

# OPEN A VEIN SUICIDAL BLACK METAL AND ENLIGHTENMENT<sup>1</sup>

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Black Metal was born in suicide. The image of Per Yngve Ohlin (aka Dead) on the 1995 album cover of Mayhem's *Dawn of the Black Hearts*, his blown-out brains oozing out of his shattered skull, is an icon that foreshadowed the emergence of Suicidal Black Metal (SBM) bands who skirt the edge between ideation and action.<sup>2</sup> For bands such as Shining, Make a Change . . . Kill Yourself, and I Shalt Become, suicide and self-harm are cathexes; death is the ultimate life lesson—we must reflect on it, embrace it . . . and do it. Albert Camus articulates in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide.”<sup>3</sup> Within the broad spectrum of philosophical positions which Black Metal represents (such as nihilism, existentialism, satanism, and abjection) is SBM's celebration of self-destruction. What might be the function of this celebration?

Enlightenment is often described as an awakening of consciousness that is sustained. It is a station or place of insightful awareness about the nature of reality. The Sanskrit and Pali word *bodhi* means “awakened,” and within many Buddhist practices this state can be activated through meditation on death.<sup>4</sup> Partial self-burial (digging and sleeping in one's own open grave) and forcing oneself to gaze upon a corpse are classic death awareness practices.<sup>5</sup> As we contemplate our mortality, we may come to understand the meaning of our existence. By extension, suicide is the ancient playground where each individual can explore and contest his or her own death. As Arthur Schopenhauer states: “Suicide may

also be regarded as an experiment—a question which man puts to Nature, trying to force her to answer. The question is this: What change will death produce in a man's existence and in his insight into the nature of things?"<sup>6</sup> From this perspective, an individual who struggles with or decides to suicide has the potential to attain self-knowledge, wisdom, and purpose.

Accounts of enlightenment are infused with transcendental and ecstatic language. For example, Evelyn Underhill in *Mysticism* introduces terms such as Absolute Reality, The Transcendental World, and Undifferentiated Life. Aldous Huxley, in *The Doors of Perception*, writes of the Clear Light of the Void, the Inner Light, and Unmitigated Reality.<sup>7</sup> Other expressions use "light" metaphors such as "to see the light," "to gaze on ten suns shining," "to be surrounded in white light," "to be guided by the light," or to encounter whitening, flashing, ebbing light. So, although Shining's vocalist Niklas Kvarforth denies any specific religious topic in the band's music, it is significant that he has described the band's name to mean "the path to enlightenment."<sup>8</sup> Also, Kvarforth claims that he started to explore destroying himself physically and psychologically at a very young stage in his life, in order "to break all the borders and to fuck myself up to get to a higher level."<sup>9</sup> This is analogous to many hierarchically organized spiritual traditions where a person strives to attain enlightenment in stages, often through a series of particular practices or exercises which may involve self-inflicted physical pain, self-denial, and self-torture.

According to James Hillman, author of *Suicide and the Soul*, self-knowledge is the essential motivation for suicide. He states, "Suicide is pre-judged by the medical mode of thought . . . it can be understood medically only as a symptom, an aberration, an alienation, to be approached with the point of view of prevention."<sup>10</sup> Rather than negate suicide as pathology, he asks what it means to the psyche; he believes that suicide is an attempt to transform the soul. The drive to kill oneself is really a demand for an encounter with absolute reality—a demand for a profound overthrow of daily life.

This encounter requires planning and rehearsal. Sitting quietly one visualizes the scene: the right outfit, the lighting, and the ambience. What will the note say? What tools are needed? Is the bar in the closet high enough? Rope or wire? Razor blades are messy, but cutting is seductively and strangely appealing, and seeing one's own blood is intoxicating. By replaying and rewriting the scene, one exerts control over one's death. Suicide is an escape clause in the contract of life, a free zone where one can reject or affirm death. By playing with the choice to live or die, each moment is ripe with meaning. As Camus states, "Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."<sup>11</sup> The suicidal person wants to use death for a purpose. This search for purpose becomes ground zero for divergent revolutionary acts, many supported by an ideology that accepts self-killing as a spiritual or mystical event and

as evidence of one's altruism. Some practices within Mahayana Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity tolerate an individual's choice for self-annihilation for various reasons including political protest, sacrificial devotion, and contemplative renunciation.<sup>12</sup>

In protest against the Ngô Đình Diệm administration's persecution of Buddhists, on June 11, 1963, the South Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức burned himself to death in the middle of a busy Saigon road intersection. His self-immolation garnered worldwide media coverage and exacerbated the downfall of the Diệm regime. However, Thích Quảng Đức's action was not unprecedented. Historically, ordinary men and women, as well as monks and nuns, have embraced self-immolation for both political protest and in order to honor Guatama Buddha.<sup>13</sup> One aspect of Mahayana Buddhism is that, besides self-liberation, it is important for followers to help other sentient beings. In this context, burning oneself is an act of sacrifice and love for the greater good of humanity. Self-destructive actions are reframed according to a person's compassionate intention.

Another more recent incidence of self-immolation occurred in Tunisia on December 17, 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, an unemployed, college graduate who was trying to work as a street vendor, set himself on fire as a result of his frustration with the municipal officers who had harassed him and confiscated his wares. Bouazizi's desperate action is credited as the catalyst for violent country-wide protests against President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's government, which forced Ben Ali and his family to flee the country a month later. The Tunisian uprising served as inspiration for demonstrations and revolutions that have spread throughout the Middle East. After Bouazizi's suicide, a wave of copycat self-immolations continues to bloom, adding a tone of bloody pathos to what is often cheerily referred to as "The Arab Spring" or "The Arab Awakening."<sup>14</sup>

Suicide bombing is a fusion of offering up one's life for a cause and forcing people to wake up to an oppressive reality. Wilhelm Stekel (Austrian physician, psychologist, and student of Freud) remarked, "No one kills himself who has never wanted to kill another, or at least wished the death of another."<sup>15</sup> Wishing for the death of a particular person or group, the suicide bomber rages against the social injustice inflicted by the enemy. The bomber is both victim and murderer and paradoxically screams, "I'll die and then you'll be sorry." The hope is to survive—if not in body, then in spirit—and to witness the enemy's suffering. The Palestinian Sunni Islamic political party Hamas (an Arabic word for "zeal" or "enthusiasm") has long advocated suicide bombings. Recruits are assured their place in Paradise and revered as martyrs after their death. The blood of martyrs lights the way, and Hamas's rhetoric is imbued with admonitions that words remain dead until people are willing to die for the cause. The famed Palestinian Islamist Abdullah Yusuf Azzam writes, "Glory does not build its lofty edifice except with skulls; honor and respect cannot be

established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses.”<sup>16</sup> Those who enlist as *shaheeds* (martyrs) imagine the laudations after the bombing mission, fantasize about the respect and reverence that will be lavished on their families, and hope to be role models for others on the path to glory.

Potential suicide bombers describe a sense of elation or of being uplifted when he or she decides to become a *shaheed* or *shaheeda*. There is an ecstatic camaraderie in the face of death—each bomber knowing that he or she will take his or her place on the roster of great Martyrs—and death is a kind of trophy. A *shaheed* rehearses his death lovingly, as many times as possible, and reflects on it with serene happiness. Not unlike an ascetic spiritual exercise, a mock burial may be performed and a would-be martyr may be temporarily interred in an empty grave, either alone or with comrades.<sup>17</sup> A feeling of renewal is earned by overcoming the natural fear of death, and many suicide survivors report a feeling of clarity and even a renewed zest for life.<sup>18</sup> As explained by Shafiq, a failed suicide bomber, “It took me a long time to decide . . . It was wonderful to say good-bye to life. I felt like I was up in the clouds from the moment I knew I was going to be a shaheeda.”<sup>19</sup> According to Hamas, there are plenty of people enthusiastically enlisting for the opportunity to blow themselves up, and they insist that they only recruit people who are “normal”—not suicidal or depressed. Suicide bombers must have pure motives, open hearts, and a desire for Allah.<sup>20</sup>

Muhammad Atta is considered the ringleader of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States. His infamous document “The Last Night” is a series of reminders to his comrades, mostly prescriptions and quotations from the Qur’an, Islamic Shari’ah Law, and Sunnah (teachings from the life of Muhammad).<sup>21</sup> Ritualistic traditions are recommended along each step of the last journey, such as the need to shave body hair and wear cologne, to have sharpened knives, to make sure one’s privates are covered, to wear proper socks and shoes, to think well of one’s brothers, to pray and remember Allah in the taxi and airplane, and to make sure that the hostages are slaughtered comfortably (as is the practice for Islamic animal slaughter known as *dhabihah*). It also shares advice that, in the end, it is imperative to be calm and optimistic:

You should feel complete tranquility, because the time between you and your marriage [in heaven] is very short. Afterwards begins the happy life, where God is satisfied with you, and eternal bliss in the company of the prophets, the companions, the martyrs and the good people, who are all good company. Ask God for his mercy and be optimistic, because [the Prophet], peace be upon him, used to prefer optimism in all his affairs.<sup>22</sup>

These statements are like those from an enlightenment-seeking aspirant who hopes to arrive at a happy, calm, and expansive state.

There are many examples of religious martyrs (Dead has been called a rock-star martyr) who seek heightened states of consciousness and recondite lifestyles; they urge humanity to find authenticity in a sea of illusions.<sup>23</sup> This condemnation of the material world—in contrast to the laudation of a luminous heaven or the veneration of an illuminated altered state—can be found in many spiritual ideologies, some pitting the body against the soul or spirit: the fleshy body becomes subject to mutilation and destruction for the sake of some higher purpose. The central figure of Christianity, Jesus Christ, is a perfect example of this; his submission to crucifixion and torture for the sake of humanity's salvation was the penultimate sacrifice that birthed a religion.<sup>24</sup> Later, so many willing martyrs followed his example that the Church fathers became concerned and debated the ethics of suicide for three centuries.<sup>25</sup> Christianity, like Islam, teaches that earthly existence is a grim prelude to the fantastical, psychedelic, exalted world that greets believers after they die; this certainly offers an incentive for martyrdom, or at least makes sacrificial self-killing an honorable option.<sup>26</sup> Through martyrdom a person becomes holy; the act can be both purifying and revolutionary.

The martyr's theater reveals the benefits of self-mutilation and the rewards for choosing physical or spiritual death in order to attain something grander than life. Through his masochistic self-torture, Saint Simeon Stylites (one of the most famous *stylitoe*, or "pillar-hermits") set an example for chronic suicide as a road to spiritual advancement. He stood on one leg for a year, atop a sixty-foot pillar that was exposed to the elements, while the other leg mushroomed into sores filled with pus and worms. Saint Simeon would ask people to put any fallen worms back in, coaxing the worms to "eat what God has given you."<sup>27</sup> Gustave Flaubert's Saint Anthony boasted, "those who are decapitated, tortured with red hot pincers, or burned alive, are perhaps less meritorious than I, seeing that my whole life is but one prolonged martyrdom."<sup>28</sup> There are numerous accounts of Christians who begged to be martyred throughout the history of ancient Rome. Because death was only of the body, not of the soul, they would rush to the pagan judges, proclaiming their faith, and when sentenced, they would hold hands and sing as they faced the lions in the Colosseum. The crowd bears witness to the passion of Christian faith, ennobling its creed, and inspiring believers. The Christian martyr conquers death—the body is only a means to an end, a vehicle for the martyr's desires.

SBM's themes, such as self-mutilation and the renunciation of life, relate to some of the ascendant aspirations of religious suicide. *Make a Change . . . Kill Yourself* invites the listener:

My great salvation lies within  
This suicidal mind of mine.  
Join me in this wicked state of suicide.<sup>29</sup>

This renunciation reflects concepts in Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity that cast doubt upon the benefit of the corporeal world. In several Hindu and Buddhist traditions, *maya* is defined as the alluringly hypnotic, superficial illusion of physical reality, and the goal is to break the spell and to realize numinous truth.<sup>30</sup> Existence on earth is ephemeral, the body temporary, and biological life is not only meaningless but filled with suffering. Death is also the point of contact with the eternal.<sup>31</sup> In Islam, the Arabic word *dunya* means “lower” and connotes all that is worldly and temporal. The *dunya* may be beautiful and pleasurable, but it is fleeting, and it is better to turn one’s gaze on what is immutable. Everything is a test that can lead to paradise or hell. The Qur’an is clear: “Nay (behold), you prefer the life of this world; but the Hereafter is better and more enduring.”<sup>32</sup> Christianity warns against sinful worldliness: “Do not love the world or anything in the world.”<sup>33</sup> This sentiment is echoed in Shining’s lyrics “Through Corridors of Oppression”:

Slowly,  
passing the oppressed,  
innocent,  
sons,  
and daughters lost,  
trembling  
in the bottomless depths of darkness,  
successfully,  
failing  
in their search.

To search  
the light,  
to search,  
salvation.<sup>34</sup>

Self-destruction or self-harm opposes the ego’s natural inclination for self-preservation (physically and experientially) and serves as a testament to a person’s non-attachment to illusory life: one destroys oneself, and in doing so one destroys the world.<sup>35</sup> This connects with psychoanalytic theories by James Hillman, which argue that the drive to kill oneself is a demand for the profound overthrow of daily life.<sup>36</sup> The music paints a putrid existence, and charges that the world is a perpetual, degenerative “whore” (according to Ondskapt’s

vocalist Acerbus) who lures humanity into ever-deeper levels of hellish darkness and violence.<sup>37</sup> SBM is a mirror and creative response to the misery.

Suicide is murder. The American psychiatrist Karl Menninger believed that there are three elements necessary in order for someone to commit suicide: the wish to kill, the wish to be killed, and the wish to die.<sup>38</sup> In *Man Against Himself*, Menninger writes, “There is a little murder and a little suicide dwelling in everybody’s heart.”<sup>39</sup> Kvarforth asserts that the whole objective of Shining is to teach people to destroy themselves, or to force-feed people with self-destructive and suicidal imagery and lyrics. The aim of the band is to hurt, to give birth to future psychopaths and a breed of people who believe in the destruction of mankind. He prescribes an end to the polymorphous perverse, obscenely pulsating overabundance of life. Kvarforth states:

I hate life and I hate living, I truly, truly hate life in all its fucking perverse forms  
. . . animals, nature, everything that grows must be put to death. But that’s just  
fantasies. I think that mankind is pretty good at fucking ourselves up in a way,  
you know, but if I can push it a little bit it’s good.<sup>40</sup>

In the documentary video *Black Metal Satanica*, he describes the thrill he experienced when he accidentally cut open someone’s arm, revealing the bone, and also how he cut someone’s leg open, took out a piece of flesh, and tried to “feed a whore” who was standing nearby (a performance that he compared to the Catholic Holy Communion ritual).<sup>41</sup> Kvarforth is notorious for passing out razor blades at concerts. He combines cannibalistic priestly gestures, ritualistic self-mutilations, and apocalyptic, anti-life sermons to exterminate hopeful dreams and floating world illusions.<sup>42</sup>

A suicidal haze, unreal like a torturous dream  
Old stinging mental wounds, still raw and fucking bleeding  
Drowning in the womb of misery, the mother of depression  
The slaughter of all hope, the grim death of compassion  
Sell your soul to evil; sell your soul to death  
. . . Suicide, suicide, suicide, suicide, suicide, suicide . . .  
A dead empty stare into the ruins of my world  
A world I have already left, so many years ago<sup>43</sup>

It is as Nietzsche elucidated: “hope,—in reality it is the worst of all evils, because it prolongs the torments of man.”<sup>44</sup>

These musicians, like the literary artists Antonin Artaud and Yukio Mishima, consider suicide an achievement. Artaud confides:

If I commit suicide, it will not be to destroy myself but to put myself back together again. Suicide will be for me only one means of violently reconquering myself, of brutally invading my being, of anticipating the unpredictable approaches of God. By suicide, I reintroduce my design in nature; I shall for the first time give things the shape of my will.<sup>45</sup>

Through suicide a person triumphs over the mundane, common, and ugly; a person is most heroic when he or she is unafraid of ending his or her life.

In Japan, an orchestrated self-killing is tolerated and considered an action of honor and respect. Historically, *seppuku*, or *hari-kiri* (“belly-cutting”), developed from the military class and was a revered form of suicide and a purification ritual. Whether voluntary or obligatory, the climax of the ceremony is death by self-disembowelment: a left to right slice deep in the belly, and a final beheading by a specially trained swordsman. Opening up the abdomen symbolizes that the center of the person’s being is undefiled.<sup>46</sup> Author Yukio Mishima criticized the moral and material decadence imported into Japan from the West, championing a return to traditions of Imperial Japan and the samurai code of conduct.<sup>47</sup> He was obsessed with *seppuku*. Hoping to restore the code of the samurai, he created the Shield Society, a private army of eighty-five men, which Mishima described as “the world’s least armed, most spiritual army.”<sup>48</sup> On November 25, 1970, Mishima and four Shield Society members raided and seized the Tokyo-based Ichigaya Military Headquarters of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces. From a balcony, he gave a confrontational and provocative speech, imploring the crowd of 200 servicemen to return to the traditional ways of Imperial Japan. Mishima admonished that the Japanese thought only of money and had no patriotic or spiritual foundation.<sup>49</sup> After his speech, which was not well received, he walked back inside the Headquarters and committed *seppuku*. His *kaishaku* (suicide assistant) completed the ritual with Mishima’s beheading, which partly failed when the *kaishaku* tried three times to sever the head from the body before one of Mishima’s other acolytes was finally successful.<sup>50</sup> Now legendary, the coup and ritualized suicide was ridiculed at the time, yet is emblematic of Mishima’s idealization of samurai morality and of his exaltation of suicide as an aesthetic act, a way to preserve the beauty of youth: “If you want your beauty to endure you must commit suicide at the height of your beauty.”<sup>51</sup> Throughout his life, Mishima desired to be not just a man of letters and words but “a man of action,” and in order to reclaim his honor he followed a paradigm of ferocious self-destruction. On the appointed day, he submitted the last pages of his last book to his publisher and composed his death poem:

A small night storm blows  
Saying “falling is the essence of a flower”



Then those who hesitate arrived.<sup>52</sup>

Dead is legendary for declaring his stance against the trendiness and commercialism of the Extreme Metal (in particular, Death Metal) scene of his time. Bands like Mayhem sought a radically evil, dark, and aggressive sound, and more bloody, transgressive, and theatrical stage shows.<sup>53</sup> The origins of the Black Metal scene came from a disillusionment with mediocrity, commercialism, and poserdom; bands needed the will to make the violent and destructive content of the music real.<sup>54</sup> This challenge to the mainstream is what drove band members and fans beyond the taboos around self-murder, homicide, vandalism, and arson. As the sociologist Keith Kahn-Harris writes in *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*, “Transgression, like extremity, implies a sense of testing and crossing boundaries and limits.” He continues, “Ultimately, transgression is dangerous” and “both dissolves and affirms being.”<sup>55</sup> Transgressive behavior is empowering in that it declares war on social norms, authority, and the law. In terms of suicide, scholars of self-destruction (such as Hillman) argue for a morally neutral and positive hermeneutical approach to the problem: culturally sanctioned attitudes do exist, if not for the act itself, then for its philosophical, spiritual, and political significance. This is the terrain of SBM.

SBM abounds with the transformative possibilities in contemplating and determining one’s own death. This position is explicitly literal in the name of the band Make A Change . . . Kill Yourself. Band member Ynleborgaz explains that he received “some suicide letters” in the summer of 2004 that inspired him to “discover a whole new world inside his head” and to create “desolate landscapes of depressive melodies.”<sup>56</sup> He (along with lyricist Nattetale) used the letters as a catalyst to explore the “darkest side of his psyche”<sup>57</sup>:

. . . As I drop lifeless to the floor.  
Follow my footprints of blood: my steps of blood.  
Leave everything behind you and step into my reality.  
Where no happiness is found.  
Feel the wind torment your skin.  
Feel the sun burn your skin and turn to stone.  
Feel my razor blades tongue and cut yourself deep and desirably.  
Let the blood run in an overflowing stream and submit to my suicide and yours.  
Nothing but death in this life is certain.  
You may be in some state of happiness but none of this will stay real.  
You are trapped in a spider’s web.  
You might as well just kill yourself.<sup>58</sup>

Make A Change . . . Kill Yourself reminds listeners of their own mortality, the fragility of life, and the transitory nature of happiness. However, in spite of the music being a liminal

space in which to play with controversial themes and language, writers such as Harris and the theologian Jason Forster critique those aspects of the Extreme Metal genre that champion death and destruction simply to shock people and sell records. From this perspective, musicians who just “talk the talk” are fakes, in contrast to a musician like Dead, a man of action, who followed the ideology to its logical conclusion. Developing this idea further (even though their actions are in a different context), suicide bombers, self-immolating monks and street vendors, and self-disemboweling writers are true SBM artists. As Camus reflected, “An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart, as is a great work of art.”<sup>59</sup>

Euronymous’s photo of Dead on the cover of Mayhem’s *Dawn of the Black Hearts* is a visual representation of a complex discourse between music as an agent for individual edification or social change, and music as entertainment. It is a seminal relic of the violent, death-worshipping origin of Black Metal, and an icon for those who continue to play with its symbolic inversion of normative values in order to be innovative and revolutionary.<sup>60</sup> The fundamental aesthetics of the scene have been reproduced by thousands of bands who showcase real and staged actions, and project images of self-mutilation and self-destruction, in order to provoke the audience out of their contented apathy and from what Ernest Hemingway referred to as “backing into the grave.”<sup>61</sup> Suicidogenic heroes and heroines celebrate the pleasure of having the option to choose death, and with it the joy of discovering that a person must cast away his or her life in order to live. Joy is a recurrent theme in the accounts of suicide survivors and in the rich and varied ideas found in suicidological literature. In George Howe Colt’s *November of the Soul: the Enigma of Suicide*, a twenty-five-year-old man is quoted who makes clear the triumph he felt when he decided to take his own life:

It was like being in class and everyone around you is giving the wrong answer . . . Blowing your head off is the answer. The answer to life, the answer to your identity, the answer to your self-preservation. That gun to your head is the most beautiful answer. And even as you are thinking of killing yourself, you can be full of passion, full of life. I think for many people it’s that zest to live that makes them keep wrapping the noose around their neck. They’re saying, “I’ll show you how much I want to live.”<sup>62</sup>

How many people slowly suffocate themselves in customs, habits, and apathy? The end of inquisitive curiosity and expansive speculation is an early intrusion of death. For I Shalt Become, suicide is a way to break away from this smothering blanket of uninspired lethargy:

A last, choked breath  
Before lifelessly  
The body hangs

A cheer rises from the crowd  
A sway in the breeze  
And life continues.<sup>63</sup>

Even though the imagery and content of SBM's music may be morbid and shockingly painful, it is purposefully invested in the venerable quest to maintain human dignity.

No single theory can elucidate the complex motives for suicide. However, it is vital to remember that in the above lyrics for "End Time" the crowd happily cheers as the veil is lifted between this world and the next, and that the actor has a receptive audience, no matter how disturbing the end game. There is admiration and respect for those who overcome the body's "will to live" and those who choose to be masters of their fate.<sup>64</sup> There is pleasure in remembering one's freedom to choose death, or at least the freedom to choose between available options. Suicide notes and statements by survivors often express the clarity of the Chosen Death: the suicide bomber, for example, may find more satisfaction from determining the day and method of his or her own death than the person who clings so passionately to life. But it is not enough to just die; one's death must have a purpose. The vehement examples discussed here illustrate motivations such as release, revolution, revenge, and ritual purification. The distinct focus of Suicidal Black Metal traces these multifarious answers to the suicide question: the listener is immersed in an atmosphere that resonates with both the pleasure and the pain of self-destruction; veins are slashed open to insist that one is very much alive. As Dead's suicide note wryly ends: "Excuse all the blood. Let the party begin."<sup>65</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Open a vein  
To watch it . . .  
It fits in  
Too much it . . .

Disinvite  
Dis-disinvite  
Disinvite  
When I'm looking alone  
Trying alone

Melvins, "Disinvite," *Gluey Porch Treatments* (Alchemy Records, 1986). All lyrics throughout essay cited from *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives*, <http://www.metal-archives.com>.

<sup>2</sup> Also referred to as Depressive Suicidal Black Metal (DSBM).

<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 11. In conclusion, Camus rejects suicide both philosophically and physically, and he explains that the task of living should be accepted. In contrast to this position, this essay presents ideas that are in favor of the individual's right to choose suicide and possible motivations for choosing suicide. See Beatriz Scaglia's "Philosophy of Suicide," in *On Fire for a Cause: The Horror of Self-Immolation* (Webster's Digital Services, 2011), 47. See also, Michael Cholbi, "Libertarian Views and the Right to Suicide" in "Suicide," 3.4, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, July 29, 2008, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suicide>.

<sup>4</sup> Also referred to as *marananussati bhavana*, see V.F. Gunaratna, "Buddhist Reflections on Death," *Access to Insight: Readings in Theravada Buddhism 1994-2011*, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/gunaratna/wheel102.html>. No doubt this statement about Buddhist thought is a generalization and deserves a more nuanced presentation, however the author has limited the examples for the sake of brevity. Consider this poem by Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku:

The monkey is reaching  
For the moon in the water.  
Until death overtakes him  
He'll never give up.  
If he'd let go the branch and  
Disappeared in the deep pool,  
The whole world would shine  
With dazzling pureness.

<sup>5</sup> See Larry Rosenberg's account of how his teacher led a meditation in the same room of a decaying corpse. Rosenberg, "The Supreme Meditation," *Shambala Sun*, November 2000, <http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1792>.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Suicide," in *Studies in Pessimism* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Marghanita Laski, *Ecstasy in Secular and Religious Experiences* (London: Cresset Press, 1961), 240.

<sup>8</sup> Mats Lundberg, *Black Metal Satanica*, DVD (Cleopatra, 2008). Interview with Kvarforth by *Black Terror Webzine* (October 2005), quoted in "Interviews," *Shining*, <http://shiningband.tripod.com/interviews-blackterror.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Lundberg, *Black Metal Satanica*.

<sup>10</sup> James Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul*, quoted in George Howe Colt, *November of the Soul: The Enigma of Suicide* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 343-344.

<sup>11</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> These altruistic virtues are not limited to religious discourse; however, the author is using examples from three religious traditions for the purposes of exploring the language used to describe spiritual enlightenment.

<sup>13</sup> Colt, *November of the Soul*, 235. The twenty-third chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* is reported to have been the inspiration for the monks and nuns who self-immolated to protest the Vietnam War. The chapter tells the story of the Medicine King Bodhisattva who burned himself as an offering to Buddha.

<sup>14</sup> See “Arab Spring,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab\\_Spring](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Spring). See also Josh Sanburn, “A Brief History of Self-Immolation,” *Time*, January 20, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2043123,00.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Al Alvarez, *The Savage God* (New York: Random House, 1971), 103.

<sup>16</sup> Ann Marie Oliver and Paul F. Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs’ Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xxi.

<sup>17</sup> Oliver and Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs’ Square*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 100. See also Steve Taylor, *Durkheim and the Study of Suicide* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 150–153.

<sup>19</sup> Anat Berko, *The Path to Paradise: The Inner World of Suicide Bombers and Their Dispatchers* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2007), 118.

<sup>20</sup> Oliver and Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs’ Square*, 119.

<sup>21</sup> “Last Words of a Terrorist,” *The Guardian*, September 30, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/30/terrorism.september113>.

<sup>22</sup> “Last Words of a Terrorist.”

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting to note that the English word *martyr* derives from the Greek word “witness” (*martyrs*) and that the Arabic words for martyr and witness (*shaheed*) are identical. The martyr’s gift of self-sacrifice is intimately tied with a public witnessing (by either people or supernatural beings) of the event: see Keith Lewinstein, “The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam,” in Margaret Cormack, ed. *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78–79. Consider also at a concert how the audience witnesses staged self-mutilation by frontmen such as the Shining’s Kvarforth: Joseph Allen, “‘Dead’ on His Last Album Cover,” *Rock Star Martyr*, April 8, 2011, <http://rockstarmartyr.net/dead-on-his-last-album-cover/>. While the term authenticity has been challenged by postmodern cultural theorists, it is used here as a term to describe a state of being in the world in accordance with the truth and reality of one’s sense of self. See “Authenticity,” *New World Encyclopedia*, [www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Authenticity\\_\(philosophy\)](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Authenticity_(philosophy)).

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 54–55. Apostle Paul proclaims that Christians need not fear death because of Christ’s sacrificial atonement for humanity’s sins: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” The soul is victorious.

<sup>25</sup> George Minois, *History of Suicide: Voluntary Death in Western Culture* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>26</sup> Carlin Barton, “Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds,” in Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self*, 30. The etymology of the word sacrifice includes the Latin word *sacrificare*, ‘holy-making,’ its root meaning *sacra*, ‘sacred rights.’

<sup>27</sup> Colt, *November of the Soul*, 155.

<sup>28</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, quoted in Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> Make a Change . . . Kill Yourself, “Chapter III,” *Make a Change . . . Kill Yourself* (Total Holocaust Records, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> “Maya (Buddhism),” *Knowledge Rush*, [http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Maya\\_\(Buddhism\)](http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Maya_(Buddhism)). See also Jason Forster, “Commodified Evil’s Wayward Children: Black Metal and Death Metal as Purveyors of an Alternative Form of Modern Escapism” (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2006), 82; [http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/966/1/thesis\\_fulltext.pdf](http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/966/1/thesis_fulltext.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Colt, *November of the Soul*, 137.

<sup>32</sup> Sûrah al-A`lâ: 16–17.

<sup>33</sup> 1 John 2: 15–17.

<sup>34</sup> Shining, “Through Corridors of Oppression,” *Through Years of Oppression* (Unexploded Records, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Colt, *November of the Soul*, 226.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, James Hillman, *Suicide and the Soul* (Woodstock: Spring Publications, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> In Lundberg’s video documentary *Black Metal Satanica*, Acerbus from the Black Metal band Ondskapt comments on why his music might be just a pale reflection of the diabolical nature of everyday life: “I can tell you this, that if this whore of a world lasts even ten more years you’ll find something even heavier than Ondskapt. I can tell you that something more advanced, something more devilish, more extreme . . . I don’t know if it will be raping babies or if it would be burning priests on local television . . . I don’t know if it would be some kind of genocide which is filmed for the camera.”

<sup>38</sup> Colt, *November of the Soul*, 201.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Menninger, *Man Against Himself*, quoted in Colt, *November of the Soul*, 271.

<sup>40</sup> Lundberg, *Black Metal Satanica*.

<sup>41</sup> Lundberg, *Black Metal Satanica*.

<sup>42</sup> The Japanese word *ukiyo* is literally translated in English as “floating world.” It means a world of impermanent, fleeting beauty and amusement. A genre of Japanese painting developed during the 17th to the 19th centuries that portrayed the world of kabuki, courtesans, and geisha, all divorced from the responsibilities of the mundane, everyday world: “Definition of Ukiyo-e,” *Babylon*, <http://dictionary.babylon.com/ukiyo-e>.

<sup>43</sup> Shining, “Claws of Perdition,” *Album IV: The Eerie Cold* (Avantgarde Music, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Fredrick Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human* (Neeland Media, 2010), 42.

<sup>45</sup> Antonin Artaud “On Suicide,” quoted in Colt, *November of the Soul*, 226.

<sup>46</sup> David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 133.

<sup>47</sup> Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide*, 141.

<sup>48</sup> “Yukio Mishima,” *Philosopedia*, [http://philosopedia.org/index.php/Yukio\\_Mishima](http://philosopedia.org/index.php/Yukio_Mishima).

<sup>49</sup> “Yukio Mishima,” *Philosopedia*.

<sup>50</sup> “November 25, 1970,” *The Yukio Mishima Web Page*, ed. Dennis Michael Iannuzzi, <http://www.members.tripod.com/dennismichaeliannuzz/finalDay.html>. See also Colt, *November of the Soul*, 141.

<sup>51</sup> Yukio Mishima, quoted in Colt, *November of the Soul*, 141. Consider the famous line said by actor John Derek in the film *Knock on Any Door* (1949): “Live fast, die young and have a good-looking corpse!”

<sup>52</sup> Carlos Mal, “The Death Poem of Mishima,” *No More Mr. Nice Poet*, July 30, 2009, <http://nomoremisternicepoet.blogspot.com/2009/07/death-poem-of-mishima.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Moynihan and Didrik Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2003), 58–62.

<sup>54</sup> Forster, “Commodified Evil’s Wayward Children,” 24–28.

<sup>55</sup> Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (New York: Berg, 2007), 29.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Sun, “Interview: Make A Change . . . Kill Yourself,” *Mirgilus Sicularum*, May 2008, <http://www.mirgilus.com/interviews/macky.html>.

<sup>57</sup> HansKopf, “Interview with Ynleborgaz (Make A Change . . . Kill Yourself, Angantyr, Blodarv),” *Mortem Zine*, January 31, 2007, <http://www.mortemzine.net/show.php?id=453>.

<sup>58</sup> Make a Change . . . Kill Yourself, “Chapter II,” *Make a Change . . . Kill Yourself* (Total Holocaust Records, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> Alvarez, *The Savage God*, 99.

<sup>60</sup> “Years later, Necrobutcher spoke of the impact of Per Yngve Ohlin’s icon: ‘Some people became more aware of the scene after Dead had shot himself. After that, churches started to burn and it just went crazy here. I think it was Dead’s suicide that really changed the whole scene. . . . A lot of young musicians got into the scene because it was the most aggressive and violent scene out there at the time’”: Allen, “Dead’ on His Last Album Cover.”

<sup>61</sup> Ernest Hemingway, quoted in Colt, *November of the Soul*, 271.

<sup>62</sup> Colt, *November of the Soul*, 228.

<sup>63</sup> I Shalt Become, “End Time,” *The Pendle Witch Trials* (No Colours Records, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism*: “It will generally be found that, as soon as the terrors of life reach the point at which they outweigh the terrors of death, a man will put an end to his own life. But the terrors of death offer considerable resistance; they stand like a sentinel at the gate leading out of this world. Perhaps there is no man alive who would not have already put an end to his own life, if this end had been of a purely negative character, a sudden stoppage of existence. There is something positive about it; it is the destruction of the body; and a man shrinks from that, because his body is the manifestation of the will to live” (29).

See also William Ernest Henley’s “Invictus,” (1875):

Black as the Pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeoning of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll.  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

<sup>65</sup> There are different reported versions of Dead’s final statement. See Chris Campion, “In the Face of Death,” *The Guardian*, February 20, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2005/feb/20/popandrock4>; Moynihan and Söderlind, *Lords of Chaos*, 62; and “Biography,” *Pell Yngve Ohlin*, <http://www.freewebs.com/peryingveohlin/Pages/Biography.html>.