity is augmented by their extreme and largely unapologetic natures. For they elude justification on socially acceptable, or at the very least palatable, grounds. Their proponents cannot, after all, legitimately rationalize identification with their transgressive discourses by appeals to political activism, like Punks, or retreat under the innocuous veil of the pensively melancholic, like Goths. Nor would they want to. True, Death Metalers might occasionally attempt to brush off external concerns about their sub-genre’s lyrical content by averring that it isn’t meant to be taken seriously, and even admit that the ideas they express don’t necessarily reflect their own personal views. But, then, the effect thus generated is not so much mitigation as a greater degree of confusion. For, despite such claims, revelations, and the lack of congruence they engender, the fact remains that, for most “Death Metal fans, the horror lifestyle is, above all, about reaffirming one’s brutality, one’s capacity to face... mock [and ultimately identify with] terrors that others shrink from.”<sup>80</sup> In fact, as Purcell notes, “[a]sk any

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<sup>77</sup> Kevin J. Took & David S. Weiss, “The Relationship Between Heavy Metal and Rap Music and Adolescent Turmoil: Real or Artifact?,” in *Adolescence*, Vol. 29, No. 115 (1994), p.620.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Andy Bennett, “Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the Relationship Between Youth, Style and Musical Taste,” in *Sociology*, Vol.33, No.3 (August, 1999), p.602.

<sup>80</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.186.

young Death Metal fan what the ultimate compliment is, and the response will probably be ‘brutal.’ The more insecure the boy, the more he wants to be brutal...and *nothing* is more brutal than Death Metal.”<sup>81</sup>

Finally, for the younger members of both sub-cultures, assuming primary identification as a Black Metaler or Death Metaler can, in turn, further serve to help regain a sense of power and control over one’s life by providing a sense of meaning, belonging and clear cut identity where society has provided them none. That is, it can help/serve to fortify oneself against, and provide some measure of mental/psychological escape from, that liminal phase of life<sup>82</sup> – “created quite recently in the West” – known as adolescence. And this is significant. For, as a transitional zone that “describes the twilight arena of crypto-adulthood and quasi-childhood,”<sup>83</sup> adolescence constitutes “a lack of status that is defined by ungovernable mayhem,”<sup>84</sup> and that essentially arises out of a lack of structural referents. After all, if one is not a child, nor an adult, too old to be under strict parental patronage, yet too young to effectively fend for one’s self, to marry, or otherwise become a truly meaningful or contributing member of society, where does that leave one if not, as Jenks notes, in a site/state of social ambiguity and “value-less, nihilistic freefall...where almost anything can [and often does] happen[?]”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Italics in original. Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.185.

<sup>82</sup> The concept of liminality derives from Arnold Van Gennep’s, *Les Rites de Passage*, and was appropriated and expanded on by Victor Turner. In its strictest application, it is predicated on the notion, or rather recognition, that transition rituals accompany every change of state, social position, or point of age,” and that they essentially comprise of three phases: 1) separation, wherein one is effectively severed from ones existing state, position, or age, 2) Liminality, a middle period, wherein one neither occupies their old nor future state, and 3) reaggregation, wherein one is reintegrated into society in their new role or position. Jenks, *Transgression*, p.44.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p.43.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p.44.

## **A Desensitizing Ethos of Utter Indifference**

Nowadays, it is more or less common knowledge “that the most insidious and potent effect of media violence is to desensitize all of us to real life violence”<sup>86</sup> – to undermine the feelings of concern, empathy or sympathy we might otherwise have for its victims.<sup>87</sup> And this is a very real downside to the ability of contemporary horror-based movies, novels and games to provide us with a means of escape from unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues, and to help us deal with them at a step’s remove through the wide range of vicarious experience they provide. In the case of Black Metal and Death Metal, however, it is not so much a downside that mars their more positive/empowering dimensions as it is a tacitly desired means of augmenting them. In fact, their practice of primary identification with the perpetrators of violence, of embracing evil through lyrics and imagery that both glorify violence and decontextualize it from its negative consequences, almost seems specifically designed to effect heightened degrees of desensitization – or rather, a desensitizing ethos of utter indifference to the plight and suffering of others. And this is important, because it is an effect or ethos whose integration into the worldview, disposition or character of individual Black Metalers and Death Metalers is facilitated by two significant facts/means that possess the potential to see it have more enduring effects than those generated by other desensitizing mediums.

Primary amongst these is the fact that the range of vicarious experience offered by both Black Metal and Death Metal is not bounded to the same extent as that offered by novels, games, movies and other similar contemporary mediums. True, there are music videos and MTV, which provide as bounded an experience as any novel, PlayStation game or horror movie. One can even remain seated in the same room as their stereo while they are listening to it. And, of course, all individual albums and songs, whether they are

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<sup>86</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education, “Media Violence,” in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 108, No. 5 (November, 2001), p.1223.

<sup>87</sup> Barbara J. Wilson, Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz, Dale Kunkel, James Potter, Stacy L. Smith, Eva Blumenthal, and Tim Gray, “Content Analysis of Entertainment Television: The Importance of Context,” in James T. Hamilton ed, *Television Violence and Public Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), p.22.

by Black Metal bands, Death Metal bands, or anyone else, have temporally finite durations. However, with the existence of car stereos, walkmans, Discmans and mp3 players music has largely transcended temporal and spatial bounds of consumption and become more of a transportable soundtrack for daily living. Hence, unlike other desensitizing mediums, Black Metal and Death Metal are not limited to being able to influence our behavior post exposure. Rather, they are frequently provided the opportunity to effect our behavior/interactions with our environment during the course of exposure, and thus when their effects are more likely to be at their height.

The second fact is that Black Metal and Death Metal albums are rarely listened to once by their owners. Rather, when they are new, just like any other type of album, they are more likely to be thrashed. That is, listened to over and over again in multiple contexts. Accordingly, they would appear to be better suited than most other desensitizing mediums for generating the sort of cumulative and consistent exposure necessary to both form and perpetuate a negative/desensitizing ethos or ideology. This is especially true when we take into consideration the fact that people generally like a number of different bands, and that there is always a steady influx of new albums available for consumption. Or, perhaps more importantly, when we take into consideration the fact that, as with other mediums, repeated exposure to Black Metal and Death Metal also constitutes a process of socialization that seasons its proponents and endows them with insider knowledge. For the decontextualization and extremist quest that plays out in their lyrics means that, unlike the insider knowledge generated through repeated exposure to other mediums, the insider knowledge generated through repeated exposure to Black Metal and Death Metal does not so much provide a “measure of security” that makes them all the more easy to brave. Rather, it creates the expectation that each succeeding album will attain a greater level of perversity than the last – in effect, generating cumulative levels of desensitization through anticipation.

All this talk of cumulative effects, however, should not be taken to suggest that a relatively short amount of exposure to violent media can not have any negative or desensitizing effects; because it can. In their experimentation on “The Effects of Sexually

Violent Rock Music,” for instance, St. Lawrence and Joyner determined that as brief a period as 17 minutes exposure was sufficient to increase males’ sex-role stereotyping and their acceptance of violence against women.<sup>88</sup> While, in their experimentation on the “Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Violent and Sexually Degrading Depictions of Women,” Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod found that watching as few as two R-rated violent films “(the equivalent of about 3 hr of viewing time and approximately 20-25 violent acts)...[was] sufficient to obtain a desensitization effect similar to that obtained after five movies.<sup>89</sup> It is, however, an acknowledgment that the maximum detriment derivable from any desensitizing medium can only come through repeated exposure. And, in the case of music, the truth of this is indicated not only by the fact that “listening preference increases as a result of repetition,”<sup>90</sup> but by the fact that both retention of and familiarity with content and ideas similarly increases with repetition.<sup>91</sup> While, in the case of R-rated, violent horror movies, it is born out by the fact that greater levels of exposure are necessary to generate a diminished ability to empathize with victims of rape in general than are necessary to generate a diminished ability to sympathize with a specific victim.<sup>92</sup>

It should, nevertheless, be noted that not everybody sees Black Metal and Death Metal’s desensitizing potential as an unequivocal downside to their more positive/empowering dimensions. Natalie Purcell, in particular, has even gone so far as to argue that “[i]n a very violent society, it can provide a coping mechanism for the sensitive inhabitants of a violent world.”<sup>93</sup> And this is an idea which is easily encompassed or accommodated by the idea of embracing evil – of escaping/insulating oneself against the effects of evil by identifying with it. Unfortunately, it is also an idea

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<sup>88</sup> Janet S. St. Lawrence & Doris J. Joyner, “The Effects of Sexually Violent Rock Music On Males’ Acceptance of Violence Against Women,” in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1991), pp. 58-61.

<sup>89</sup> Daniel G. Linz, Edward Donnerstein & Steven Penrod, “Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Violent and Sexually Degrading Depictions of Women,” in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 55, No. 5 (1988), p.765. Interestingly, the collection of R-rated violent films used in Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod’s experimentation were all of the “Slasher” variety. Specifically, they used “*Maniac*, *Toolbox Murders*, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, Part 2, Nightmare*” and “*Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.” Ibid, p.761.

<sup>90</sup> St. Lawrence & Joyner, “The Effects of Sexually Violent Rock Music On Males’ Acceptance of Violence Against Women,” p.60.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, “Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Violent and Sexually Degrading Depictions of Women,” p.766.

<sup>93</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.141.

that fails to acknowledge the fact that, much like the postmodern horror movie, Black Metal and Death Metal are ultimately mediums that depict “a universe out of control where extreme violence is endemic and virtually unstoppable;”<sup>94</sup> and thus that they ultimately contribute to the cultivation of what the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education terms the “mean world” syndrome,” which causes people to perceive the world as being a decidedly more dangerous place than it actually is.<sup>95</sup>

Unfortunately, in the end, there is only limited value in demonstrating that Black Metal and Death Metal possess greater desensitizing potential than most other mediums. For few people subject themselves to a single medium to the exclusion of all others. Rather, most people routinely subject themselves to multiple mediums. (Indeed, in a very real way, Black Metal and Death Metal actually exist as testimony to this fact – being as they are eclectic composites of other media). Hence, the cumulative effects being generated through repeated exposure to individual mediums are often being compounded by multiplicity. And this is significant, because, as the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Public Education makes clear, the combined time spent exposed to various forms of violent, desensitizing media over the course of a single day is often substantial:

American children between 2 and 18 years of age spend an average of 6 hours and 32 minutes each day using media (television, commercial or self-recorded video, movies, video games, print, radio, recorded music, computer, and the internet). This is more time than they spend on any other activity, with the exception of sleeping. When simultaneous use of multiple media is accounted for, that exposure increases to eight hours a day. A large portion of this media exposure includes acts of violence that are witnessed or “virtually perpetrated” (in the form of video games) by young people. It has been estimated that by age 18, the average young person will have viewed 200, 000 acts of violence on television alone.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.65.

<sup>95</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education, “Media Violence,” p.1223.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, p.1222.



Chapter Four

## The (Potential) Social Effects of Black Metal and Death Metal

### Lyrical Efficacy

When it comes to looking at Black Metal and Death Metal's potential to generate negative social effects, it is obvious that we need to take into consideration the multiple means they have available to them; from promotional videos through to album cover, t-shirt and poster art – all of which can be extremely graphic in nature. However, having said this, given their nature and content, it is hardly surprising that “[m]ost critics cite the lyrics of Death Metal [and Black Metal] as their reason for condemning [them],”<sup>1</sup> and for believing that they possess the potential to generate highly undesirable/negative social effects. Nor is it surprising that, as a result, a number of arguments attempting to downplay the potential of Black Metal and Death Metal's lyrics to generate negative social effects have also arisen. Accordingly, it will be useful to begin this final chapter by taking a look at the validity of these arguments.

Among the most common of these arguments, is the fact “that the lyrics in Death Metal [and Black Metal] are most frequently unintelligible.”<sup>2</sup> That is, sung in a fashion that generally renders them indecipherable. The implication being that since they cannot be heard clearly, they cannot reasonably be impugned with generating any real effects – negative or otherwise. And this is an argument that would appear to be further bolstered by the fact that, as Anderson and Carnagey note, “[a] large portion of time spent listening to music involves paying attention to the music (not the lyrics) or to other tasks.”<sup>3</sup> For it suggests that the “effects of violent lyrics may generally be attenuated (relative to video-

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<sup>1</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson & Carnagey, “Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs with Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings,” p.960.

base media violence) simply because the lyrics are not processed by the listeners.”<sup>4</sup> However, in refutation of both of these objections to the potential of music with violent lyrics to have negative effects, Anderson and Carnagey note two important points. First, that “listeners are capable of recognizing themes of music (i.e. violence, sex, suicide, and Satanism) even when it is difficult to comprehend the specific lyrical content.”<sup>5</sup> And second, that while the lyrics might not usually be listened to particularly attentively (whether it be because one’s focus is directed more towards the music itself or elsewhere), the fact “that music stimuli are played repeatedly...by listeners themselves”<sup>6</sup> means that they are commonly provided ample opportunity to get picked up on. What’s more, while Black Metal and Death Metal might get played on specialized Metal oriented radio or MTV shows (which are usually relatively short in duration and aired late), they are not really the types of music that you will generally have occasion to be subjected to unless you actively seek them out (i.e. actively watch/listen to specialty shows, go to gigs, or buy albums and other merchandise); and thus either already know what they are all about or possess a willingness to find out.

In an attempt to bolster the argument that, since Black Metal and Death Metal’s lyrics cannot be heard clearly, they cannot reasonably be impugned with generating any real effects, Purcell further notes that “many devoted Death Metal [and Black Metal] fans would be unable to recite the lyrics of even their favorite bands.”<sup>7</sup> And, in reality this is true. In fact, it is as true for fans of Death Metal and Black Metal as it is for fans of any other music genre. In the case of Black Metal and Death Metal, however, this cannot reasonably be read as an indication that, by and large, their fans don’t really know what it’s all about. For, as types of music that their proponents commonly have to go out of their way to acquire, they are rarely heard in absolute isolation from any sort of exposure to their accompanying album art or song titles, the graphic nature of which leaves little to the imagination. Having seen the pentagram that adorns the cover of Dimmu Borgir’s

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson & Carnagey, “Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs with Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings,” p.960.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid; see also C. H. Hansen & R. D. Hansen’s interesting study, “Schematic Information Processing of Heavy Metal Lyrics,” in *Communication Research*, Vol. 18 (1991), pp.373-411.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson & Carnagey, “Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs with Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings,” p.960.

<sup>7</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.39.

*Death Cult Armageddon* album,<sup>8</sup> for instance, one would hardly need to have read or committed its lyrics to memory to know that they are Satanically orientated. Nor, having seen the spectacle of a fetus freshly carved from the womb of its mutilated mother by two Zombie looking butchers, which adorns the cover of Cannibal Corpse's *Butchered at Birth* album,<sup>9</sup> would one need to have read or committed its lyrics to memory to know that they center around gore and sexual perversity.<sup>10</sup>

Closely related to this argument, and in Purcell's mind further attenuating our ability to impugn Black Metal and Death Metal's lyric's with possessing the potential generate any real negative social effects, is the fact that, "[o]ften, their lyrics are poorly written (or even composed by foreign band members with little grasp of the language in which they write)."<sup>11</sup> The implication here being that where written lyrics lack coherence, and hence intelligibility, they will either fail to convey any real meaning at all or be misinterpreted. And it is tempting to similarly dismiss this notion on the grounds that the graphic nature of their accompanying album art and song titles renders an exact knowledge/understanding of their lyrical contents unnecessary; or even simply argue that album art and song titles often serve as highly effective auxiliary tools for lyrical exegesis. However, doing so would gloss over several important points; the first of which is the fact that misinterpretation has never been tantamount to negating a given mediums potential to generate social effects – negative or other wise. Take Christianity's 2000 year history, for instance. It has been plagued by dissent and reform, and thereby generated a myriad of denominations, almost purely because its proponents have never been able to establish an ecumenical consensus on what the scriptures actually mean.<sup>12</sup>

The second important point is that when gross or routine lyrical misinterpretation does occur, it is more likely to occur in the context of people whose clique of friends or sub-culture isn't centered round the music it listens to, than within the context of those

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<sup>8</sup> Dimmu Borgir, *Death Cult Armageddon* (Nuclear Blast, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Cannibal Corpse, *Butchered at Birth* (Metal Blade Records Inc, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> In fact, with band names like Cannibal Corpse and album titles like *Butchered at Birth*, which serve as adequate enough statements of intent/content in and of themselves, there is almost a sense in which graphic song titles and cover art become superfluous.

<sup>11</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.39.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Dr. Tim Dowley ed, *The History of Christianity* (England: Lion Publishing, 1977).

whose does. For, as Jeffrey Victor notes, such groups often colour their lyrical interpretation/meaning with their own values and preconceptions. Hence, if a person's non-music-based sub-culture or "clique values symbols of aggression, he or she is likely to find them in the kind of music they prefer to listen to regularly"<sup>13</sup> – irrespective of whether they are there to be discerned or not. In the case of the Black Metal and Death Metal subcultures, however, because new members undergo a process of socialization that moulds their values, preconceptions and expectations in accord with those both held and expressed by their respective sub-culture at large, more routinely accurate lyrical interpretation is naturally facilitated.

This, however, is not to suggest that there are never any levels of interpretation, or layers of meaning, to be discerned in Death Metal or Black Metal Lyrics. For, as the section on eclecticism above made evident, a true appreciation of their lyrics can only come through a high degree of familiarity with their diverse sources, which is something that is naturally only developed over time. As such, many lyrics are capable of both a literal and esoteric reading. On the most literal/superficial level, for instance, it is easy to discern that Deicide's song "Dead by Dawn" centers around a Grimoire (handbook on magic) called the *Necronomicon*, whose incantations possess the power to call forth demons that will literally render you "Dead by Dawn."<sup>14</sup> However, the person acquainted with its source material also knows that everything from the song's title and chorus through to the Grimoire on which it centers has been appropriated from Sam Raimi's 1987 horror classic, *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn*,<sup>15</sup> which in turn was inspired by both the fictional writings of Howard Phillip Lovecraft and the pseudo-editions of the *Necronomicon* to which they gave rise.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the songs on Mortician's albums employ samples from the movies on which they are based as intros frequently enough that, when listening to them with others, you could almost turn guessing which movie they have been taken from into a game aimed at testing their knowledge about B-grade horror.

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<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), p.171.

<sup>14</sup> Deicide, *Deicide* (RC/Roadrunner Records, 1990), track.4.

<sup>15</sup> Sam Raimi, *Evil Dead 2: Dead by Dawn* (Renaissance Pictures, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> See for instance the Simon., ed, *Necronomicon* (New York: Avon Books, 1980).

The third important point is that any attempt to attenuate the potential of Black Metal and Death Metal lyrics for generating negative social effects on the grounds that they are poorly written/unintelligible/incoherent, and therefore prone to misinterpretation or incapable of conveying any real meaning, serves to obscure their functional dimension. That is, the substantial contribution they make towards preserving the exclusivity, and hence elitist natures, of the Black Metal and Death Metal sub-cultures.<sup>17</sup> For such attempts effectively deny that the ideology and vulgarity expressed through Black Metal and Death Metal's respective lyrics can play any real part in keeping the two sub-cultures pure. In reality, however, they combine with the graphic nature of Black Metal and Death Metal art and the extreme nature of the music itself to ward off outsiders by generating feelings of shock, indignation and repulsion; and thereby protect "the solidarity, identity, and subcultural status of scene members."<sup>18</sup>

Finally, it would appear that the majority of arguments attempting to downplay the potential of Black Metal and Death Metal's lyrics to generate negative social effects are predicated on the assumption that the music can't generate any negative social effects in and of itself. This, however, isn't necessarily the case. In their study on the effects of sexually violent rock music, for instance, St. Lawrence and Joyner variously assigned each of their 75 male participants to listen to a brief selection of five songs from one of three music genres: violent Heavy Metal Rock, Christian Heavy Metal Rock, or Easy-

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<sup>17</sup> Significantly, as Purcell notes in relation to Death Metal: "[I]n being exclusive, the metal scene is not trying to be elitist in the traditional sense of the term. They want to exclude from their scene those who might judge and rate them. Metal is not about classes and status. It is about non-status, if you will (just as Pariahs of the Indian class system were not a class *per se* but were classified as being classless). If those who believe in the class system and have elitist ideas were to enter the scene, what would happen to it? There could occur the introduction of a class system based on competition for inherent qualities. This is what metal heads reject because they do not want to be subject to and defined by such judgments... In short, there can be no classes in metal. A fan is not metal based on how scary he looks or on how many T-shirts he owns; he is metal depending on how metal he feels, how enthusiastic and passionate about the music he is. Thus, ironically, to keep judgments and classifications out, there must be exclusivity. That exclusivity is established through vulgarity. The judgmental 'perfect' people will not invade and divide the scene into a hierarchy because they are repulsed by it. Better yet, metal people cannot be considered inferior to those status symbols in American society because metal heads are completely outside of the social class system and are inside their own classless system. The competition is eliminated because the opponents are no longer playing the same game." *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.112 -113

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p.112.

listening Classical. And of these 75 participants, an overwhelming 88% not only “reported a personal preference for music other than heavy metal rock”<sup>19</sup> of either violent or Christian variety, but were determined to have had limited prior exposure to these two genres. The corollary being that the majority of the study’s participants lacked any real familiarity with either violent Heavy Metal Rock or Christian Heavy Metal Rock’s lyrical messages. Nevertheless, after 17 minutes exposure to their assigned medium, participants who had listened to selections from either of these two genres exhibited similarly increased inclinations to sex-role stereotype.<sup>20</sup> That is, to agree with statements like “A woman should never contradict her husband in public.”<sup>21</sup> Thus suggesting that, in this particular study at least, “sexually violent lyrical content did not produce significant elevations beyond those produced by the [sonic effects of the] heavy-metal music medium alone.”<sup>22</sup> St. Lawrence and Joyner were, however, careful to note that “[p]articipants lack of familiarity with the music may have resulted in initial unfavorable reactions to the sexually violent rock music or minimal understanding of the lyrical content.”<sup>23</sup> And, moreover, that “[g]reater comprehension might have followed a more sustained exposure, with correspondingly higher elevation in their [negative effects]”<sup>24</sup>

### **(Potential) Negative Social Effects**

Given the violent and belligerent nature of Death Metal and Black Metal’s respective lyrics and art, it seems only right that this particular subsection begin by analyzing their potential for generating/facilitating either violent or aggressive behaviour. Or more specifically, by assessing several of the claims and arguments that such potential is either non-existent or yet to be effectively demonstrated. For, as we shall see, while at first glance they appear to be quite damning, they are all either misleading or erroneous.

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<sup>19</sup> St. Lawrence & Joyner, “The Effects of Sexually Violent Rock Music On Males’ Acceptance of Violence Against Women,” p.60.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.59.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.55.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.60.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

This, of course, naturally begs the question: what exactly is meant or encompassed by the respective referents “violent and aggressive behavior”? And, in answering this question, for obvious reasons we will defer to the working definitions employed by the psychological literature dealing with them. That said, according to Anderson et al., in their article, “The Influence of Media Violence on Youth,” “[a]ggression is defined by psychologists as any behaviour that is intended to harm another person,”<sup>25</sup> and is expressed in a variety of different forms. For instance, “*verbal aggression* usually refers to saying hurtful things to the victim;” while “*Relational or indirect aggression* refers to behavior that is intended to harm the target but is enacted outside of the person’s view (e.g., behind his or her back), such as telling lies to get the person in trouble or to harm his or her interpersonal relationships.”<sup>26</sup> The type of aggression, or rather aggressive behavior, that is of most concern, however, is *physical aggression*; which can “range in severity from less serious acts, such as pushing or shoving, to more serious physical assaults and fighting, extending to violent acts that carry a significant risk of serious injury.”<sup>27</sup> Violence, on the other hand, is both defined as and used almost exclusively “to refer to the more extreme forms of physical aggression that have a significant risk of seriously injuring their victims.”<sup>28</sup> That is, extremely violent criminal behaviors like forcible rape, aggravated assault and homicide.<sup>29</sup>

Insofar as it extends to all violent media, among the most embracing claims against our two sub-genre’s potential for generating violent or aggressive behavior is Purcell’s claim/assertion that no studies to date have been able to either confirm or demonstrate a causal (cause and effect) relationship between interest in/exposure to violent media and actual violent behavior.<sup>30</sup> And strictly speaking this assertion is true; not everybody who has been exposed to violent media commits acts violence. Nor can every act of violence ultimately be traced back to exposure to some sort form of violent

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<sup>25</sup> Craig A. Anderson, Leonard Berkowitz, Edward Donnerstein, L. Rowell Huesmann, James D. Johnson, Daniel Linz, Neil M. Malamuth, and Ellen Wartella, “The Influence of Media Violence on Youth,” in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (December, 2003), p.82.

<sup>26</sup> Italics in original. Ibid, p.82.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.83.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.81.

<sup>30</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.82, 93.

media – humans were, after all, committing acts of violence against each other well before the advent of contemporary media. The problem with this assertion, however, as Anderson et al. make clear, is that it generates the impression that violent media never play any real part in effecting violent behaviour by conveying an inaccurate understanding of how causal language is generally used:

[T]he weight of evidence indicates that violent actions seldom result from a single cause; rather, multiple factors converging over time contribute to such behavior. Accordingly, the influence of the mass media is best viewed as one of the many potential factors that help to shape behavior, including aggression. When we use causal language, we do not mean that exposure to media violence is either a necessary or sufficient cause of aggressive behavior, let alone both necessary and sufficient... To our knowledge, no media-violence researcher has ever made such an extreme claim. The 14-year-old boy arguing that he has played violent video games for years and has not ever killed anybody is absolutely correct in rejecting the extreme ‘necessary and sufficient’ position, as is the 45-year-old two-pack-a-day cigarette smoker who notes that he still does not have lung cancer. But both are wrong in inferring that their exposure to their respective risk factors (violent media, cigarettes) has not causally increased the likelihood that they and people around them will one day suffer to consequences of that risky behavior.<sup>31</sup>

And it is with this understanding of causal language that, on the basis of the cumulative evidence provided by the substantial and increasing body of research on the effects of media violence, “[by] the early 1990’s, most researchers in the field had arrived at a consensus that the effect of media violence on aggression and violent behavior was real, causal, significant.”<sup>32</sup>

Complimenting Purcell’s claim about the failure of psychological literature/experimentation to establish a definite causal link between exposure to violent media and violent behavior is her claim that, “[o]n the macro level, there is no evidence suggesting a correlation between media violence and violent behavior.” That is, that while “[a]t times the rates of violence in reality increased as the rates of violence in the media increased...at other times, the reverse was true.”<sup>33</sup> And this may well be true. The

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<sup>31</sup> Anderson et al., “The Influence of Media Violence on Youth,” p.83.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.82.

<sup>33</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.92-93.



problem with this assertion, however, is that it is predicated on the erroneous assumption that all depictions of violence, irrespective of their context and content, can be pooled into a quantitative analysis and expected to produce consistent and uniform effects. In reality, however, it is not so much the violence as the context in which it is portrayed which is important (i.e., the quality and not simply the quantity that is significant).<sup>34</sup> In particular, three contextual elements stand out as being integral to any given medium's potential to contribute to violent behavior or aggression in its consumers: (1) The perpetrator needs to be someone with whom audiences can identify, or who possesses a powerful and charismatic enough character to attract and engage them.<sup>35</sup> Boys, for instance, "are more likely to attend to and imitate male perpetrators, whereas girls respond more strongly to female characters." Similarly, "children are more likely to engage in aggression after watching a violent child character than a violent adult character."<sup>36</sup> And, of course, in general, people are far more likely to act aggressively or violently after watching the perpetration of violence by a charismatic superhero, like Batman, than after viewing depictions of the atrocities committed by the Nazi's against the Jews in films like *Schindler's List*. (2) The portrayal of violence needs to be depicted as being somehow justified. For people learn by "observing, imitating and making behaviors their own."<sup>37</sup> Hence, "when violence is portrayed as justified, viewers are more likely to come to believe that their own aggressive responses to a perceived offense are also appropriate" – thereby making them "more apt to behave aggressively."<sup>38</sup> (3) The violence either needs to be rewarded, go unpunished, or fail to show any human cost. For where violence is depicted as a viable means for gaining money, property, power or admiration, it is endowed with incentive. Conversely, where it is depicted as going unpunished, it is divorced it from its real world deterrents – like prison. And finally, depictions of violence that fail to depict any resultant harm and pain circumvent the

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<sup>34</sup> For an overview of the contextual factors that influence various audience reactions to portrayals of violence, see Barbara J. Wilson, Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz, Dale Kunkel, James Potter, Stacy L. Smith, Eva Blumenthal, and Tim Gray, "Content Analysis of Entertainment Television: The Importance of Context," in James T. Hamilton ed, *Television Violence and Public Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), pp.13-44.

<sup>35</sup> Anderson et al., "The Influence of Media Violence on Youth," p.98.

<sup>36</sup> Wilson et al., "Content Analysis of Entertainment Television: The Importance of Context," p.31.

<sup>37</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education, "Media Violence," p.1223; see also Anderson et al., "The Influence of Media Violence on Youth," pp.94-95.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson et al., "The Influence of Media Violence on Youth," p.98.

possibility of such harm and pain serving “as vicarious punishment for the viewer who identifies with the aggressor;” which, by virtue of “reducing the vicarious value of any rewards associated with the aggressive act,” could serve to reduce “the usual media-violence effect on aggressive behavior.”<sup>39</sup>

Not all of Purcell’s claims, however, extend to violent media in general. She also asserts more specifically that “[no] previous studies have ever found solid evidence correlating violent actions with interest in music that has violent themes.”<sup>40</sup> And much like her other claims, there is a certain sense in which this is true. However, it is not, as we are lead to believe, because psychological studies and experimentation have repeatedly tried and failed. Rather, it is because there has never been any psychological study or experiment conducted for the express purpose of demonstrating such a correlation. In fact, no studies or experiments to date have even specifically examined how exposure to either violent music or music videos affects physically aggressive behavior in youths – let alone violence.<sup>41</sup> Instead, they have centered round how violent music and music videos affect aggression-related variables, like thoughts, attitudes, moods and feelings.<sup>42</sup> That is, round the precursors to violence and aggression, rather than on violent and aggressive behavior itself.

Of course, over and above this, it is unlikely that any honest attempt to demonstrate such a strict correlation would be successful, given that violence is the most extreme form of physical aggression, and that, as we have already noted, not every body who has been exposed to violent media commits violent acts. And, in reality, we should be grateful that the rare incidents of violence that have been linked to people with an interest in Extreme Metal, like the Richland School shootings and the Pahler, Andreassen and Euronymous murders, constitute exceptions rather than the rule. The real problem with Purcell’s assertion, then, is that, by virtue of denying a correlation between violent

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<sup>39</sup> Anderson et al., “The Influence of Media Violence on Youth,” pp.98-99.

<sup>40</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.138.

<sup>41</sup> Not surprisingly, the lack of such studies and experimentation appears to have been engendered by “ethical necessity.” Anderson et al., “The Influence of Media Violence on Youth,” pp.84.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pp.89-90.

music and its most extreme potential effect (violent acts), it obscures the fact that violent music possesses the potential to generate a spectrum of different aggression-based effects – ranging in severity from aggressive thoughts and feelings, through verbal aggression to physical aggression. That is, it obscures the fact that violent music’s aggressive effects don’t need to be extreme or conspicuous (i.e., worthy of a criminal conviction) to be palpable. And this is significant. For, in reality, even temporary and seemingly insignificant increases in aggression can potentially generate effects that affect not only the individual, but the individual’s social environment as well. This is because, as Anderson and Carnagey explain:

Close others (friends, family, peers, teachers) are influenced by these initially temporary increases in aggression and naturally respond to them in a negative way. Over time, these relationships deteriorate, and acquaintances begin to expect aggressive and conflictual interactions with the person and will therefore elicit further aggressive behaviors via well-established expectancy effects. In other words, repeated short-term media violence effects (lyrics, TV, movies, video games) can indirectly create a more hostile social environment, which further promotes the development of chronic hostility biases in the person’s internal makeup –their perceptual and social scripts and schemata and related knowledge structures – in short their personality.<sup>43</sup>

Another argument that attempts to mitigate violent media’s potential for generating either violent or aggressive behavior plays on the direction of causality. That is, “involves the question of whether entertainment media shapes aggressive attitudes and behaviour of consumers, or whether it simply reflects the aggressive personality predispositions of particular consumers, who selectively seek out media with aggressive content.”<sup>44</sup> In his own work, for instance, Jeffrey Victor concludes that “ it would seem that the aggressive predispositions of some teenagers leads them to seek out symbols of aggression in specific types of rock music, much like any consumer seeks out what they most appreciate in the entertainment media.”<sup>45</sup> And that “the key factors in the aggressive

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<sup>43</sup> Anderson & Carnagey, “Exposure to Violent Media: The Effects of Songs with Violent Lyrics on Aggressive Thoughts and Feelings,” p.969.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), p.171.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, pp.171-172.

behavior of some teenagers include having a personality with an aggressive predisposition and receiving encouragement of aggressive behavior from family and friends, rather than the content of the music the teenagers happen to prefer.”<sup>46</sup> And given, as we have already noted, that violent actions and aggressive behavior rarely result from a single cause, and “that exposure to media violence is [n]either a necessary or sufficient cause of aggressive behavior,” Victor can perhaps be considered to be mildly, if somewhat misleadingly, justified in his conclusion.<sup>47</sup> The problem with arguments that negate the potential effects of violent media by focusing on the direction of causality in this way, though, is that they fail to see it for what it really is – a significant additional risk factor. For as Anderson et al. note “[i]ndividuals who are characteristically more aggressive than their peers are likely to have multiple risk factors predisposing them toward aggressive behavior,” and “one of these risk factors may be a lower threshold for media-violence-induced activation of aggressive behavior.”<sup>48</sup> This, however, should not be taken to suggest that relatively non-aggressive people can’t be affected by violent media, because they can. It is simply an attempt to draw attention to the concept of “reciprocal determinism,” which essentially argues that the more an individual identifies with a particular medium the greater the likelihood that it will affect them. Or, in our case, that “aggressive youths’ attraction cannot explain away the effect of violent media on those youths. Rather, their attraction is an added risk factor that increases the likelihood they will be affected by the violence they observe.”<sup>49</sup>

A more insidious attempt to downplay violent media’s potential for generating either violent or aggressive behavior is embodied in the claim often made by the entertainment industry that “violent media simply reflect the violence that already exists in society.”<sup>50</sup> That is, that the level of violence in the “reel world”<sup>51</sup> merely mirrors the level of violence in the “real world.” For in reality, the amount of violence depicted in the

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<sup>46</sup> Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend*, pp.172.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson et al., “The Influence of Media Violence on Youth,” p.83.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.97.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.97.

<sup>50</sup> Bushman and Anderson, “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” p.479.

<sup>51</sup> Coined by Bushman and Anderson, the referent “reel world” is obviously a play on the movie reel, and is used to denote the world of television and movies. Ibid, *passim*.

media greatly exceeds the amount of violence that occurs in the real world. A study carried out in 1994 on “Portrayals of Crime, Race, and Aggression in ‘Reality-Based’ Police Shows,” for instance, found that, while only 13% of crime occurring in the real world was violent, a striking 87% of the crime being depicted on “*America’s Most Wanted, Cops, Top Cops, FBI, The Untold Story, and American Detective*”<sup>52</sup> was violent.<sup>53</sup> While as we have already noted, Black Metal and Death Metal are ultimately mediums that depict “a universe out of control where extreme violence is endemic and virtually unstoppable.”<sup>54</sup> The problem with this is that the “mean world syndrome” it cultivates, which causes people to perceive the world as being a decidedly more dangerous place than it actually is,<sup>55</sup> is ultimately conducive to little more than generating “the impression that violence is a justified means to protect oneself or to resolve conflict.”<sup>56</sup>

Finally there is the argument that the effects of violent media on either violent or aggressive behavior “are so small or that they affect so few people that the risks to society are negligible and can and should be ignored.”<sup>57</sup> Purcell, for instance, in a study conducted for *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, discovered that only 3.0% of the Death Metal fans she surveyed had ever been convicted of a violent crime; which was pretty much on target with America’s “national average rate for violent crime conviction”<sup>58</sup> – 3.4 % for males and 0.5% for females.<sup>59</sup> And, in reality, it is

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<sup>52</sup> Bushman and Anderson, “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” p.479.

<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, the “largest discrepancy between the real world and the world depicted on television is for murder, the most violent crime of all. Only 0.2% of the crimes reported by the FBI are murders, whereas about 50% of the crimes shown in reality-based TV programs are murders.” Ibid, p.479.

<sup>54</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.65.

<sup>55</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education, “Media Violence,” p.1223.

<sup>56</sup> Juliette H. Walma van der Molen, “Violence and Suffering in Television News: Towards a Broader Conception of Harmful Television Content for Children,” in *Pediatrics*, Vol. 113, No. 6 (June, 2004), p.1772; The American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education even goes so far as to say that the “[f]ear of being a victim of violence” that this syndrome can generate “is a strong motivation for some young people to carry a weapon, to be more aggressive, to get them before they get me.” “Media Violence,” p.1223.

<sup>57</sup> Bushman and Anderson, “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” p.480.

<sup>58</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.138; The key word here, of course, is convicted/conviction. For such statistics say nothing of violent crimes for which people failed to be convicted, violent crimes that failed to be reported, or other types of aggressive behaviour.

<sup>59</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.138.

uncertain how much exposure to violent media might have contributed to the perpetration of any of the crimes encompassed by either of these sets of meager statistics. However, when we consider that literally millions of people are exposed to violent media everyday, even if only 1% of the people so exposed become more aggressive or violent the numbers potentially run into the tens of thousands. That is, even if statistically speaking the number of people affected is relatively small, the potential “effect on society can be immense.”<sup>60</sup> After all, as Bushman and Anderson note, “[i]t takes only one or two affected students to wreck murderous havoc in a school, as demonstrated in recent years in Jonesboro, Arkansas; West Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; Stamps, Arkansas; Springfield, Oregon; Littleton, Colorado; and Santee and El Cajon, California.”<sup>61</sup>

In short, then, there would appear to be no good reason to doubt that, as forms of violent media, Black Metal and Death Metal possess the potential to generate/facilitate violent or aggressive behavior. However, before we move on, attention should be drawn to the fact that, while the present study affirms violent media’s potential to generate/facilitate violent and aggressive behavior, it concurs with the belief found in Purcell’s study that such media should not continue to be used as a scapegoat that enables people to ignore other important causal factors, like one’s socio-economic background.<sup>62</sup> For, ultimately, this practice is as unacceptable as stifling public education on the deleterious effects of violent media on the basis of little more than vested interest – whether it be as a fan, politician, or entertainment industry executive.

Having briefly looked at Black Metal and Death Metal’s potential for generating violent and aggressive behavior, it is important to also look at what might be termed their anti-Feminist dimensions. That is, the ways in which they can potentially generate both negative attitudes towards and perceptions of women. For one need only watch a few Black Metal videos or read a few Death Metal lyrics to see that much of the imagery they either employ or evoke exploits female sensuality and/or depicts gratuitous and

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<sup>60</sup> Bushman and Anderson, “Media Violence and the American Public: Scientific Facts Versus Media Misinformation,” p.482.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.83-88, 139-147.

misogynistic violence against women. And this is potentially very significant, because the existing body of psychological literature dealing with the behavioral and cognitive effects of sexually violent depictions in forms of media as diverse as commercial films, magazines and books, art and music, “suggests that exposure to sexually violent material increases acceptance of violence towards women, lowers compassion for victims of sexual aggression, contributes to sex-role stereotyping, and adversely affects males’ attitudes towards women.”<sup>63</sup>

Purcell, herself, accurately identified the crux of Black Metal and Death Metal’s anti-Feminist dimensions when she noted that Death Metal reinforces Patriarchal ideals and traditional sexual mores and values.<sup>64</sup> Not surprisingly, then, when we look to either medium we see that the primary way in which this is achieved is through the strict polarization of gender roles. That is, through the routine portrayal of men as powerful, masculine, active/dominant aggressors, replete with personal agency, and women as weak, feminine, passive/submissive supplicants, who are subject to the will of either their assailants or masters. Few, if any, Death Metal lyrics, after all, play out like your generic Slasher movie in which, against all odds, in the end a “resourceful female usually subdues the killer, sometimes kills him, and survives.”<sup>65</sup> And it would be hard to construe the half-naked woman being restrained on all fours with a make-shift chain leash in Dimmu Borgir’s “Progeniens of the Great Apocalypse”<sup>66</sup> video as anything other than an intentionally arousing exhibition of male dominance.

At first glance, of course, Cradle of Filth’s 1998 release, *Cruelty and the Beast*,<sup>67</sup> would appear to provide the exception to our two sub-genres strict polarization of gender roles. For, as we saw in the section in the hyperreal nature of Black Metal and Death Metal, it is a theme album that centers around the life of the infamous Countess Elizabeth

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<sup>63</sup> St. Lawrence & Joyner, “The Effects of Sexually Violent Rock Music On Males’ Acceptance of Violence Against Women,” p.51.

<sup>64</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.179.

<sup>65</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.72.

<sup>66</sup> The “Progeniens of the Great Apocalypse” video comes as one of the bonus features on the two disc Ozzfest edition of Dimmu Borgir’s, *Death Cult Armageddon* album. (Nuclear Blast, 2003).

<sup>67</sup> Cradle of Filth, *Cruelty and the Beast* (Music for Nations, 1998).

Bathory, who, according to the most sensationalized legends that have coalesced around her, both tortured and murdered some 650 servant girls for the purpose of bathing in their blood to preserve her own beauty<sup>68</sup> – an enterprise that is portrayed as being anything but weak, passive, or devoid of agency. In reality, though, by virtue recasting the Countess as a sensuous vampire, *Cradle of Filth* unwittingly conformed themselves to the common human practice of branding those who perpetrate atrocious acts of violence and sexual degradation, like rapists, pedophiles and serial killers, as monsters; which effectively denies their acceptance within the category of humans.<sup>69</sup> And thus, stigmatized as an anomaly, not only is the possibility of the Countess serving as an extreme symbol of female power and agency negated, but she actually comes to reaffirm and perpetuate the polarized patriarchal ideal. For as Jenks noted in relation to the notorious female serial killers, Rosemary West and Myra Hindley:

...by refusing women who commit acts of supreme Violence acceptance within the category of women...[people reaffirm to themselves] the essence of what women are. Thereby also reaffirming [their] commitment to a 'shared' social order. That is, it [is] a way to restore the primary image of the innate maternal and caring dispositions of womankind through relegating some would-be women (those who commit acts of atrocity) to another category essentialised through images of evil or pathology.<sup>70</sup>

Another important way in which Death Metal and Black Metal reinforce Patriarchal ideals and traditional sexual mores and values, is through punishing female sensuality and aberrant sexuality. However, the methods through which our two sub-genres accomplish this punishment are quite divergent. In the case of Black Metal, for instance, this punishment is more commonly of a symbolic, as opposed to physical, nature. And, in the most general sense, is accomplished through the frequent exhibition of scantily or provocatively clad women in video clips and promotional art. For by virtue of Black Metal's Satanic ideology, such displays of female sensuality become evil (i.e. stigmatically punished) by association – especially since the women are commonly portrayed as enjoying their subjection and degradation, and therefore as vindicating the

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<sup>68</sup> Tony Thorne, *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism* (London: Indigo, 2000), p.40.

<sup>69</sup> Jenks, *Transgression*, p.185.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



traditional fear and mistrust of female sexuality that has always underlain Christianity's inherent misogyny.<sup>71</sup> Some bands, however, don't seem content to leave things here, but rather, seem bent on adding insult to injury. The music videos for Satyricon's "Fuel for Hatred"<sup>72</sup> and Dimmu Borgir's "Progeniens of the Great Apocalypse,"<sup>73</sup> for example, have even gone so far as to depict their respective femme fatales handling serpents in an erotic manner; which, aside from serving to link them to what, in the Christian world at least, is an unequivocal symbol of evil/Satan,<sup>74</sup> simultaneously serves to both emphasize Eve's role in the original sin and validate the interpretation of partaking of the forbidden fruit as a euphemism for the Sexual act.<sup>75</sup>

By contrast, in the case of Death Metal this punishment is more commonly portrayed as being of an overtly physical nature. That is, as acts of sexual violence and murder being perpetrated on society's sexually promiscuous/deviant woman – its "sluts" and its "whores." The cover art for Gorgasm's 1998 EP, *Stabwound Intercourse*, for instance, depicts a woman clad in black heels, stockings, elbow length gloves, and a bra with nipple perforations, who, blindfolded and half-bound in chains, is parting her cheeks to accommodate the knife that has been inserted into her vagina.<sup>76</sup> While the intensely Puritanical song "Serial Cocksucker," from Devourment's 2005 release, *Butcher the Weak*, explicitly portrays "hookers" as "dirty whores" and "bitch[es]" who "need to be taught a lesson in butchery" for their illicit way of life.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*, p.116; Perhaps not surprisingly, this fear and mistrust finds poignant expression in the works of late mediaeval and early modern European Demonologists. In the midst of what are arguably some of the most misogynistic pages ever penned, for instance, Kramer & Sprenger assure us that "the word woman is used to mean lust of the flesh," and that "[a]s it is said: I have found a woman more bitter than death, and a good woman subject to carnal lust." *Malleus Maleficarum*, pp.43-47, 43.

<sup>72</sup> The "Fuel for Hatred" video comes as a bonus feature with Red Ink Records 2004 reissue of Satyricon's album *Volcano*, which was originally released by the band in 2002 through Moonfog Productions.

<sup>73</sup> Dimmu Borgir, *Death Cult Armageddon*, bonus track.6.

<sup>74</sup> As Jeffrey Russell notes, the identification of serpents with Satan arises from "following the Book of Revelation in equating the Satan of the Old Testament with the serpent of Genesis." In particular, in describing the archangel Michael's battle with the Devil, Revelation 12:7-9 states: "and the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, p.67.

<sup>75</sup> For the narrative outlining the transgression, and Adam and Eve's subsequent expulsion from Eden, see Genesis 2-3.

<sup>76</sup> Gorgasm, *Stabwound Intercourse* (Pulverizer Records, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> Devourment, *Butcher the Weak*, track.3.

The question that naturally arises, then, is: what motivates Black Metal and Death Metal to produce such blatantly anti-Feminist music and imagery? In attempting to answer this question we might begin by noting that the overwhelming majority of Black Metalers and Death Metalers are male. For, in the broadest sense, this enables us to interpret their exploitation of female sensuality and depictions of gratuitous and misogynistic violence as being bound up in a desire to maintain/affirm a primary identification with heterosexuality. Strictly speaking, of course, such a desire does little in and of itself to explain the extremity of much of the exploitation and depictions of violence. Much of this extremity might, however, be at least partially accounted for by several of the beliefs Purcell derived from feminist critiques of horror. Namely, that, like horror movies, such media can provide a means to express both “repressed desires for sex and violence,” and “deep-rooted, subconscious fears of sex and women.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, having said this, we cannot allow ourselves to fall into the trap of simply looking to feminist critiques of horror from which to extrapolate our answer; and thereby conclude that Black Metal and Death Metal’s lyrics and imagery, too, are ultimately little more than expressions “of male anxiety about female agency.”<sup>79</sup> For, in contemporary western societies where the current generation of youth has been raised around women with relatively equal rights, such a conclusion fails to speak to lived experience – fear and anxiety, after all, stem largely from the unknown. Moreover, as members of marginal sub-cultures, Black Metalers and Death Metalers, in particular, have relatively little vested agency to protect. In fact, it would almost be fair to say that, by virtue of opting to become antonymous transgressors, Black Metalers and Death Metalers effectively shun generic/conventional forms of male agency. Rather, we need to look again to the stereotype of the typical Black Metaler and Death Metaler. For aside from revealing to us that they are not generally the guys who do well at school or sports, have a popular social circle, or have great careers or career prospects, it also reveals to us that they are not generally the guys who get the girl, and thereby suggests good old fashioned resentment as the major motivating factor.

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<sup>78</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, p.179.

<sup>79</sup> Pinedo, *Recreational Terror: Women and the Pleasures of Horror Film Viewing*, p.85.

Of course, to some, the suggestion that simple resentment might figure so prominently in motivating our two sub-genres to produce such blatantly anti-Feminist music and imagery might appear absurd – especially given the extreme nature of their lyrics and imagery. Yet it is not a suggestion that has been made without historical precedents. In her interesting work, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*, Maria Tartar, in particular, demonstrates how resentment figured prominently as a motivating factor for the production of art centering round themes of *lustmord* (sexual murder)<sup>80</sup> in Germany both during and after World War I; a period during which it was easy view women “as anxious conspirators in a plot to lure men into the frenzied brutality of military bloodbaths.”<sup>81</sup> In fact, as she explains:

That fantasies of sexual assault on women might be driven by a combination of resentment, self-doubt, and vulnerability experienced by several generations of German men seems almost inevitable in the context of the asymmetrical effect of the war on men and on women. The amputees everywhere testified to the brutalization of men’s bodies in the theatres of war. Women, who had escaped the shells and shrapnel of the trenches and survived the war intact, could easily slide into the role of a covert enemy, one that had cheered them on and had thereby become complicit in plunging them into physically devastating military combat.<sup>82</sup>

Moving on, a potential negative social effect that is more or less unique to Black Metal is embodied in its engagement in racist discourses. For, as Keith Kahn-Harris suggests, Black Metal’s engagement in races discourses can serve to desensitize “scene members from more straight forward racisms both within and without the scene,”<sup>83</sup> and thereby serve to foster a world view in which they are seen as both casual and inconsequential. In evidence of this potential we need only recall that there commonly exists a substantial lack of congruence between individual Black Metaler’s private

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<sup>80</sup>Foremost amongst artists producing such imagery were George Grosz and Otto Dix. The formers *Murder on Acker Street* drawing (1916) and the latter’s *Sexual murderer* painting (1922), in particular, respectively depict a decapitated women and an eviscerated woman sprawled across a bed. Maria Tartar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 118, 14.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p.111.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>83</sup> Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” p.107.

treatment of non-Aryans/whites and the racist discourse that is so prevalent within the Black Metal scene. Because when you get someone one like Darkthrone drummer, Fenriz, who on one day can be found having a phrase like “Norsk Arisk Black Metal” (“Norwegian Aryan Black Metal”) printed boldly across a new album sleeve<sup>84</sup> and then on another wearing “a T-shirt from the prominent Israeli trance music band Astral Projection”<sup>85</sup> while conversing amicably with Israeli Black Metalers,<sup>86</sup> this would appear to be exactly the type of world view we are dealing with.

Another potentially negative social effect that is more peculiar to Black Metal, but which might also be contributed to by satanically orientated Death Metal bands, is embodied in their reaffirmation and perpetuation of traditional Christian beliefs about Satanists, Witches and Pagans/Heathens – beliefs that unequivocally portray them as being in league with an objective Devil and his demons. For the reaffirmation and perpetuation of such beliefs possesses the very real potential, however inadvertently, of serving to confound the efforts made by their contemporary counterparts, like the LaVeyan Satanists, practitioners of Asatru religion, and Wiccans (contemporary neo-Pagan Witches), to extricate themselves from the stigma and misconceptions that such beliefs have imposed upon them. And, not surprisingly, the existence of such potential has not been lost on many of the members of such groups. Amongst members of organized forms of religious Satanism, for instance, like LaVeyan Satanists, who not only eschew belief in Satan as an objective reality,<sup>87</sup> but also generally shun the practice of ritual sacrifice<sup>88</sup> and engagement in unlawful activity,<sup>89</sup> this has lead a desire to have

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<sup>84</sup> Darkthrone, *Transilvanian Hunger* (Peaceville, 1994).

<sup>85</sup> Kahn-Harris, “The ‘failure’ of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene,” p.103.

<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, Kahn-Harris does not relate whether these Israelis were member of a specific band, which negates the possibility of investigating their particular cosmology. However, a brief look through the Encyclopedia Metallum’s listings for Israeli Black Metal Bands suggests that they too share a lyrical spectrum that ranges from pure/uncontaminated Satanism at one end, through to strong anti-Christian sentiments, grounded in a desired return to the ways and faith of the usurped Pagan past, at the other. Although they quite naturally differ in that the Israeli bands dealing with Pagan motifs focus on Mesopotamian, as opposed to Norse, mythology. URL: <http://www.metal-archives.com/index.php?PHPSESSID=2baf7d309c3df8ee06436b9b91ffe03c>

<sup>87</sup> LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, pp.62.

<sup>88</sup> According to LaVey, the only time a true Satanist ever involves them self in anything even closely approximating human sacrifice is when they symbolically sacrifice “a totally obnoxious and deserving

people acknowledge a distinction between “real” Satanists like themselves and Satanic dabblers or pseudo-Satanists.<sup>90</sup> When sourcing data online for his important survey, “Who Serves Satan? A Demographic and Ideological Profile,” James Lewis, in particular, had the importance of stressing this distinction made to him by the webmaster of the Satanic Media Watch, who noted that:

For every serious Satanist you can find online I would guess you could find at least two teens who are into Heavy Metal music, who never read anything on Satanism, and who have problems in their personal lives. Heavy Metal teens who are into vandalism form local groups and do not go online. It would also be very hard to make them take part in any survey. As you know there are many kinds of Satanists. A lot of teens fit stereotypes rather well. If you do not take this into account and show the public a false picture of Satanism, you will make the public accuse serious Satanists for the actions of teens. I think you need to explain the difference between at least these two groups, and that your survey does not cover both groups.<sup>91</sup>

While Jean La Fontaine similarly draws attention to the stress that has been placed on this distinction when he observes that:

There seems, however, to be agreement between observers and the more established or ‘visible’ Satanists that the adolescents who call themselves Satanists, scrawl pentagrams and the number 666 on walls and play the type of rock music associated with Satanism, are more often than not merely posing, adopting an image that proclaims a rebelliousness that is not lasting or serious. The source of their ideas is more likely to be horror videos and films or the novels of Dennis Wheatly

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individual” by ritually cursing them. “Under no circumstances,” however, he clarifies, “would a Satanist ever sacrifice any animal or baby [symbolically or otherwise].” And the reason is thus: “Man, the animal, is the godhead to the Satanist. The purest form of carnal existence reposes in the bodies of animals and human children who have not grown old enough to deny themselves their natural desires. They can perceive things that the average human adult can never hope to. Therefore, the Satanist holds these beings in a sacred regard, knowing he can learn much from these natural magicians of the world.” LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, pp.88-89,

<sup>89</sup> Lewis, “Who Serves Satan? A Demographic and Ideological Profile,” p.5.

<sup>90</sup> As Lewis notes, many religious Satanists are also highly critical of Black Metalers, and dismiss church-burners, in particular, “as ‘violent, unbalanced people with serious mental problems and an unhealthy fascination with fascism.’” Ibid, p.19.

<sup>91</sup> Op. cit. Ibid, pp.4-5; It should perhaps be noted that while Lewis himself agrees “that there are some adolescents who ‘dabble’ in Satanism and who have no [real] interest in Satanism as a religion,” he questions this two-to-one ratio. And accurately notes “that some serious Satanists start out as ‘Satanic Dabblers,’ which means there are some hazy areas in the line dividing Satanists from those merely adopting Satanic trappings.” Ibid, p.5.

and their film versions, than writings containing the philosophical ideas of Satanist leaders or the principles of high magic.<sup>92</sup>

The potential reaffirmation and perpetuation of such beliefs has similarly prompted the desire among practitioners of Asatru-based religions to have people understand that “[t]here is absolutely no connection between... Nordic religious practitioners and the Black Metal scene.”<sup>93</sup> In fact, as Moynihan & Soderlind note, owing largely to Varg Vikernes decision to recast his Satanic church burnings as Heathen acts, on numerous occasions Norway’s Asatru-based religious organization, Draupnir,<sup>94</sup> have deemed it necessary to publicly state their lack of any common ground with Satanism in general and Black Metal in particular.<sup>95</sup>

By contrast, Wiccans don’t appear to have had anything specific to say about Black Metal and Death Metal’s potential in this regard. Nor do they seem particularly interested in the nuances of belief exhibited by various forms of Satanism. For, as adherents of a decidedly positive religion, Wiccans generally “dislike and fear [all] worshipers of Satan as much as Christians do.”<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, by virtue of the fact that, like other contemporary Neo-Pagans, they “consistently try to separate themselves from the taint of Satanic images constantly being thrown at them,”<sup>97</sup> they are likely to come into conflict with Black Metal and Death Metal sooner or later.

Finally, there is a potentially negative social effect embodied in the very appearance of Black Metalers and Death Metalers; or rather, in their preferred styles of dress. For not only do the big boots, studded gauntlets, graphic T-shirts and other equally intimidating articles of clothing that Black Metalers and Death Metalers commonly wear

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<sup>92</sup> Fontaine, “Satanism and Satanic Mythology,” p.108

<sup>93</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.205.

<sup>94</sup> It is interesting to note that Draupnir “has been recognized as a legitimate religious organization by the Norwegian Government.” Ibid, p.205.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> J. Gordon Melton, “Modern Alternative Religions in the West,” in John R. Hinnells ed, *A New Handbook of Living Religions* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p.608.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

serve as a form of visual terrorism,<sup>98</sup> they also serve to reify them as easily identifiable evil ‘others.’ That is, as scapegoats for evil, who, like the demonized serial killers, rapists and pedophiles commonly regarded as monsters, can easily be construed as being somehow fundamentally different from the rest of us “normal people.” Unfortunately, the problem with this is that it ultimately serves to obscure the fact that much of the world’s evil is committed by people who, ostensibly at least, appear altogether ordinary. Dr David Silber, for instance, a psychologist at George Washington University, confirmed this of killers when he noted that they “may seem remarkably unremarkable – at least on the surface.”<sup>99</sup> And this finds a concrete example in the words of the criminologist, James Fox, from Northeastern University in Boston, who, in reference to Jeffrey Dahmer, averred that if he “looked bizarre, if he looked crazy, if he drooled or wet himself, no one would get close to him. [But] on the surface he blends in. That’s what makes him so dangerous.”<sup>100</sup> Perhaps the most renowned example of such ordinariness, however, or perhaps more specifically of just how banal evil can often be, is found in Hannah Arendt’s important book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which treats of the 1961 trial of Nazi war criminal, Adolf Eichmann.<sup>101</sup> For, as Robert Fine summarizes, an important part of what her account of Eichmann’s role in the Nazi genocide brings to light is how “the perpetrators of the most radical evil could be pedestrian, bourgeois individuals, rooted in an everydayness that made them incapable of

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<sup>98</sup> It is worth noting that there is a sense in which engagement in this form of visual terrorism is a requisite part of being either a Black Metaler or Death Metaler. For, as David Kertzer argues, a person’s allegiance to an organization or group can only be expressed symbolically. Hence it is only by dressing this way and acting in the prescribed manner that individual Death Metalers and Black Metalers can both assert themselves as members of their respective sub-cultures and be regarded as such by others. *Ritual, Politics & Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p.16.

<sup>99</sup> Op. cit. Robert J. Dvorchack & Lisa Holewa, *Milwaukee Massacre: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Milwaukee Murders* (London: Robert Hale, 1991), p.94.

<sup>100</sup> Op. cit. Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963); In clarification of what was meant when she spoke of “the banality of evil” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Arendt has stated that she meant by it no theory or doctrine but something quite factual: “the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a large scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer [Eichmann], whose only personal distinction was perhaps extraordinary shallowness. However monstrous his deeds were, the doer was neither monstrous nor demonic, and the only specific characteristic one could detect in his past as well as his behavior during the trial and the preceding police examination was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think.” Hannah Arendt, “The Banality of Evil: Failing to Think,” in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty ed, *The Many Faces of Evil: Historical perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.265.

critical reflection or serious moral judgment, marked more by ‘thoughtlessness’ and ‘remoteness from reality’ than by any streak of Satanic greatness.”<sup>102</sup> And the problem with this, as Arendt states, is precisely that there were, and still are, so many like Eichmann.<sup>103</sup>

### **(Potential) Positive Social Effects**

In her work on Death Metal, Purcell emphasizes the potential of its graphic lyrics and art to help society move toward what is known as ethical ground zero. That is, to a point, where, having challenged and destroyed traditional values and ethics, it would be possible to develop a new body of ethics and values on more “just” and “noble” terms.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, however, while she is certainly justified in construing the transgressive nature of Death Metal’s lyrics and imagery as an attack on ethical norms and values, her ethical ground zero thesis is ultimately untenable. The primary reason for this, of course, is that the impetus or driving force behind the production of Death Metal’s transgressive lyrics and imagery is the quest to attain ever greater levels of extremity – not moral or ethical activism. And in this sense, Death Metal it is actually dependant on the existing moral and ethical order. After all, you can’t be extreme without commonly accepted boundaries to transgress.

The exception, here, might be thought to exist in the lyrics and imagery produced by Satanically orientated Death Metal Bands, and thus by extension Black Metal. For, ostensibly at least, they promote the subversion of Christian based morals and ethics. But even here Purcell’s idea misses the mark, because, by virtue of being Satanic, they could only ever supplant a Christian based moral and ethical system with a reign of amorality.

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<sup>102</sup> Robert Fine, “Understanding Evil: Arendt and the Final Solution,” in Maria Pia Lara ed, *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p.143

<sup>103</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, p.253.

<sup>104</sup> Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture*, pp.168-169, 178; Here, Purcell has obviously put a social spin on what was originally a highly individualistic concept. For, as she herself notes, as a concept popularized by Cartesian individualism, “[a] person is said to achieve ethical ground zero if he disowns all culturally-imposed values in favour of a purer ethical system discovered by himself. The idea of ethical ground zero impli[ng] that the individual should be the source of his own value system, that only he can discern true right from wrong, and [that] cultural norms and values actually cloud the path to virtue.” Ibid, p.168.



Another important reason Purcell's ethical ground zero thesis is ultimately untenable is the existence of psychology's contrast principle. "[A] principle in human perception" that "affects the way we see the difference between two things that are presented one after another,"<sup>105</sup> it states that "if the second item is fairly different from the first, we will tend to see it as being more different than it actually is."<sup>106</sup> Consequently, because of our two sub-genres extreme natures, if we subject ourselves to some Death Metal lyrics or Black Metal imagery and then go and watch a horror movie or listen to some rap music, we will perceive the horror movie or rap music as being far less transgressive/offensive than we would have if we hadn't first subjected ourselves to Death Metal lyrics or Black Metal imagery. In other words, by providing extreme contrasts to horror movies, rap music, and other similar mediums, Black Metal and Death Metal actually facilitate the popular acceptance of slightly less transgressive discourses. Thus, rather than viewing Black Metal and Death Metal's transgressive discourses as serving to subvert contemporary values and ethical norms in the hope of building a better tomorrow, it would appear more accurate to regard them, at least in part, as insidious/indirect agents of contemporary society's gradual moral and ethical decay.

Quite paradoxically, however, (and this is where Black Metal and Death Metal's positive potential begins to show) in the process of facilitating the popular acceptance of slightly less transgressive discourses, our two sub-genres actually serve to reaffirm and perpetuate the boundaries that they themselves transgress. For, as Chris Jenks explains, "[t]o transgress is to go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law or convention, it is to violate or infringe. But to transgress is also more than this, it is to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law or the convention." In short, "[t]ransgression is a deeply reflexive act of denial and affirmation."<sup>107</sup> In this sense, Black Metal and Death Metal actually become implicated in the process of cultural reproduction

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<sup>105</sup> Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Quill, 1993), pp.11-12.

<sup>106</sup> Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, p.12.

<sup>107</sup> Jenks, *Transgression*, p.2; Transgression, then, is not the same as disorder. For, "it opens up chaos and reminds us of the necessity of order." Ibid, p.7.

– preventing cultural stagnation by breaking the rules, and helping to ensure stability by reaffirming them.<sup>108</sup>

The corollary here, of course, is that in serving to reaffirm and perpetuate moral and ethical boundaries, Black Metal and Death Metal also serve to draw our attention to the ultimate necessity of evil. That is, to the reality that evil is more than a mere residual category, “even if those who are categorized by it are marginalized socially.” That, in fact, “[f]rom the merely distasteful and sickening to the truly heinous,”<sup>109</sup> as what George Bataille terms “transgression condemned,”<sup>110</sup> “evil is deeply implicated in the symbolic formulation and institutional maintenance of the good.[And b]ecause of this, the institutional and cultural vitality of evil must be continually sustained.”<sup>111</sup>

Finally, through their reaffirmation and perpetuation of traditional Christian beliefs about Satanism, and their lyrical, artistic and even physical assaults, both Black Metal and Satanically orientated Death Metal can actually inadvertently serve to generate/facilitate social cohesion, Christian solidarity, and faith. (Although, given the natural human tendency unite against common enemies, whether it be in world, civil or religious wars, or simply in support of our local or national sporting heroes, this is hardly surprising). In evidence of this we need only look to the aftermath of the spate of church burnings that plagued Norway in the early 1990s. For as Pal Mathiesen, writer on theological issues for Norway’s cultural newspaper, *Morgenbladet*, tells us:

The congregations that have been affected by the church burnings have had a huge interest in the community from people who might baptize their children and so on, but don’t actually go to

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<sup>108</sup> Jenks, *Transgression*, p.7.

<sup>109</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Toward a Sociology of Evil: Getting Beyond Modernist Common Sense About the Alternative ‘to the Good,’” in Maria Pia Lara ed, *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p.161.

<sup>110</sup> Op. Cit. Jenks, *Transgression*, 91-92.

<sup>111</sup> Alexander, “Toward a Sociology of Evil: Getting Beyond Modernist Common Sense About the Alternative ‘to the Good,’” p.161; Similarly, Alessandro Ferrara avers that “those who think that idealized conditions could in principle exist under which no evil affected the human world fail to understand the extent to which the constitution of ourselves as moral subjects requires that we distance ourselves from shared images of radical evil.” “The Evil that Men Do: A Meditation on Radical Evil from a Postmetaphysical Point of View,” in Maria Pia Lara ed, *Rethinking Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p.186.

church themselves. Where there have been church burnings and rebuilding of the churches, there has been a huge interest in the congregations, so they have experienced a kind of ‘Christianization’ during this process.<sup>112</sup>

While, Per Anders Nordengen, former minister of Hauketo church, which was burnt to the ground on the eve of October 3, 1992, recalls that:

The day after was an incredible experience. It was a state of mourning in Hauketo and Prinsdal, and it wasn’t just us, the active churchgoers. I suddenly realized what a church means to a community. The church is a symbol of security. Everyone had been baptized or confirmed or married there. Lots of people who didn’t really go to church were crying and speaking of ‘our church.’ Later, lots of people helped out and contributed money. So we kept going in makeshift localities; we didn’t cancel one service, one choir practice, or one activity.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Moynihan & Soderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p.235.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, pp.89-90.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is now evident that while we may not be used to thinking of evil as a commodity, we are certainly justified in doing so. For, with mediums as diverse as movies, books, CDs and PlayStation games trafficking in everything from Demons, Vampires, Werewolves and Zombies through to war, terrorism and serial killing, this would appear to be what it is increasingly being reduced to. And, in the end, as we have seen, this is a real cause for concern. For as forms of media, such mediums clearly constitute potential means of moulding/altering/distorting their consumer's perceptions not only of the various myths, religions, folklore, historical events and figures they eclectically appropriate in their composition, but of the world around them. And beyond this, of both desensitizing their consumers to real world evils and insidiously aiding them in the subconscious development of aggressive, even physically violent, dispositions.

Yet, as we have also seen, as a rule this highly capitalistic exercise in reductionism has generally been mitigated, at least to a certain degree, by two important facts. The first being that such mediums commonly also serve as forms of mainstream escapism. That is, as mediums that not only possess the ability to temporarily wrest our intellects/imaginings from their present cares, but which, through the various bounded forms of vicarious experience they provide, can also serve to help us master a myriad of unsatisfactory conditions/situations and issues at a step's remove. The second being that such mediums generally depict the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Or rather, routinely exhibit what has accurately been described as the "good guys always win" motif, which effectively serves to couple their escapist functions with the underlying consolatory hope that we too can overcome our own seemingly insurmountable problems.

Nevertheless, as this study has confirmed, Black Metal and Death Metal Music constitute extremely noteworthy exceptions to this rule. For, as our analysis has shown, they are complimentary forms of commodified evil whose respective natures and essences effectively situate them in diametrical opposition to the "good guys always win"

motif; and hence to the overly optimistic form of consolation it engenders. In fact, as we have seen, by contrast they suggest to us that the ability to overcome our problems, and cope with the world's atrocities, lies not in the vain hope that justice will prevail, but rather, in embracing evil; and thereby in actively cultivating what will be termed a desensitizing ethos of utter indifference to the plight and suffering of others. Disturbingly, of course, in the case of Death Metal this effectively translates into an invitation for strict identification with the perpetrator – as opposed to the victim. That is, with the serial killers, cannibals, and sadists, both real and fictional alike, glorified in their lyrics and imagery; which is made easy through the decontextualization its practice of eclecticism engenders. While in the case of Black Metal it translates into identifying with either the “evil one” (the Devil) himself or one of his demons or minions, which is facilitated by the promise of the eventual triumph of good over evil that inheres in its strict inversion of Zoroastrian dualism. Consequently, both Black Metal and Death Metal have justly been construed as purveyors of an alternative form of modern escapism.

Yet, as this study has also shown, this is not the only way in which Black Metal and Death Metal are exceptional; they are also exceptional in that they have both generated their own distinct sub-cultures. In other words, in that they are forms of commodified evil produced both by and for the members of their respective sub-cultures. And given that both sub-cultures are predominantly populated by marginalized youths, this begged a question that has been central to this thesis: What is it that motivates them to produce and/or endorse forms of music, and thereby become members of sub-cultures, which ostensibly promote such a negative world view? Hence, in the course of delineating their divergent (albeit complimentary) ideological bases, and demonstrating that Black Metal and Death Metal are purveyors of an alternative form of modern escapism, we have also demonstrated some of the ways in which they can serve to help their proponents regain a sense of power and control over their lives. Most notably, that they provide them with an accepting peer group; enable them to modify their social status from marginal by default to anonymous transgressor; allow them to assume a primary identity of their own choosing; and thus, at the end of the day, provide them with a genuine sense of meaning and belonging.

What is more, in concluding by looking at Black Metal and Death Metal's (potential) social effects, there is a sense in which we have reaffirmed and perpetuated the notion that the real significance of any analysis hinges on its social implications. For, as our analysis has revealed their (potential) social effects are overwhelmingly negative, and disconcertingly include the generation/facilitation of violent or aggressive behaviour; the advocacy of strong anti-feminist sentiments; the promotion of casual racism; and the reaffirmation and perpetuation of traditional Christian conceptions about Satanism, Paganism and Witchcraft, which manifestly serve to distort the true nature of the beliefs and practices of their contemporary adherents. And yet, in spite of this, there are still several important ways in which they are ultimately implicated in the maintenance and reproduction of the good. For not only do they serve to draw our attention to just how profoundly evil is implicated in the good's symbolic formulation, they also serve to reaffirm and perpetuate the very boundaries that they themselves transgress. Nonetheless, it is not without a sense of irony that while Black Metal and Death Metal may very well serve to reaffirm and perpetuate the very boundaries that they themselves transgress, the extreme nature of the contrast they provide for other forms of commodified evil means that they ultimately end up facilitating the popular acceptance of less transgressive discourses.

Perhaps the biggest conclusion warranted by the present study, though, is that both Black Metal and Death Metal music and their sub-cultures are in definite need of further scholarly attention. For, in the end, few individual pieces of academic writing can justly claim to be more than modest attempts to contribute to open and ongoing conversations.

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