

OKTAY AHMED



BLACK METAL
A SHORT ESSAY

BLACK METAL: A SHORT ESSAY

by:

Oktay Ahmed

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Contact: <www.oktayahmed.com>.

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“Black Metal” (poetry)

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Foreword

For over 40 years, metal music has been a constant source of inspiration for me. Now, I feel compelled to share this passion and leave a lasting impression on the next generation of metalheads, casual listeners, and anyone curious about the genre.

Following the publication of my 2024 poetry collection, "**Black Metal**", I wanted to offer a deeper exploration for my readers. This short essay serves as a concise overview, delving into the origins, development, and current state of black metal.

This work is a labor of love, **freely available** to all.

While I encourage you to explore my "Black Metal" poems for a more personal exploration of the genre (available in paperback on Amazon and ebook on all major platforms), this essay stands alone as a resource for understanding black metal's rich history and enduring legacy.

Stay human. Stay metal. Stay black metallor.

Good reads.

Black Metal: A Short Essay

1. Introduction to Black Metal

The origin of black metal can be traced back to the late '80s and early '90s, and Norway is the place where black metal began to develop in all of its stormy brilliance.

A very important and necessary existence for the birth of black metal in Norway was the adaptations of all national Christian churches in the pre-900 ideas of Old Norse Shamanism.

The black color aspect of this music in this context also comes from the dogma of such era's beliefs when lots of people claimed that the eastern church rites of the Christians didn't symbolize atonement, creation, and heaven respectively.

Besides, from Norway with its music, black metal spread rapidly all over Scandinavia until it became one of the most recognized metal genres.

Both graphically and lyrically, it seemed to achieve international acceptance remarkably quickly. In the same way as heavy metal evolved from the financial crisis and distress that took many nations in the early 1960s and 1970s, the aggressive sound and graphics of black metal represent a scorning of the worldwide pop music that dominates consumerist Western culture.

As metal fellows feel isolated from the capitalistic world of the consumer, so the sound of black metal begins to sweep through every country. For those who behave like black metallers, this aesthetic represents a fetish of the destructive forces inherent in humanity. These forces are represented on a very small scale in the music of black metal.

Black metal is one of the most controversial genres of heavy metal music owing to its hostile and aggressive sound that often utilizes high-pitched vocals to invoke immense screaming. Often, themes and emotions focus on depression, hatred, suicidal ideation, and nihilism.

The reason why this particular music genre is known as black metal is because the lyrics and the sound often have a dark, shadowy feeling to them and discuss anti-Christian topics, graphic and satanic imagery, and the presence of disgorge vocals.

Throughout this study, the entire history of the genre of black metal and the gospel of black metal was investigated; the main controversies were exposed, and files about the recent black metal landscape were presented.

Music is an essential aspect of human culture, and the type of music that an individual listens to can reveal many things about the sociocultural aspects of that person. The societal and cultural influence of music is quite profound and cannot be overlooked.

One of the most interesting facets of music is that it has countless shapes and forms, and it is an ever-changing type of art as well. One of these music specialties is black metal.

1.1. Defining Black Metal

Early definitions of black metal linked it to a sense of the mystical. This connection led some scholars to define black metal as a complex process that goes beyond just music and lyrics. It begins with the music and visuals, and then incorporates ideology. This approach, however, can downplay the musical aspects of the genre, focusing instead on its social and philosophical significance.

Until the 1980s, the lines between black metal as art/music and ideology were blurry. Since the 1990s, this connection has become clearer, with some even viewing it as transcendent. Proponents of this view see black metal, in its purest form, as more than just music – it's a complete worldview that embraces mystical and often primal ideals. These ideals can be rooted in various belief systems, including paganism, Satanism, or even nationalism.

On the other hand, some scholars focus heavily on the music itself. They define black metal as a subgenre of heavy metal with a unique style defined by specific vocal techniques, unconventional guitar sounds, and an atmosphere that evokes feelings of dread and despair. This more general definition suggests that black metal can be appreciated and

judged primarily for its sonic qualities, potentially ignoring any social, political, or ideological messages associated with the genre.

Black metal has been a subject of several scholarly treatments, but there exists strong disagreement towards its definition and subject boundaries, and this is evident from the multiple definitions provided by different scholars. The variety of definitions can be divided into philosophical-historical and genre-specific definitions. In this section, I give a non-exhaustive review of these definitions. It is important to mention that these definitions can happen simultaneously within an individual's conceptualization of black metal.

1.2. Origins of Black Metal

For example, emphasizing these traits in almost every sense, especially aggressive and fast riffs, loud guitar usage, drum and bass guitar techniques, and of course using images associated with these cases, made thrash metal, death metal, black metal, and doom metal genres called extreme metal starting from the early 1980s.

Although general music audiences and the metal music community, which considers these four sub-genres and therefore extreme metal as different music, still perceive these sub-genres with a feeling of anger, the music listeners who do like extreme music have created open tournaments for categorizing extreme metal in their minds.

The comprehensive features of extreme metal, the bands that were influential in this ever-increasing storm, album covers, live performances, fanatical fans, and even non-structured musical elements gradually reveal a difference from each other to music lovers who are into musical journeys.

This section is introductory in nature, discussing the earliest origins of black metal. The functioning definition of black metal, incorporating historical context, is discussed from a musicological point of view.

The events and cultural influences that laid the foundation of black metal are explored before delving into chronological development and genre-defining acts in the coming parts. Metal's creative peak in terms of a number of individual metal genres unrelated to each other began in the 1980s.

The second generation of heavy metal genres that were closest to each other in terms of relationship and time of formation, as well as the main objects of this study, were the so-called extreme metal. This term was increasingly being used due to characteristic traits such as loud and aggressive musical atmosphere or extreme image.

2. Development of Black Metal

It is essential to the understanding of the black metal movement that it is predominantly European and although it draws little from the Christian message, it is equally sick of some rotating art bore

alternatives, emaciated on lies over the millennia of opposing evolution by obstructiveness of the psychological principle.

Negativity is both inspiring and moody. It righteously deplores good hippies and all libertine hedonists, discharging them of their seraphic tag everywhere, precious combustibles that have blistered forever the mind and tormented capitalists.

Since black metal only develops into pure music and not an elaborately arranged concerto built on proffered spontaneous screams, the scene, possibly as an inherent nature of its non-metaphysical dashing principle, is one of lords and their devotees.

The black metal style is characterized by long and complex songs, ravenously displaying raw speed, distortion, and untamed growling vocals.

It purports to emerge from or inspire lessons of a diabolic nature and, world physics willing, it can possibly be compared to the cubist movement of the early 20th century in its devastating and unstructured attempt to relieve evil of its innate loathsomeness and alienation. Essential to its authenticity is a clear identification with untamed animal instincts and intuitions, as opposed to a metaphysical acreage it requires imagination to decipher.

Physiologically, special emphasis is placed on grinding noise and high distortion of the guitars,

and most bands aim for a hateful, grueling approach when contemplating bindings.

2.1. Pivotal Moments

Well, let's start with Norway.

Norway was a unique place because, at the beginning, they only had a small number of hardcore metal scenes, which made them follow a unique path from the other cultures in the world.

This fact was also very strong in the cultural aspect – black metal was not synonymous with quality, but rather with a kind of rebellion, anarchic still present in groups so revolutionary by the duration of time, and especially, by the amount and variety of styles used along the period.

The band who had the principal inception of black metal was the first Mayhem, influencing with its wrinkles and extravagances – especially Dead's (Per Yngve Ohlin, a Swedish musician who was the vocalist and lyricist for the Norwegian black metal band Mayhem from 1988 to 1991.) suicide on stage and Euronymous's behavior.

The movement came to be called, for the media, the "Black Circle," a term never used by the members themselves, who simply saw themselves as the authentic elite of the black metal scene, despite Dead's poor execution, his delusions of grandeur, and total vanity.

Some bands focused on totally anti-Christian and nihilistic songs, which led, by their artists and behavior, to the formation of a strong cult image.

2.2. The 'Second Wave' in Norway (early 1990s)

Black metal came into prominence in the nineties with the most influential band in history, a Norwegian group called Mayhem. After sixteen years of chaos, Mayhem was the first band to be associated with the second wave of black metal, in which some bands started to possess a more distinct sound of black metal, composed around a set of basic elements – abrasive vocals, simple riff construction, dark and gloomy lyrics.

The 'second wave' in Norway stepped forward with the unprecedented release of Darkthrone's “A Blaze in the Northern Sky” in 1992.

During the previous years, a series of death metal bands such as Immortal and Burzum had already been striving to approach new musical spectrums, fused with a profound scent of coldness and putrefaction, in order to distance their music from their origins.

The misunderstood Everest had already been confined many years before the resurrection and the applauded Bai Bang, the official Norwegian ambassador for having represented Norway at the Eurovision festival.

There is still a controversial flash-back toward the early years of the second wave black metal. These flashbacks feature albums that present pieces somewhat ideologically or aesthetically inclined towards black metal, such as the self-titled track from Turbonegro's "Ass Cobra" release of 1996 or "Hanko" by Wig Wam, a prolific pop metal Norwegian band.

The overall features of the 'second wave' reserve to the black metal magic a compromised but meaningful niche.

Moving fast forward, historical perspectives are showing a change of scenery - the black metal mushroom which first grew in two distinctively different atmospheres: Denmark and Sweden, burst forth in a virtually completely unfathomable and unendurable form only in one country, namely Norway, during the turbulent years of 1991 to 1993.

In essence, the impudence of this Norwegian phenomenon lies in a most theatrical, almost romantic outcry, endeavor to defy high modernity on a global scale through a revival and enhancement of negative Romanticism, a concept that Goethe himself has once conceived with such fright and splendor.

The general social, psychological and aesthetic background includes themes drawing from religious elements - particularly Satanism, anti-Christian attitudes, misanthropy and paganism, and frequently

a mixture of all these. Accordingly, extreme pessimism is not unseen.

Parallels and concomitants could be easily drawn and established between the black metal and the 'dark wave' in modern pop music, and Hindu or Western European neo-pagan currents and beliefs. According to some currents, traditionalism and nationalism could be associated.

In this sense, black metal could be described as an expression of revitalizing the collective memory of identity, the awakening of cultural roots.

Black metal is not a purely musical phenomenon, its reception is built on image. Coherence is an indispensable aspect of any social phenomenon, especially whenever that phenomenon deepens and establishes connections with the reality of life and death. The bloody unrests do enlighten and distinguish.

In social or musical-pathological terms, various studies admit that black metal fans are generally adolescents attracted by the receptive aspects of black metal, or individuals with moral problems, low self-esteem, emotional problems, extrovert-aggressive hostility, substance abuse, and change of look. Such studies suggest that black metal behavior is essentially a fad passing with adolescence.

Nonetheless, extermination and self-destruction are always means of awakening and significant

punishment; life, no matter the instinctual-nihilistic call, always appears as a chapter of harmony for art, especially to the artist-warrior.

2.3. Key Bands: Mayhem and Burzum

While being the black aesthetes who often rely on the imagery of Satanism, vampirism, and death in their visuals to promote or sell their sounds, the members of Mayhem really managed to put into practice everything that their artistic activities advocated: immoral and degrading.

In February 1993, Burzum player Varg Vikernes murdered guitarist Euronymous, and the latter burned several other churches as a symbol of protest. The band represented then a clear and unique form of rebellion against outer society, since this type of extreme occurrences outside the stage or studio, that should satisfy the darkest searches, aspirations or longings of its creators and consumers, would only be reproduced within musical and visual creations of that some original members of Mayhem themselves scornfully described to us in their interviews.

The Norwegian band Mayhem represents the true essence of black metal. Mayhem is without a doubt one of the bands responsible for the initial existence and recognition of the sub-genre. Established in Oslo in 1984, widely recognized as the first black metal band in history, these Norwegians gradually oriented to the much more rapid death metal,

recording some of the most classic and important recordings of this style.

Twenty years after its establishment, Mayhem simultaneously released one of the best works of their career, and one of the greatest classics of black metal. “De Mysteriis Dom Sathanas”, in addition to being totally opposed to the first sounds of Mayhem, since it represents a much blacker style, is one of the most extreme and radical albums of the genre, without a doubt.

3. Controversies Surrounding Black Metal

Black metal is not purely a musical art but is influenced by other media and aesthetic aspects that are not subject to any notion of faith. We must also, however, highlight the importance of such manifestations by cinema or literature as objects of study.

The outcome of thoughtful or unintended misinterpretation of these concepts or indeed the adoption of them as mere accessory elements for viewing or just maintaining a consolidated tradition run the risk of completing the extreme nature of the black metal phenomenon as a whole and lead to neglect of some of its inherent values.

Finally, a point of principle to be remembered by us all is that several researchers hold that the bloodthirsty crimes committed by some black metallers are, in actuality, purely the responsibility of themselves and their own acts and were not the

result of the teachings of certain transgressive or unacceptable ideologies.

Black metal as a genre is predominantly identified by its theatrical, attention-seeking, and controversial endeavors, beyond its musical characteristics. From the early 90s, instances of violence, murder, paganism, and Satanism came to be synonymous with black metal - with some acts using every media to preach hate speech against specific religions or promoting powerful ideologies counter to mainstream society, which they often declare to separate themselves from.

In many cases, these acts have blamed the teachings of transgressive art for their criminal activities. The murder of a bandmate, burnt churches, artworks containing blasphemy, political extremism, bestiality, and hatred manifestos associated with black metal have not only quashed the inspiring tranquility of surrounding Scandinavian nature-inspired black metal, which sought to distance itself from musical outreach and projected rebellion against societal norms, but have also led to a significant amount of research being conducted on the DNA of black metal's extraordinarily enveloping characteristics as an art form.

In several states, these violations have even led to associated acts being arrested and their concerts interrupted.

3.1. Association with Violence and Arson

In contemporary media, black metal is still considered an extreme form of death metal, and it continues to make headlines, often due to the extreme behavior exhibited by some band members and fans. It is possible that they wish to remain a scapegoat subgenre for issues of youth crime and the nature-nurture debate that virulent music often seems to ignite.

Countering the criticism, black metallers argue that it is the media that makes a big issue out of the most rare occurrences, and that these acts therefore gain a reputation of being common among fans. They argue that black metal operates primarily at a symbolic level.

It must be noted that there are very few connections between black metal music and any form of skinhead or right-wing rock scene. While there are some anti-society and anti-music messages in the lyrics of several bands, and some fans seek a similar extreme in other aspects of their lives, it is important to recognize that what attracts many (but certainly not all) listeners to black metal is a general disaffection and a desire to escape despite the restrictions of the real world.

There is controversy surrounding the association of black metal with violence and arson. Varg Vikernes, as the main instigator of much of the notoriety surrounding black metal, has influenced

this reputation through his acts, such as the church burnings he was responsible for in the 1990s.

Varg Vikernes was sentenced to prison in 1994 for murder and arson. He was released on parole in 2009. In 2013, he was arrested in France on suspicion of terrorism, but the charges were later dropped.

Vikernes's prima donna behavior must be recognized as an exception among the Norwegian black metal scene, setting it apart from black metal in general. Vikernes does not now, nor has he ever, practiced Satanism, and he distanced himself from the rest of the Norwegian scene as well. Vikernes states that his primary motivation for these activities was directed against Christianity. Additionally, his attack on Øystein Aarseth could be interpreted as a matter of personal conflict.

3.2. Extremist Ideologies

What makes black metal so different within the new wave of metal music?

Unlike in other music sectors, here the extreme antisocial or radical political views and behaviors seem to be commonplace. However, it is important to understand that neutral or pro-communist, anti-Nazi or internationalist/politically anarchist and even apolitical artists are still present in contemporary black metal. Their music is very often very good and is followed by a wide array of devotees.

Even within the die-hard NSBM scene where xenophobic hatred, national superiority or racism are preached, there is a remarkable diversity in artistic visions, political views, and national origins of the actors involved.

This music subculture has attracted attention not only because of the controversial behavior of the performers and the fans, but also because of the underlying extremist ideologies and policies that are often embraced within the growing culture of non-mainstream musical genres, including black metal.

Mind you, politically extreme ideas have not always accompanied more extreme styles of music within the underground genres. For example, punk rock, hardcore, and thrash styles formed mostly in the European and American underground cultural spaces, but they did not carry along superimposed politically extreme narratives.

These styles were more anti-social, against materialism, and pro-antisocial rather than promoting very specific political ideologies in the way that neo-Nazi skinheads in Europe or the National Socialist Black Metal (NSBM) bands to this day explicitly do.

3.3. Philosophical and Cultural Significance

Metal music is often seen as exclusive, perhaps because it arose as a form of rebellion against mainstream culture. Despite facing harsh criticism, metal continues to thrive.

The connection between black metal and Satanism is a complex one. Some suggest that young fans drawn to black metal's intensity might explore Satanic themes as a way to grapple with anxieties about aging or societal expectations.

Some people claim that the philosophy of black metal leads to true personal sacrifices, while others claim that it is nothing more than a fleeting moment that reflects heart-wrench. In the Satanist world, the satanic star represents the head of Baphomet, a pagan deity who, in association with Lucifer, is the god of the modern church. Nowadays, it is often associated with the worship of Satan. It represents the "flesh" because, in the occult, it is believed that humans must satisfy only their own desires, and sometimes at the expense of others.

Black metal has a philosophy of bizarre Satanism, emphasizing negative emotions such as suffering, depression, nihilism, and misanthropy. In short, black metal is used to facilitate depression, horror, despair, and suffering as a spiritual paradise. The Satanist philosophy behind black metal is often regarded as bitter, evil, and reflective.

Metal is notorious for its dark and gloomy aesthetic. If a single subgenre has Jesus, sails, and the cross, why can't another one depict a "dark" and "cold" image? This beheld evil worldview can reveal the soul's longing, despair, and horror, as well as the beauty of life and space. Denying the expression of

sad emotion is a fundamentalist artistic foolishness, in my opinion.

Black metal, in particular, behaves in a very philosophical and ideological way, relying on individual expression and a personal approach to existential and emotional questions. All the so-called points of dubious existence and the enjoyment of art can, however, certainly lure one away from the truth. The point is thus to find the true aim of the music.

4. State of Black Metal Today

One of the main features in the BM concept of the late 2000s is the role of literature. Lyrics seem to be of no consequence at all.

At first, we thought this might be due to the accessibility of using lyrics on the internet, but bands with this characteristic can be traced quite easily even though specific lyric sheets are not available—this even happens in orchestra projects.

There are two integral aspects in these bands: the music, augmented with full-blown orchestras, and the use of mass media. These projects are symbiotic constructs in which the music boosts the audience for these results.

It is logical—but not simultaneously obvious—that there has been a huge explosion in bands producing, promoting, and making their music known. Several factors make this current characteristic especially

problematic. There is a confusion that must be solved: music quality is intrinsically tied to the background or origin of the performers.

It is difficult to provide an unbiased analysis of the current state of a musical genre as a whole when it has produced hundreds of albums each year for almost an entire decade.

I will not try to summarize the whole state of black metal in this brief account, but I will present a common trope: black metal as an innovative and experimental force less bound to a set of norms than other extreme metal subgenres. I will contend this position here, below, and in the following sections. It is pertinent to ask what is the true extent of these changes and how global do these changes affect the whole community.

All of these commentaries help to understand our initial question: is black metal still a relevant musical genre?

I will address the influence of these complaints in the final section of this research work and propose some tools to improve the genre.

4.1. Global Reach and Influence

Black metal continues to grow internationally, and it is a powerful and culturally influential form of heavy metal, which both defines and explores cultural otherness across contemporary global society. Rather than there being a Norwegian black

metal blueprint, the geography and politics of Norway (especially its contemporary social democracy and economic openness) played a role in its development and transmission.

It is, however, noticeable that about half of the world's black metal bands come from just a few quiet neighboring countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the United Kingdom dominate black metal production within Europe, and the United States is the largest source of black metal outside Europe and the second largest producer at this extraordinary juncture in its circumscribed history.

Norwegian black metal's global reach and influence are significant. The simplicity, otherness, and rawness, as well as ideological and lifestyle agency, make the earlier themes of nightmare, evil, and the occult accessible to its growing number of fans.

Understanding the geographical and cultural background of music adds depth to how we experience it. This suggests that fans from outside the genre's birthplace aren't excluded from its full meaning. Ironically, some fans feel a strong connection precisely because of their distance from the scene's center.

This perspective challenges the idea of a central culture versus outlying cultures. In this case, the genre's birthplace is considered the center, but fans still find enjoyment and interpret the music in various ways, regardless of their location.

4.2. Diverse Subgenres

Extremely diverse itself by nascenting as a genre already heavily laden with meaning by stationing to the musical subgenre that it is a relative apex of, not least due to purposeful attempts to maintain and glorify the embryonic anti-musician performance aesthetic that is conforming like blackgaze and the switching trance breakdowns of melodic death in clouding sullen atmospheres of misery married to melodic riffs, united in fast tempos even when close to graduating into euphonious 80's thrash by way of less incantatory vocals.

However, the ethos will always be more important than the sound, for many: there are countless bands that espouse the kernel of those original ideas through the prism of pushing genre boundaries even further, enhancing the scene with machineries yet to be fathomed by the first waves.

Over time, the general aesthetic has been bent and its signifiers appropriated into many different styles of music, ranging from the more striking similarities embodied by doom-influenced black metal or blackened death metal, through to the quieter nods in dungeon synth or blackgaze forms of music that display a heavy, visible influence enacted by the image of those that took the form of Burzum.

The layering of different genre modifiers appended before the end formality of "black metal" has become a world in and of itself over the years. From more obvious cross-pollination of technical death

metal to more retro-leaning nods within speed and punk, the ability to rearrange the aesthetic has allowed for easy diversification and niche creation, but in doing so, also gives the ability for arguments to occur when hard lines are drawn.

4.3. Musical Style and Thematic Evolution

Black metal has historic and thematic connections to its close relative, death metal. These two periods of "dark" metal music are paralleled by the second wave of thrash and the fifth of rock.

Musically speaking, black metal is very, very different from death metal and, in general, from all other kinds of heavy metal. The characteristics of black metal include the use of non-tempered tonality and complex song structures to create ominous and dissonant atmospheres, mimicking a constant sense of emotional madness.

For this reason, pre-existing elements of dissonance have been accentuated through vocals, guitars, and keyboards. The latter instrument is used mostly for ambient or simplistic ornamentation, often accompanying furious battles between tremolo-pitched two-vocal guitars.

Black metal is typified as being aggressive, fast-paced, and abrasive, traits that differ greatly among metal. The guitar work is mainly characterized by shredding techniques, dissonant scales, tremolo picking, and minor chords, features that give it its aggressive sound.

This deviates from the pentatonic scales and power chords accustomed to typical heavy metal themes like fantasy and struggles of man against the machine.

The singing, often recalling grunting, reinforces the sense of blasphemy with the practice of Satanic themes. This is made possible, again, by lyrics not always easily legible, thus creating alternatives to the typical heavy metal virtuoso singing.

Being black metal unethical and anti-institutional, generally bands refuse publicity and media, which for them represent a tool of the capitalist system.

Newsletter scarcity and disinterest in every branch of the media allow black metal to assert itself easily as an underground and non-commercial genre, antagonist to power systems.

“Black Metal” (poetry)

Are you ready to explore the depths of your soul?

“Black Metal” is a collection of poems that delves into the darkest corners of the human experience. Prepare to be challenged and captivated by verses that paint vivid landscapes of introspection and ignite the flames of creativity.

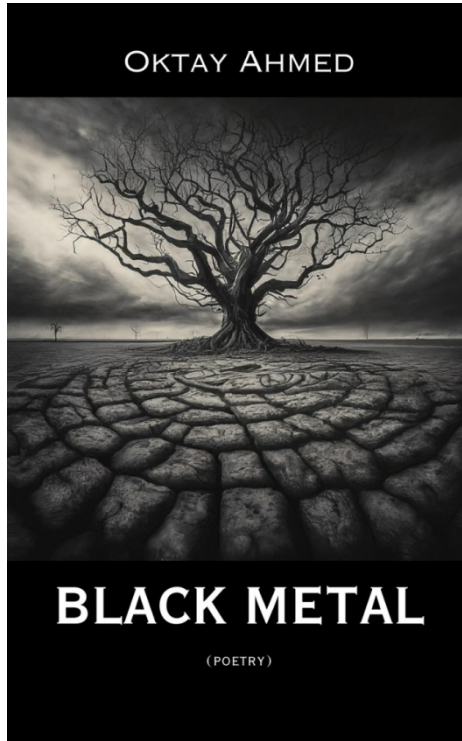
More than just words on a page, these poems are whispers from the abyss, beckoning you on a journey through the labyrinthine corridors of your mind.

A testament to a lifelong love of metal, “Black Metal” infuses the raw energy and spirit of the genre into every line. Whether you find yourself in the depths of despair or soaring to triumphant heights, these poems capture the shared experiences that unite metalheads across the globe.

A word of caution: Black Metal is potent. Savor each poem, allowing its essence to linger and resonate within you. Let the verses transport you to a realm where dreams and reality blur.

Embrace the unknown. In the shadows, Black Metal reveals the beauty of ambiguity and the power of the poet's imagination.

This is poetry. This is Black Metal.



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About the Author

Oktay Ahmed (Prof. Dr.), a renowned Turkish linguistics professor at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, North Macedonia, is celebrated for his diverse talents. Beyond academia, he's a prolific writer, poet, and translator, seamlessly blending language exploration with creativity.

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