

Glossator 7: Black Metal Commentary

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Call for Proposals

And thereafter I saw the darkness changing into a watery substance, which was unspeakably tossed about, and gave forth smoke as from fire; and I heard it making an indescribable sound of lamentation. — *Corpus Hermeticum*

L'OBJET DE L'EXTASE EST L'ABSENCE DE RÉPONSE DU DEHORS. L'INEXPLICABLE PRÉSENCE DE L'HOMME EST LA RÉPONSE QUE LA VOLONTÉ SE DONNE, SUSPENDUE SUR LE VIDE D'UNE ININTELLIGIBLE NUIT. [THE OBJECT OF ECSTASY IS THE ABSENCE OF RESPONSE FROM THE OUTSIDE. THE INEXPLICABLE PRESENCE OF MAN IS THE RESPONSE THAT THE WILL GIVES ITSELF, SUSPENDED OVER THE VOID OF AN UNINTELLIGIBLE NIGHT.] — George Bataille

The burning corpse of god shall keep us warm in the doom of howling winds. For we are a race from beyond the wanderers of night. — Xasthur

The editors of *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary* (<http://glossator.org>) seek proposals for a themed issue on Black Metal, to be published in the fall of 2012. In keeping with the journal's focus and scope, contributions may take the following forms, with strict priority given to the former: 1) original commentaries on music, lyrics, images, or events within the Black Metal genre; 2) articles or essays investigating relationships between Black Metal and commentary. The editors have a special desire for dense, rich, copious commentaries, as the generous publication time frame permits. Collaboration is also encouraged. "Commentary" should be understood in its traditional senses (*catena*, *commentum*, *gemara*, *glossa*, *hypomnema*, *midrash*, *peser*, *pingdian*, *scholia*, *tafsir*, *talkhis*, *tika*, *vritti*, *zend*, *zhangju*, et al.) and in light of the following guidelines:

1. A commentary focuses on a single object (text, image, event, etc.) or portion thereof.
2. A commentary does not displace but rather shapes itself to and preserves the integrity, structure, and presence of its object.
3. The relationship of a commentary to its object may be described as both parallel and perpendicular. Commentary is parallel to its object in that it moves with or runs alongside it, following the flow of reading it. Commentary is perpendicular to its object in that it pauses or breaks from reading it in order to comment on it. The combination of these dimensions gives commentary a structure of continuing discontinuity, which allows it to be consulted or read intermittently rather than start to finish.

4. Commentary tends to maintain a certain quantitative proportion of itself vis-à-vis its object. This tendency corresponds to the practice of “filling up the margins” of a text.
5. Commentary, as a form of discourse, tends to favor and allow for the multiplication of meanings, ideas, and references. Commentary need not, and often does not, have an explicit thesis or argument. This tendency gives commentary a ludic or auto-teleological potential.

At the same time, the editors welcome formal and disciplinary innovation within the commentary genre. Commentaries may be philosophical, poetic, critical, historical, philological, etc. or some combination thereof.

More specifically, we encourage proposals for work that draws inspiration from and explores the spaces of contact between commentary and Black Metal. Such as:

*Vacuum/Void/Abys*s: Black Metal and commentary share concern with explicitly spatial forms of emptiness and absence, and with the horror/joy/creativity of being before them. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht finds a relation to emptiness as the context for commentary’s imminent return: “The vision of the empty chip constitutes a threat, a veritable *horror vacui* not only for the electronic media industry but also, I suppose, for our intellectual and cultural self-appreciation. It might promote, once again, a reappreciation of the principle and substance of *copia*. And it might bring about a situation in which we will no longer be embarrassed to admit that filling up margins is what commentaries mostly do—and what they do best” (*The Powers of Philology*). Black Metal similarly fills voids, sounds abysses with its sonic/verbal/visual representations of them. So they share a deeper function beyond explanation/representation, namely, to multiply explanation and representation fractally, to generate more and more perceptual enclosures, spaces within which the unexplainable/unrepresentable is brought into presence.

Liminality/Marginality: Black Metal and commentary situate themselves, and derive power by operating from, margins of genre, history, ideology, knowledge. Both enjoy “unofficial” cultural status. Both destabilize, by holding intimate relation to, categories of the center: truth, onto-theology, “God.” Both enjoy forms of authority that are fundamentally ambivalent, safe from attack in a space of irrelevance, yet therefore capable of perfect incursions, the most dangerous unrecognizable raids.

Avant-Garde: The expansion of the margin and the perforation of the boundary associated with Black Metal and commentary provide both with a vanguard front capable of exposing the established order to the corrosive influence of the outside and affecting any outside-oriented determination with the non-escapist influence of the established. To put it differently, since the zone of operation for both Black Metal and commentary is the margin, by expanding the margin of the established order they increasingly expose it to the influence of the beyond. Yet since they also perforate the boundaries, they establish an affect between the beyond and the center. The vanguard in Black Metal and

commentary does not merely set itself against the *status quo* in order to make difference (the hallmark of modernism) but rather operates as a form of resistance which is bent on conjuring the potentialities of what has already been grounded and bringing about the obstructed possibilities of beyond *within* the established (primary text, world, idea, etc.). The modernist determination against the *status quo* presumes an emancipatory sublime which adheres to the modernist temporality of progress and the possibility of unilateral determination against the established. For Black Metal, however, this unilateral determination as the vector of modernism is too reliant on the initial possibility of a unilateral separation from the established gravity and the promise of an escape or access to the outside free from the influence of what is already there. Breaking from such promises, Black Metal resorts to action whose scene is here, within and in relation to what is already there, its initiation is not dependent on a hypothetical opportunity, its resources are limited to what is available and its line of determination deflects inward in the direction of what is already there. Black Metal, in this sense, confounds the distinction between expression and praxis. For Black Metal as well as commentary, the deferral of aesthetic or ideological resolution is not compatible with the concrete and conciliatory model of the sublime developed by despotic, fascist and racist movements. Since a notion of the sublime that belongs to another time and is dependent on a promised opportunity or the fulfillment of an initial possibility is prone to ethico-political manipulations, both genres grasp the avant-garde through reworking of the sublime as “beyond within” (Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*).

Arcana/Enclosure: The nexus of erudition and the esoteric. Commentary and Black Metal collude in perverse attachment to sedimentary, occult lore, to what is buried in books, and more generally in relations to lore *as buried*, in need of excavation. This shared loric perversity may be understood on the analogy of archaeology, as a discipline which unearths so as to reinter in the tombs and vaults of its own expertise, which understands by entombing itself in a relation to the object as artifact. So, like the alchemical manuscript, itself often the story of another found-and-lost text, commentary makes itself available via indirection, not generally but for those who want to know, who love to follow the multiplying referential labyrinths of knowing. Similarly, Black Metal delves into obscure discourses only to sing them through the dark veils of its own *trobar clos*, so as to produce and enjoy itself as a hidden relation to the hidden. Hermetic, subterranean, semi-anonymous, Black Metal and commentary pursue parallel adventures in conspiratorial and melancholic epistemic conditions, in erotic relation to their objects as always already lost. At the same time, commentary and black metal, by producing their arcane or enclosed condition, by bringing it into presence as art, also keep open and play in freedom from it, as modeled in Robert Burton’s melancholic and melancholy-curing commentarial *Anatomy*—“I write of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy”—and in the black bile-sweetening music—“a certain melancholy disposition . . . made sweet for us by frequent use of the lyre” (*Letters*)—of the saturnine occultist commentator Marsilio Ficino, who understood “that the melancholy man was

uniquely suited to perform the talismanic incantations which he believed were capable of liberating the spirit from the world of appearances” (Robin Headlam Wells, “John Dowland and Elizabethan Melancholy”). Haunted by the principle of *ignotum per ignotius* as its own logical spectre, the clarifying-by-complicating and explicating-by-obfuscating movement of commentary, which is captured in Montaigne’s complaint that “everything *swarms* [fourmille] with commentaries,” is analogous to Black Metal as a motion/anti-motion of artistic expression that articulates from and through enclosure, or, as Dante knew, bubbles to the surface from black depths: “Fixed in the slime they say: ‘We were sullen in the sweet air gladdened by the sun, bearing within us the sluggish fumes [*accidioso fummo*]; now we are sullen in the black mire.’ This hymn they gurgle in their throats [*si gorgoglian*] ne la strozza, for they cannot speak it in full words” (*Inferno* 7.121-6).

Necrology: Black Metal is usually characterized among its followers and opponents by its ambivalent relationship with death and decay to such an extent that it is often said that the only protagonists in Black Metal are festering corpses. It is the ambivalent relationship of Black Metal with death that gives rise to the most criticized aspect of Black Metal, namely, necromanticism. As a part of vitalistic investment in death, necromanticism involves a liberalist or hedonistic openness toward death in the form of a simultaneously economical and libidinal synthesis between desire and death. Capable of safe guarding the innermost political, economical and libidinal recesses of vitalism, necromanticism simultaneously enchants the necrotic Other with the charm of animation and romanticizes a vitalistic escape through death. Yet Black Metal can also be approached from a more twisted and colder intimacy with death, an impersonal realm where the already-dead finds its voice in the living. The voice of the living, in this case, bespeaks of dejection from a world for which vitalistic ideas are spurious, yet they cannot be simply disillusioned or disenchanting by recourse to death in the form of utter annihilation or solution as termination. Black Metal, in its lyrics, sounds and performances, simultaneously presents the impossibility of this recourse and vitalism’s precarious position through the concept of blackening or decay. Aside from Black Metal’s necromanticism which usually takes on a medieval gloss, Black Metal’s ambivalent relationship with death and decay corresponds with medieval necrology which appears in commentaries of scholastic theology and natural philosophy. More than just assuming a successive role for the medieval commentaries on death, decomposition and macabre, Black Metal can also be examined as a unique genre capable of disinterring the necrological dimensions of commentary. It is in commentary that the dead is impersonally animated according to its own laws and not by the laws of the living. Both Black Metal and commentary genre internalize the concept of decomposition and infinite decay by putting to the test the tolerance or the limit of the world, a text or an idea without completely erasing or silencing it. Here, commentary and Black Metal respectively correspond with an interminable — therefore a limit process — explication or disintegration of a primary source. Such a limit process constitutes the basic principle of decay in which the object degenerates to no end without returning to its constitutive elements (a better and older

world), or without becoming silent and ceasing to exist.

Problematicity: Rather than seeking resolving solutions, both Black Metal and the commentary genre operate as functions of the problem. Their approach to their objects, themes, ideas and genres is characterized by relentless problematization. They do not resolve the problematic situations but rather contribute to the internal tension of the problem. Quite literally, they situate themselves as problematical entities. The internal duplicities of Black Metal toward death, (anti-)humanism and extremities are the consequence of such problematical nature which requires means of investigation and commentary other than pejorative, purifying and absolving. Where other musical genres are constantly tempted towards justification and purification (musical, philosophical, aesthetical, etc.), Black Metal tends to bask in *the speculative glory of the problematic*.

Praxis: Whatever their utility, commentary and Black Metal intersect in an essential anti-instrumentality. Commentary and Black Metal make useful, enjoyable products, but their production of them is determined by various kinds of counterimpulses that would unmake production as such, that would perform it freely, at once for itself and for nothing. For commentary, anti-instrumentality shows up primarily in the way it is pursued as praxis, as a way of being with a text that only produces the commentary as a record or residue of an essentially relational “extra-textual” experience, like the reader’s marginalia, so often *not* written to be read. But this negative production, production as residue or waste, is exactly commentary’s fertility. Formed of the accumulated impressions of innumerable actions and reactions to the text, commentary *accomplishes* nothing and so becomes *capable* of everything. As waves are to the stones that caused them, the gloss is to what it glosses, spreading out in unending uniqueness from the page’s unmarkable center, giving witness to depths the undisturbed, undefaced surface cannot. Commentary thus materializes a form of consciousness that may be understood as phenomenological, following Gaston Bachelard’s understanding of the *reverberation* of the poetic image as an experience whereby being realizes itself in a movement of reading *becoming* writing: “Through this reverberation, by going *immediately* beyond all psychology or psychoanalysis, we feel a poetic power rising naïvely within us. After the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past. But the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface. And this is also true of a simple experience of reading. The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being” (*Poetics of Space*). For Black Metal, anti-instrumentality shows up above all in its paradoxical nihilistic visions of itself, in the identity of being a useless and alienated activity (given the futility of all things and in particular pathetic humanity’s imminent demise) that is yet ordered as agency towards the apocalypse and/or universal

transformation which renders its own production futile. Whence, for instance, Mortifer's account of Abonus Noctis's latest release as producing in the listener the event it narrates: "*Penumbral Inorgantia* is a chronicling of a man's journey to ancient underground kingdoms haunted by the inhuman entities that once dwelt therein. He must seek their arcane instruments to rid earth of all organic life after sinking into the abysmal pools of their souls to shed his human frame and assume an elevated, blackened, and immortal state of being, enabling him to eternally reign over the desolation he has created. Each song represents a specific stage in his journey and shall consequently engulf the listener in an experience of metamorphosis into inhumanity" (<http://www.wraithproductions.net/bandpages.htm>).

Possession: In Black Metal, all elements from musical to vocal and visual must reflect the voice of the outsider, the indifferent or even the hostile and the incompatible. The explicit distortions and to some extent theatrical discordance of Black Metal are the outcome of the genre's embracing of possession as a conceptual and structural determinant. Referred to by Oesterreich as the "terrible spectacle" (*Possession: Demoniactal and Other*), possession not only suggests the usurpation of one's voice qua possession but also draws a vector of determination that moves from outside to the inside in order to dismantle the self or turn its zone of activity inside-out. It has been objected that since commentary does not necessarily ground a thesis of its own and is basically determined by an externalthetic framework (someone else's possession), it is inherently deficient for hosting radical thinking. Yet this is exactly what makes commentary genre a playground for ascesis of thought, for it determines thinking in relation to that which does not belong to the thinker and is indeed exterior to it. In doing so, commentary simultaneously disturbs the hegemonic harmony between reflection and thinking-for-and-by-oneself, and aligns itself with the true contingency of thinking for which the necessity of the thinker does not have an anterior position or a privileged locus. It is in commentary genre that thinking transmits both voices and contents which are exterior to the thinker yet they do not enjoy a pre-established status either, because commentary entails the concomitant possession of the primary source by an outsider's voice and thereby, creates a speculative opportunity for thinking and writing on behalf of no one. What is usurped in possession is belonging *per se*—as an appurtenant bond between parties—rather than the possession of someone else on behalf of another. Both Black Metal and commentary regard possession as the true vocation of art and thinking.

Nota Bene: 400-500-word *proposals* should be sent via email to glossatori@gmail.com. Proposals should indicate the scope, form, and length of the intended work. Deadline: March 1, 2009.