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# METAL AND GOTHIC LITERATURE: EXAMINING THE DARKER SIDE OF LIFE (AND DEATH)

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## Abstract

This article examines the connections between Gothic literature and the lyrics in Death metal music, specifically the lyrics of Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, and Deicide. The study examined the lyrics for each band's first 3 albums and their most recent three albums, looking for Gothic characteristics. Further, the study aims to see if bands are changing their focus in terms of lyrics over the span of their careers—especially in terms of the Gothic tenets they incorporate into their songs and how they connect to traditional Gothic texts. This study continues the research begun in the article appearing in *Heavy Metal Music in Britain*.

## Introduction

Death metal music has always fascinated me because much of it is so violent and off putting to the general public. On the other hand, much of the musicianship is some of the best in metal today. Having seen some Death metal shows over the years (Cannibal Corpse, Suffocation, Kataklysm) I have found my jaw hitting the ground on a number of occasions because of the sheer intensity of the music and the abilities of the musicians. Also, I have always been someone who loved lyrics—I like to know what bands are singing about, and Death metal lyrics provide a wide range of topics, though often it's next to impossible to decipher them when listening to a song, whether live or recorded. Because of my love for most things Metal and my passion for Gothic literature, I wanted to continue researching the connection between metal lyrics and characteristics of Gothic fiction. This study is a continuation of the one published in the *Heavy Metal Music in Britain* anthology in 2009. In that article I examined Gothic literature in relation to many of the early metal bands, including Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, Iron Maiden, and Saxon. Much of that article's focus dealt with how the bands used Gothic literary characteristics in their lyrics, such as Satan or Satan's influences, barbaric tendencies, narratives that took place in scary or foreboding places, and instances of the occult in the lyrics. The more I listened to Death metal music, the more I became interested to see how much these characteristics appeared in those lyrics—which has led to this article.

Gothic literature as an art form first appeared with Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764. It kicked off one of the most popular periods in Gothic fiction with authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, and William Beckford gaining immediate popularity. This era, from roughly 1760-1820 also introduced the literary world to many of the early English Romantic poets, who began their careers writing Gothic stories and poems—Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. What does all this have to do with Death Metal music? At first glance, nothing, but after exa-

mining the most prominent characteristics of Gothic fiction and analyzing them against the lyrics of many death metal bands the parallels become evident. The goal of this research is to examine literary characteristics in Gothic fiction and determine if those tenets appear in Death metal music's lyrics. In essence, were they using Gothic characteristics in their lyrics, and if they were, were there changes in how they used them from their first three albums to their most recent three. The focus of this study will be on three of the most prominent Death metal bands: Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, and Deicide.

### **Concepts for the study**

This study arose out of my previous research that appeared in *Heavy Metal Music in Britain*, edited by Gerd Bayer, where I examined the connections between characteristics of Gothic literature in metal music lyrics—particularly bands which began during the first decade of heavy metal's development: Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, and Saxon. What I learned was that each of these bands used characteristics found in Gothic literature in their lyrics, though none of them used these characteristics as a primary approach to lyric writing. As a lifelong fan of both Gothic fiction and Metal music I wanted to see if there was a connection between the two, though I did have a good idea there would be some connections at the outset based on my own experience with both the literature and the music. I also wanted to learn if bands continued to use the same Gothic characteristics over successive albums and over long periods of time.

As someone who listens to Death metal, though I am not as well-versed in it as I am in other genres of Metal, I assumed that there are Gothic characteristics in the lyrics, though I did not know how prevalent they are. I wanted to see how often Death metal bands use Gothic tenets in their lyrics and if over time they tend to use the same ones at the same general rate. Also, I felt it was important to look at bands who have been around for at least 20 years and that have made at least 6 albums—that way I know that they have some longevity in the scene and they have had time to develop their own lyrical style. The notion of time is important because I want to learn which types of Gothic characteristics bands tend to rely on and which types tend to be used less often. By doing this I hope to learn about patterns in bands' uses of lyrics and what effect those patterns have on the songs and inevitably the albums.

Furthermore, by selecting Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, and Deicide, I am examining three important bands in the scene, three of the bands who have been around the longest, and three bands who can serve as the baseline for future examinations of Death metal lyrics and Gothic fiction characteristics. In the future I plan to look at many more bands, including Arch Enemy, Enslaved, Obituary, Entombed, Amon Amarth, Carcass, and Unleashed. By selecting these three to start there is good variety in lyrical themes and the amount of focus on Gothic characteristics throughout the bands' histories.

### **Methodology**

I selected Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, and Deicide because each has been around for at least 20 years from the time of their first album to their most recent. This is important because I want to examine the first three albums' lyrics and the most recent three albums' lyrics from each band. This approach, in part, allows me to see if 1) the bands use Gothic literary tenets in their lyrics, and 2) if the bands have changed their approach to lyric writing in terms of

how often they use Gothic characteristics over the years. I can also look for changes in the types of Gothic characteristics the bands are using—assuming they do use them.

Before I could examine the lyrics I needed to have a basic list of Gothic characteristics to look for as I read and analyzed the texts. I chose not to use the same sources I did in my previous article because the previous list came from a book which was nearly 30 years old and did not really address Gothic fiction prior to 1980. This is an issue because Gothic literature is still incredibly popular today, and there are different characteristics today that really weren't around before 1980. In researching various texts, I selected Daniel Olson's (2011) edited collection, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Gothic: Great Gothic Novels since 2000* because of the way he decided on his list of characteristics and the list itself:

Nevertheless, in a post 2000 survey that went out to a hundred Gothic scholars from Europe and North America. . . editors Diane Long Hoeveler and Tamir Heller found that scholars tended to agree on many of the Gothic's traits and tones, all of which were shared with our contributors. Their survey respondents mentioned that often the Gothic explores fantasies, hidden and forbidden desires (murder, incest, and worse), damnation, physical and emotional disease and aberration, revenge, curses, family lineages, estate battles, horror, terror, falls, the sublime, superstition, reanimation, entrapment and confinement (especially of women), the supernatural, the past, and haunted and decayed structures (castles, mansions, abbeys, or modern houses of spirits). (xxvi)

Another reason I selected the characteristics that Olson discusses in his introduction is that today's scholars are still using some of the same characteristics from the original study (the supernatural, archaic settings, murder, etc.), but there are also many that were not included in the original study (physical and emotional disease and aberration, revenge, and curses, to name a few). Because the two sets of characteristics are combined I felt that I could get the most thorough collection of tenets, which would make the lyrical analysis more accurate and complete.

Once I knew which characteristics I would be using for the study I began examining the lyrics of the bands. I realized that the best way to show the data from the lyrical analysis would be to use some charts which examine the total numbers of individual characteristics used for the first three albums and the last three albums for each band. In the charts I have selected those characteristics that appeared to show the biggest changes in the number of times each tenet was used.

***Cannibal Corpse***

First three albums: <i>Eaten Back to Life</i> (1990), <i>Butchered at Birth</i> (1991), <i>Tomb of the Mutilated</i> (1992)		Most recent three albums: <i>Evisceration Plague</i> (2009), <i>Torture</i> (2012), <i>Skeletal Domain</i> (2014)	
Physical and Emotional Disease	20	Physical and Emotional Disease	22
Hidden and Forbidden Desires	18	Hidden and Forbidden Desires	14
Supernatural	7	Supernatural	6
Terror	2	Terror	8
The Past	1	The Past	4
Entrapment and Confinement	3	Entrapment and Confinement	5
Revenge	0	Revenge	7

In looking at the Cannibal Corpse data several things stand out. It's important to reiterate, first, that characteristics listed above are not the only ones that

appeared in the Cannibal Corpse albums, but they are the ones that showed the biggest increase or decrease in number of times they appeared between the first three albums and the final three albums. First, by looking at the total number of times that Gothic characteristics were used (beyond just the above list) from the first three albums to the most recent three albums there is a 19 % increase, though the number of uses of Gothic characteristics increased the number of songs per album also increased, which lowered the average number of Gothic tenets per album. For instance, on Cannibal Corpse's first three albums there were 28 songs and Gothic characteristics were used in the lyrics 66 times for an average of 2.35 uses per song. Whereas in their most recent three albums there were 36 songs and 79 Gothic characteristics were used, for an average of 2.2 uses per song. Clearly, the drop is negligible, and this is predominantly because Cannibal Corpse is writing more songs per album. Despite the drop in uses per song, there are increases in various Gothic categories.

By examining the chart it is clear that the band has increased the number of characteristics in many categories. Those of particular importance are Physical and Emotional Disease, Terror, and Revenge. For example, in the song "High velocity impact spatter," from the album *Skeletal Domain* (2014, track 1), physical and emotional disease is clearly shown in the lyric Slamming/You into walls excessive speed/Creates catastrophic sounds/Scraping/Fresh blood and guts from off the pavement/Before stench of death sets in/Piercing between the eyes and unexpected/ Liquid red spraying behind/Killing/Impact spatter brutal force/Something I will always need.

Someone who needs to murder has some kind of emotional disease, and these types of lyrics run throughout Cannibal Corpse songs and albums. The increased use of these particular Gothic characteristics shows an increase in violence in the lyrics, which with the other two bands being examined is not usually the case. Cannibal Corpse has increased the violence as well as the amount of music they put out.

Likewise, an example of terror is seen in the song "Sarcophagic frenzy" from the *Torture* (2012, track 2) album. Zombies chase the narrator — Panic is a catalyst/They crave limbs-to rip and twist/Now soon to be within their grasp/Run-the chase begins/Terror-they're closing in/Must attempt to refrain from defeat/Done-fallen to the ground/Clawing-disturbing sounds/Can't escape the gnashing of their teeth.

Though the word terror is mentioned in the lyric, it is clear by the words that the narrator is in unimaginable fear for his life, and by the end of the quote he has become a victim of the zombies. The use of examples of terror in their lyrics is especially interesting because the band only used it twice in its first three albums, and although it was used 8 times in their most recent three it is important because each song has a first person narrator who is either being terrorized himself, as in "Sarcophagic frenzy" or terrorizing someone else, as in *Evisceration Plague's* (2009, track 8) "Evisceration plague: "Stabbing compulsion overwhelms my mind/Terrorized screaming follows the thrust of my knife/I wrench the blade from the chest to the crotch/Organs and entrails fall to the ground." Though clearly Cannibal Corpse's songs are still horribly violent, the increase in Gothic characteristics like Terror and Revenge makes the lyrics more personal—and in that sense even more gruesome and disturbing.

Furthermore, the band goes back to some classic Gothic characteristics when it showed an increase in its use of entrapment and confinement as well as referencing the past in its lyrics. Whereas in traditional Gothic literature women are typically the ones who are confined, Cannibal Corpse does not specify in their lyrics, though their lyrics show no outward signs that those being trapped were women by describing the female body in any way. In the *Torture* (2012, track 9) album, the song “Caged. . .Contorted” is a clear example of this entrapment:

Abducted by a psychopath with evil intent/Beaten to the point of unconsciousness/Awakened by the sound of someone screaming in pain. . ./Realizing now that you are trapped in a cage/Arms and legs in disarray/Bones have all been broken and your limbs are displaced. These images are a much more brutal entrapment than is seen in Ann Radcliffe or Matthew Lewis’ work—though in their fiction much of the brutality is implied rather than explained. For instance, in Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796), one of the main female characters, Agnes, who became pregnant while a novice in a convent in Madrid, is thrown by the evil abbess into the convent’s crypt until the child is born. Agnes gives birth to the child, it dies, and Agnes nearly loses her life until she is rescued at the end of the novel. In many of the early Gothic works like *The Monk* and Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) the Catholic Church is seen as much of a confining force as any cage or locked room. Often those that are confined, like Agnes, are nuns or women whose families are wealthy, but because the women themselves are not allowed to have personal wealth they are worth nothing unless married or given to the church. Cannibal Corpse isn’t talking about religion’s power to imprison, but the physical confinement they describe is often taken farther by the physical destruction done to the narrator of the song or by the narrator of the song. Also, unlike Deicide, whose focus consistently is on religion, Cannibal Corpse does not concern itself with any formal institution, like religion, in its lyrics.

Cannibal Corpse also wrote more songs that are set in the past—usually the distant past, in their most recent albums—which mimics Gothic authors like Radcliffe, Lewis, and Beckford, each of whom set their novels in medieval times. The *Evisceration Plague* (2009, track 5) album contains a good example. The song “Beheading and burning” references a village being destroyed and its inhabitants raped and murdered. Using the term “village” and the means by which the people were killed—axes and swords—leads the listener to believe that the song is set

in the past—possibly medieval times: “Descend upon the village on a mission of death/Setting fire to their homes, attacking the men. . ./Targeting their necks a ruthless slaughter begins/Our axes swing with malice, blood drips from the blades.” Though the song does not say specifically that the action took place in the past the word choice indicates that it is so. Gothic authors like Horace Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto*) and Edgar Allan Poe (“Cask of Amontillado,” “The Masque of Red Death,” and many others) often set their stories in the past.

**Morbid Angel**

First three albums: <i>Altars of Madness</i> (1989), <i>Blessed are the Sick</i> (1991), <i>Covenant</i> (1993)	Most recent three albums: <i>Gateways to Annihilation</i> (2000), <i>Heretic</i> (2003) <i>Illud Divinum Insanus</i> (2011)
Supernatural 19	Supernatural 18
Hidden/Forbidden Desires 18	Hidden/Forbidden Desires 13
Damnation 13	Damnation 0

Physical/Emotional Disease	6	Physical/Emotional Disease	3
Entrapment/Confinement	6	Entrapment/Confinement	5
Reanimation	6	Reanimation	3

Morbid Angel's use of Gothic literary characteristics declined heavily from its first three albums to its most recent three albums. In fact, it declined by 40%, from being used 84 times in the first three albums to just 54 times in the most recent three. And unlike Cannibal Corpse, there was not a significant increase in the number of songs in the six albums. Their first three albums had 32 songs, while the last three had 34. By dividing the number of songs per set of albums by the number of times the band used Gothic characteristics there is a drop of one full characteristic—from 2.63 in the first three albums to just 1.58 characteristics in the second set of three albums. By examining the chart more closely five of the six characteristics listed showed a drop from the early albums to the later albums, some by a small margin, like *Supernatural* (19 to 18), while others, especially *Damnation*, by a huge margin (13 to 0).

Morbid Angel's early albums are characterized by more lyrics that address the supernatural, murder, and damnation, but as the band developed both musically and lyrically it moved away from these themes, to some extent. For instance, though the band still wrote about the supernatural quite often—about once every other song, it reduced the amount of references to murder and completely eliminated the references to damnation. An early example of damnation appears in the album *Altars of Madness* (1989). In the song "Damnation" (track 8), vocalist David Vincent sings "Ashes to ashes so I must be/Lost in this misery/There's nothing left here for me/I know of no other way/Even death cannot change my ways/ I'm first in line/To hell we shall go." The tenet of damnation is important in Gothic Literature as well. Matthew Lewis' lead character in *The Monk* (1796), Ambrosio, makes a deal with the devil, guaranteeing he can never go to heaven. Lucifer comes to Ambrosio before he believes he is about to be put to death and says, Shall the reward of my services be paid me? Dare you embrace my cause? Will you be mine, body and soul? Are you prepared to renounce him who made you, and him who died for you? Answer but yes and Lucifer is your slave. (pp. 433-34). Ambrosio does answer yes and is tricked by the devil and dies a slow painful death.

Even though Morbid Angel reduced virtually all of the Gothic characteristics it used from its first three albums to its most recent three, it only reduced the supernatural characteristic by one, from 19 to 18. Clearly, the band felt that using this tenet was lyrically important, even 20 years after its first album. One example early in the band's career is in the *Blessed are the Sick* (1991) album with the song "Thy kingdom come" (track 8)." The song opens with Restless minds beneath the ground/Through ghostly winds I hear the sound/Crying forth in ancient tongues/Eternal quest of vengeance/From tombs of scorn cadavers rise/Angered fury in their eyes/Solemn rage a need to kill/Feasting on holy hordes.

At various points in this quote supernatural elements are seen—first with ancient tongues being spoken by ghostly winds as well as zombies rising from the grave to seek revenge on those who support religion. Gothic fiction is rife with the supernatural as well. The first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), has multiple unexplained supernatural occurrences throughout the text. Early in the novel, a huge plumed cask crushes the son of the Prince of Otranto, Manfred. Later in the story, Manfred is attempting to take his now deceased son's fiancée' by force when a picture of his grandfather on the wall behind Manfred "Uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast" (p.26).

Toward the end of the novel a statue of Alfonso, the individual whose family should be ruling Otranto, bleeds from its nose. Each of these events go unexplained in the novel, though by the end of the story they all work to support the conclusion that Manfred is not the rightful prince of the city. Despite the fact that Morbid Angel drastically reduced its use of Gothic characteristics the band still used them to help get their message across. For example, in the song “Summoning Redemption” (track 2) on the album *Gateways to Annihilation* (2000), the band summons gods of all pristine” to come to their aid to enact revenge on the world: “I stand before thee, gods of all pristine/Come forth to see, all things to be seen/Now know the presence, and choose thy wrath/For flock of tyrants, who know thy path/Come now in sweeping vengeance/ Come now in needed time/I demand as I stand before you/Cleanse this world’s decay.

Both the supernatural and revenge tenets are used in these opening lines to set the stage for the rest of the song when the band calls for the world’s corruption to end. In order to achieve this goal within the song those two Gothic characteristics are needed to bring about that change.

### **Deicide**

First three albums: <i>Deicide</i> (1990), <i>Legion</i> (1992), <i>Once Upon the Cross</i> (1995)	Most recent three albums: <i>Till Death do us Part</i> (2008), <i>To Hell with God</i> (2011), <i>In the Minds of Evil</i> (2013)
Damnation 9	Damnation 15
Confrontation b/w Us and the Uncanny 4	Confrontation b/w Us and the Uncanny 0
Hidden/Forbidden Desires 9	Hidden/Forbidden Desires 11
Physical/Emotional Disease 11	Physical/Emotional Disease 12
Entrapment/Confinement 8	Entrapment/Confinement 9
Supernatural 9	Supernatural 13
Revenge/Curse 2	Revenge/Curse 7

Deicide increased the number of Gothic characteristics it used, but, like Cannibal Corpse, the band also had more songs on its most recent three albums. Basically, the average number of Gothic tenets the band used per song remained the same (2.29 to 2.25 characteristics per song respectively). Also similar to Cannibal Corpse is that over the years Deicide’s lyrics have gotten more violent—the lyrics in the most recent albums have more revenge/curses, hidden/forbidden desires, physical/emotional disease, and more damnation. Furthermore, because of these increases the lyrics are also more anti-religion, which is difficult to believe by examining the band’s catalog. Over the years the band also used fewer Gothic characteristics in their lyrics. In its first three albums Deicide used 15 different tenets, while in the most recent three albums only 9. It should be noted that 5 of the 6 characteristics that were not used most recently were only used once or twice in the first three albums, so the band was not relying on those tenets much early in its career either.

Damnation was the Gothic characteristic that the band showed the greatest increase from its first three albums to the most recent three albums. The album *To Hell with God* (2011) has six examples of Damnation out of the 10 songs. The most obvious example is from the song “Into the darkness you go (track 9).” The second stanza reads, Death, down to the flames of Belial, in through the gates of denial/Screaming and begging for god, belong to Satan now/ Chained in torment, till the end of hell and heaven’s reign/ Suffering in your damnation forever and a day/Tribulation, destiny, the verge of your demise/ Memories of all you’ve done, to haunt your afterlife/ Hell, coming too



fast to repel, into the pit of dispel/Leaving the body and the soul, into the darkness you go.

This song seems to be showing followers of Christ being taken to hell and explaining what will happen to them once they get there. Most of Deicide's songs that address damnation do so in a way that describes God's demise and the rise of Satan. "Into the Darkness you go" is one of the few that actually shows an individual or group being taken to Hell.

Gothic literature does contain stories where the antagonist gets sent to hell, but it is very rare where the devil wins in the end. One example when this does happen is when Lucifer claims Ambrosio at the end of *The Monk* (1998). At the conclusion of the book Lucifer explains to Ambrosio how he had been manipulating him throughout his entire downfall. He says, Know, vain Man! That I long have marked you for my prey: I watched the movements of your heart; I saw that you were virtuous from vanity not principle, and I seized the fit moment of seduction. I observed your blind idolatry of the Madona's picture. I had a subordinate but crafty spirit assume a similar form, and you eagerly yielded to the blandishments of Matilda. Your pride was gratified by her flattery; your lust onneeded an opportunity to break forth; You ran into the snare blindly, and scrupled not to commit a crime, which you blamed in another with unfeeling severity. (p. 440)

In the novel Ambrosio is known as the most pious priest in all of Madrid, nothing can lead him to sin or to break his vows. He is known as the greatest orator in Madrid as well—people flock to see his weekly sermons. In the end his vanity gets the best of him, as Lucifer explained in the previous quote. Deicide's lyrics often look to bring down the Christian God just as Lucifer sought to snare Ambrosio in his web of manipulation.

One example of Deicide's attempt to use its' lyrics to show Christianity's attempt to manipulate its followers is in the song "Tricked or Betrayed" (track 5) from the album *Once Upon the Cross* (1995). Throughout the song the lyrics attempt to convince the listener that Christianity is a hoax: "I think you should know/ They know it is true/That their book is a hoax/Join us to see through the light/Christ is a scheme and will ruin your life." The lyric emphasizes that the light that Christianity always talks about is part of the hoax, and people should see through it to get to the truth. Later in the song the real purpose of the song is made clear—that God does not exist. The lyric reads, "Cannot live with the fact that they are wrong/There is no such thing as God." Whether Deicide's lyrics call for people to go to hell, for them to denounce Christianity, or to just accept the perspective that God does not exist, listeners get a consistent message, regardless if they have the first three albums or the most recent three albums.

### **Closing thoughts**

By examining the types of Gothic characteristics that these three bands use the most, three characteristics stand out and there are connections to traditional Gothic tenets. The three characteristics are (in order of popularity) hidden and forbidden desires, physical and emotional disease, and the supernatural. These three characteristics are used much more often than the next two characteristics, damnation and entrapment and confinement, which are used less than half as often as the most commonly used characteristics. What does this show? Obviously, that Death metal is violent, which anyone who listens to it

and reads the lyrics would certainly understand quite quickly. But, each of these three characteristics has clear connections to Gothic literature—whether or not the bands were intentionally trying to make connections to Gothic characteristics. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe’s works are full of characters who have hidden and forbidden desires—Montresor in “The Cask of Amontillado” or the narrator in “The Tell-Tale Heart” or even Hop Frog in “Hop Frog.” Each of these characters intends on killing their eventual victim(s), all the while keeping their intentions clearly hidden from others. Another consideration could be that making connections to Gothic texts and authors is a way for the bands to move beyond the violence so inherent in their lyrics. It may also add creative merit to themselves and their genre as well as an attempt to appeal to the imagination in ways similar to Gothic authors.

Similarly, the characteristic of physical and emotional disease runs throughout Gothic fiction. Lucifer in *The Monk* (1998) even tells Ambrosio that he manipulated him through Ambrosio’s vanity and idolatry. Throughout much of the early Gothic literature the Catholic Church could rightly be termed as having an emotional disease based on the way its upper clergy treated novices, like Agnes in *The Monk* (1998), or even non-Catholics who may be put to death by the Inquisition for refusing to convert to Catholicism. Finally, the supernatural has always been prevalent in Gothic works. Any time an event or experience cannot be explained there is a connection to the supernatural. For instance, the ghost stories of Elizabeth Gaskell, or the vampire stories of John Polidori, Sheridan LeFanu, Bram Stoker, and even Stephen King all have their roots in the supernatural. Even present day zombie narratives or movies or tv shows like *The Walking Dead* or *World War Z* can rightly be referred to as supernatural texts.

The Gothic influences on Death metal are clear, but are the bands getting these ideas from Gothic texts and using them as the source of their lyrics? In most cases I would say no. The nature of Death metal lyrics lends themselves to the characteristics found in Gothic literature—the violence, the murder, the unexplainable occurrences, the revenge narratives, the hatred of formalized religion—all these tenets appear throughout Gothic fiction—whether in the earliest texts or even in today’s fiction and literature. What interests me the most is how different each band approaches its uses of these characteristics—while all of them use the most prominent three types, they do it in very different ways. Cannibal Corpse is the most violent, while Deicide’s focus relies on condemning religion and promoting Satanism, and then Morbid Angel’s is the most diverse in terms of subject matter—from their early ultra-violent lyrics to their more recent connections with Sumerian mythology, the Roman Empire, and the works of H.P. Lovecraft. This diversity is what fascinates me the most about these lyrics—they all, at least in this stage of my research, contain these characteristics, but the bands use them for very different purposes, which makes the lyrics that much more vibrant and the music that much stronger.

There is a reason why Death metal music is not considered mainstream—many people find the lyrics offensive and the music too abrasive. But, by examining the lyrics in terms of parallels with Gothic literary characteristics, a new understanding of the genre can be seen. Death metal music is not for everyone, but it should not be thrown away or disregarded without looking more deeply at connections made beyond the violence within the lyrics—there is more to it than that.

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