

# NICOLA MASCIANDARO

## BLACK SABBATH'S BLACK SABBATH

---

Nicola Masciandaro | Black Sabbath's Black Sabbath:

A Gloss on Heavy Metal's Originary Song.

Originally published by: Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture 9.2 | 2009

[reconstruction.eserver.org](http://reconstruction.eserver.org)

---

RMEDL | METASOUND - MetaCuratorial Practice Platform, its a inner organization of RM-ED/L, constituted for the experimentation of conceptual/projectual methodologies for the production, communication and development of contemporary art events connected to the art of listening/sound art, through the construction of meta-curatorial artistic practices focused on extreme, transgressive, unorthodox, experimental and avantgardistic music researches, linked to many fields of human expressions and media art involved in new kinds of languages and settings of the communication. A freelancer based organisation conceived as a meta-curatorial platform that deals in design of independent ways of practice of curating, based on the development of conceptual sound art researches, environmental music, audio-visual installations and extra-acoustic experiences, close to visual and performing arts, joined to unconventional and "extended" techniques of production for multidisciplinary projects, conceived as special programmatic events and collectable art editions, to promote cultural acknowledgements for artistic practices.

RMEDL | METASOUND - MetaCuratorial Practice Platform

**Rain . . . Thunder . . . Bells . . . Metal!}}**

PRIMORDIAL FOREBODING. The sound of the rain drowns and darkens the world. Hearing the water we already know that it is late, that we are not where we should be. For a moment this lateness is veiled by the lame lateness of the familiar midnight storm gothic trope, the cultural belatedness of the adolescent and kitsch. But *how* did it get dark? We have already passed through this critical veil and are looking back at it from the inside. Our thinking has already been destroyed by what we see and believe. It is late. It is dark. We are where we want to be. Hearing the rolling thunder, late becomes early. Chronological time becomes mythical time as the liminal hour opens a space around a point outside of time, a point of origin. Thunder speaks from the beginning: "he ordered fog and clouds to take their place, and thunder, that would stir the hearts of men" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I.54-55). But it calls towards the end: "he thundered, calling us hence to return to him in that secret place" (Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.12). WHEN DOES THE WORLD END? Not in time, but when the voice of thunder becomes human, the echoing question of the being who answers it as thunder itself, earthly thunder striking the gods, seizing in a moment a place outside of time. "At that moment in one of the intervals of profound darkness, following the flashes, a voice was heard at his side; and almost at the same instant a volley of thunder peals rolled overhead. "'Who's there?' 'Old Thunder!' said Ahab, groping his way along the bulwarks to his pivot-hole, but suddenly finding his path made plain to him by elbowed lances of fire" (*Moby Dick*, ch.119). Thunder calls forth bells, nature art, answering the storm's question by repeating it, setting off a reverberation through AC/DC's "Hell's Bells," Metallica's "For Whom the Bell Tolls," and beyond. Medieval church bells drove off storms and the demons who stirred them. "And this is the cause why the bells be rung when it thundereth, and when great tempests and outrages of weather happen, to the end that the fiends and the evil spirits should be abashed and flee, and cease of the moving of tempests" (Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, LXX). Heavy Metal bells stir men to dance with summoned demons, to sacrifice the sacred and perfect the profane, to feast on the corpses of dead values and drink the dawning of the real. "Come Centaur / Those who prance to the Hymns of Truth / Come join us" (Morbid Angel, "Invocation of the Continual One," *Formulas Fatal to the Flesh*). The peal of the origin touches the end of time. Ouroboros. The judgement of apocalypse invites the jubilation of apocatastasis! THREE NOTES: low, high, and the *tertium quid*. *Verba, res, and significai*) ("there am I in the midst of them" Matt 18:20). Earth, heaven, and what joins them. Lightning. Yggdrasil. Axis Mundi. Skambha. The Epic Monolith. You know it when you hear it.

**What is this**

THE QUESTION before the question, the essence of questioning, the question of existence. The first word of the first line of the first song of the first album of Heavy Metal attacks the world with a question. Before the question is articulated it preexists in its first word, *what*, a word that speaks without signification, which points, not to a thing, but to pure something. Before the song *says* anything it names what exists "before" saying. What is this? Ignorant, we use words like *world* and *life* as if we know *what* they signify, as if they capture the this that stands before us. Fracturing the facade of habitual, unexamined notions, the question renames the world as unknown, returning us to its origins. Does the world exist before the song begins, before the first word of its question? In a sense, no. NAMING THE WORLD as a what, the first word reveals the world to be, not a thing, but a *relation* between self and thing. Naming with a question the biggest and most obvious thing that does not and cannot have a name is the most essential, the most natural, the most absolute, and thus the truest instance of this relation. The world's true name is a question. Truly naming the world is not giving the world a name, which would reduce it to a thing, *but a revelation of the world as naming itself*. But where does the question come from? Nowhere! The question emerges out of who knows where only to bring into view something that is simultaneously already and not yet there. It calls into presence what is latent, hidden, invisible. The question is the eternal enemy of unconsciousness and the unmaker of its conventionally accepted mask, opinion. Real questioning is the infinitely perfectible pastime of the person hell-bent on staying awake, on paying attention both to what is happening and to what happening is. It almost seems that questioning is consciousness and understanding itself. "Thus a person who wants to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back *behind* what is said, then we inevitably ask questions *beyond* what is said" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 370). Here questioning, whose heart resides in *what*, shows its powerful deictic function. It calls attention to the overlooked, to the nearly forgotten, and even more palpably, to the reality of the questioner, the self itself. Announcing and attending upon itself with a question, Heavy Metal enters the world, becomes itself, as a Deictic Art. Through sound and language it awakens awareness of what exceeds sound and language. Cf. the first word of *Beowulf*, "Hwst!" Hear the strain in Ozzy's voice, like the cry of an already-ancient baby born angry at the *absolute affront* of existence and the arbitrariness of individuality. How dare there be anything! How dare I exist! "For what is it that I want to say, Lord, except that I do not know where I came from into this dying life, or living death?" (Augustine, *Confessions*, I.6). "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (Edgar Allen Poe,

*Eureka*). Ahab is not born or made, but made by birth itself. Metal calls us back to beginning and reopens the trauma of being. *What is this that stands before me?* reenacts the birth of consciousness as a question aimed at existence, as a current that runs from unconsciousness to *what is to me*.

#### **that stands before me?**

The question actually produces the world as a situation of interstanding (self and thing standing before each other) that demands understanding. But can *what stands before me* ever possibly be understood? Of course not. However comprehensively a thing is understood it is only understood through a medium that separates us from *what it is*. Knowledge is knowledge of what is known, not of the thing itself. QUESTIONING IS HOPELESS and Heavy Metal plunges us into the hopelessness of all questioning. “All these philosophical explanations are creations of the mind that has never succeeded in passing beyond itself” (Meher Baba, *Beams*, 7). But we love this hopelessness, we stand transfixed before the question that has interrupted us, the pounding riff that brings and rebrings things to a halt. Why? We were going somewhere, doing something, but the question stops us in suspicion that we do not know what we are doing, that we do not know who we are (cf. Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*). We wanted to be interrupted. The beautiful secret of the hopeless question is that it points back, indeed reproduces, the reality of the questioner. This sense becomes obvious in the next line of the song, but here we are suspended on that fact’s threshold, caught at *me?*, and thus frozen in the fear that behind the question asked of the world, *what is this?*, there is a deeper question that has produced the world as its answer and that *that* question has something to do with us. Here we stand over a beyond opened up by asking what stands before us, a beyond out of which we have sprung as mysteriously as our question. “The unitarian Beyond is an indivisible and indescribable infinity. *It seeks to know itself*. It is of no use to ask why it does so” (Meher Baba, *Beams*, 8). QUESTIONING WHAT IS, Heavy Metal manifests itself more practically as the friend of reality and the sworn enemy of values, isms, fads, religions, collective egos, systems, parties, movements, tribes, societies, clubs, cults, and especially all feel-good white-guilt hippie-shit whereby the self lays claim to rather than realizes the real. Heavy Metal is born out of that craving for the real which can hold it in a death-embrace, even if *it* turns out to be nothing at all.

#### **Figure in black which points at me**

THE UNKNOWN POINTS BACK at the questioner, as if to say, “You want to know what I am, but you do not know what you are!” Cf. “BARNARDO: Who’s there? FRANCISCO: Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.1.1 -2). The point is not to determine the identity of the figure in black, but to feel its pointing, to experience the *treason of the question*, as it turns back on oneself and opens up more dark space within it, within the inky term that the pointing repeats and reflects, within *me*. The figure in black mirrors the one who questions it as a shrouded, self-blind being who questions what is outside himself in an attempt to point to himself, to the unseen being that is always looking for and staring back at itself. The question, ostensibly about *what*, is unconsciously about *who*. Out of the depths of the self, the question tries to bring the self into consciousness. But how can *who* be brought into view? To reveal and know identity palpably, as a thing that can be pointed to, would seem to reduce the self to a thing, to reify *who* as a *what*. But there is no other way. We are caught at the impasse of seeing what we have questioned pointing back to what we cannot see in ourselves. The mysterious *what* confronting me seems to be a *who*, it has a human shape, it recognizes me and knows *who* I am, yet it is not a person, much less an individual, but only a figure, a depth created by hollowness. The only way through is to accept the confounded boundary between *who* and *what* embodied in the black figure and run headlong, following the pattern of the already-given consciousness-making cosmos-machine, into the *what*, to keep asking, with Sleep’s heavy pounding, “*What is the soul? What is the mind? Constructed?*” (“The Suffering,” *Volume One*). SO THE METALHEAD, feeling the question echoing back on himself, is drawn to mirror and materialize the figure conjured within his music in himself by wearing black. Unlike the clerical black of the intellectual which says “I stand outside the world, being more abstract, critical, and smarter than you,” and unlike the similarly adult black of the sophisticate which says, “I stand above the world, being more powerful, elegant, and urban than you,” the black of the metalhead is adolescent and funereal, communicating a problematical immersion in the world rather than elite transcendence of it. Heavy Metal black displays the mystery and mortality of its wearer. It represents an attempt, however imperfect, to renounce identity and revel in the unknowable and unnamable. “But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe” (*Hamlet*, 1.2.85-6). Black denies externality, reminding us that “Matter is understood through the mind or the intellect working upon data given through the different senses, but *Spirit can be understood only through the spirit itself*” (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.135). BEING SINGLED OUT, made to face oneself in the mirror of question and answer, the spirit is caught at its own threshold and we flee. This is not Tintern Abbey, where the “burthen of the mystery . . . Is lighten’d” and “we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul” (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey,” 39-46). This is Heavy Metal Abbey, where the mystery-burden becomes unbearable and we have no idea who we are or what to do, where the “I” is elided and we do not know who is speaking!

#### **Turn around quick, and start to run**

Simultaneously spoken by the singer to the narrator (get out of *there*), the narrator to the singer (get out of Aere), the narrator to himself (I need to save *myself*), and the singer to us (save *yourselves*), the line is a

*disembodied imperative* to go who knows where that leaves no where to go. The only person in the song's fiction who could reasonably be said to have spoken them, because they are spoken *to* the speaker, is the black figure who does not say anything. So the line voices fear as the translation of silence into a command, whereby the silence pointing to oneself is misinterpreted as an order to run the other way. WHY FEAR? Fear is a form of ego-centered self-created suffering that simultaneously acknowledges and fails to accept the other, including the otherness of one's own self. "Fear acts as a thick curtain between the 'I' and the 'you' and it not only nourishes deep distrust of the other, but inevitably brings about a shrinking and withdrawal of consciousness so as to exclude the being of another from the context of one's own life" (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, II.68). The pain of fear is the pain of answering "Who am I?" falsely, the auto-violence of the person refusing to become something else, the person afraid to die. Unlike pop music, which expresses real fear, Heavy Metal enjoys fear to make friends with the real, above all, the reality of annihilation: "Face the fear that grips your mind, / The final conflict - the end of mankind" (Bolt Thrower, "This Time it's War," *The IVth Crusade*). And unlike horror movies, which try to intensify fear, Heavy Metal thrives on inverting fear, on making moments where fear's negative, worried sense of what might happen is transmuted into the excited expectation that something feared is about to happen, *and there is nothing you can do*. The acoustic intro that you know will not last (e.g. Metallica's "Fight Fire with Fire") is but the outermost layer of an *aesthetics of inevitability* that pervades Metal, a disembodied perspective that speaks prophetically from the other side of fear: "An unforeseen future nestled somewhere in time. / Unsuspecting victims no warnings, no signs. / Judgment day the second coming arrives. / Before you see the light you must die" (Slayer, "South of Heaven," *South of Heaven*)!!!!!!

#### **Find out I'm the chosen one - Oh no!**

THE ARBITRARINESS OF INDIVIDUALITY, the *weirdness* of being someone. The elided "I" now reappears as a monstrous uniqueness. Running from what points to him, he discovers himself, and it is not easy. The "chosen one" prophesied in the Dead Sea Scrolls 4Q534? Of course not. Among other things, he's missing the red hair, moles, and marks on his thighs. He is Everyman, the universal individual, the everywhere-encountered person selected by their own singularity, the chosen *one*. Why are you you and me? Nothing explains this. The absolute arbitrariness of the fact feels like a glitch in the system, an abyss the world will fall into. Oh No! Heavy Metal individualism is fundamentally different from, and opposed to, bourgeois individualism, which believes in freedom from history and the respectability of being someone. It goes beyond individualism as a value to the reality of being an individual, which is something infinitely more beautiful and horrible. Metal celebrates the individual - "Got no religion / Don't need no friends" - but it spreads it feast, Bosch-like, in apocalyptic zones: "I've seen the future / And I've left it behind" (Black Sabbath, "Supernaut," *Volume 4*). The soldier's death and the sinner's punishment are among its essential tropes, complementary spaces where individualized being is destroyed and disclosed. "Soldier boy, made of clay / now an empty shell" (Metallica, "Disposable Heroes," *Master of Puppets*). "Day of judgment God is calling / On their knees, the war pigs crawling / Begging mercy for their sins / Satan laughing spreads his wings / Oh Lord yeah!" (Black Sabbath, "War Pigs," *Paranoid*). Metal's interest in these moments passes their moral meanings to touch the metaphysical traumas they define. The injustice of war and the justice of damnation are fine messages, but Metal goes beyond messages into the more important subject of *what happens*. And what happens here is DEATH, not simply as the end of living but as a mutual breakdown of history and the individual, a collapsing of self and world into each other that calls the whole mess into question and brings the self into a beautiful suspension between life and death, yes and no. For inside the "Oh yes!" that Heavy Metal's "Oh no!" elicits - "You thought that it was all over, / But it's only just begun" (Bolt Thrower, "Embers," *The IVth Crusade*) - there is a little door into that microcosmic apocalypse that fools fear and that the wise, in their infinite foolishness, know how to enjoy. "Sniper blazes you thru your knees / Falling down can you feel the heat" (Slayer, "Mandatory Suicide," *South of Heaven*). It's obvious: Heavy Metal is negative theology, with a beat.

#### **Big black shape with eyes of fire**

FROM DARKNESS LIGHT. The central instance of the threefold appearance of the figure (figure, shape, Satan) assumes a form that synthesizes the other two and so contains a triple significance that, like all significance, is buried in the unknowability of the form that contains it. Transparently, the fiery-eyed figure is three things at once. One: the enlightened person, who passes through darkness to become light. "That the intellect reach union with the divine light and become divine in the state of perfection, this dark contemplation must first purge and annihilate it of its natural light and bring it actually into obscurity" (John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, 9.3). "I pray we could come to this darkness so far above light! If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge" (Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, ch. 2). "Never did the eye see the sun unless it had first become sun-like, and never can the Soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful" (Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1.6.9). Two: a phenomenological literalization of the human eye as the *lucerna corporis* that, at once containing and emitting the being within the body, fuses subject, object, and will. "And of the organs they first contrived the eyes to give light . . . and the pure fire which is within us and related

thereto they made to flow through the eyes in a stream smooth and dense” (Plato, *Timaeus*, 45b). “[In vision] three things, although diverse in nature, are tempered together into a kind of unity; that is, the form of the body which is seen, and the image of it impressed on the sense, which is vision or sense informed, and the will of the mind which applies the sense to the sensible thing, and retains the vision itself in it” (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 11.2.5). Three: a dark version of the son of man as envisioned in the Revelation of John. “His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire” (Rev 1:14). The coincidence of these meanings, an intuited musico-mystical unity of which the passages cited are only flickering shadows cast by the light of understanding, is a form whose name may be translated as MASTER OF DESIRE. Holding this name up to the mirror of *nomina sunt consequentia rerum* reproduces the big black shape as a correlative triple reflection. First, a happy being who masters desire by following the infinity of desire beyond desire to infinity itself. Cf. “For all that is beneath Him sufficeth not us. And this is the cause why that no soule is restid till it is nowted of all things that is made” (Julian of Norwich, *Shewings*, ch.5). Second, desire personified as an essentially ocular being, the eyes being the “perilous mirror” (see *Romance of the Rose*) or primary projector, receiver, and reflector of love. Cf. “It is your eyes. They looked into my eyes; and that look went deep into my bowels and kindled consuming fire in the marrow of my bones” (Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, 10.3). Third, an evil being that seeks out and feeds upon desire’s blindness. Cf. “The Eye was rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat’s, watchful and intent, and the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing” (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 379). The line thus signifies a voice that speaks simultaneously from within desire’s flame and from the void behind it.

### **Telling people their desire**

This is frightening. To hear one’s desire spoken by another and to know it as the desire of others, *their desire*, disrupts the comfort of enchanted, unconscious *identification* with desire. “The soul gets enmeshed in the desires and cannot step out of the circumscribed individuality constituted by these desires. It imagines these barriers and becomes self-hypnotised” (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.36). If other than desire, what am I? Hearing my desire spoken by another - “I know what you want” being the logical essence of temptation, a *representation* of the desired by *someone else* - proposes choice about my identification with it. Do I use the other to confirm or to question my identification with desire? Do I (saying yes to the black shape) extend my self-hypnosis to another and dissolve myself? Or do I (saying no) assert my self as an individual distinct from desire and open myself? The question of the black shape’s telling is not whether you want what is spoken, of course you do, the question is whether you want the you that wants it. How the “people” in the scene choose is a mystery, an indeterminacy, masked by the appearance of Satan.

### **Satan’s sitting there, he’s smiling**

THE SMILING ARCH-INDIVIDUAL presides over them, indeed, is a presence produced among them, as a being with a double aspect. His smile is *at once* the mocking smile of the tempter as a person that appears near the loss of individuality through desire’s hypnotization and the happy smile of the inspirer as a person, like Black Sabbath’s Fifth Member, that appears near the manifestation of individuality through creative, free action. *Depending on intention, either choice can produce either aspect, or both!* The moment of Satan’s appearance is of tremendous significance, not only for the the meaning of the song but for the subsequent history of Heavy Metal, and most importantly, its future. As the moment concerns the appearance and disappearance of individuality, both within the drama of desire and within Satan’s own emerging (Satan/Lucifer being not only an original individual but the only individual named in Metal’s original album), so does it operate as an originary moment within each individual’s relationship to Heavy Metal. How many links to the genre have been forged, consciously and unconsciously, in the momentary imagination of Satan’s smile! So also is this a moment to which Metal must return to reproduce its newness, to rediscover its generic individuality. At stake in our understanding of Satan’s appearance is nothing less than the essence of Heavy Metal and the structure of every individual relationship to it. What the true meaning of this moment is, I cannot tell you. If you know it, you know why. What I can do is describe the three essential features of the poetic image through which its true meaning may be discovered. First, the appearance of Satan is only the recognition that he has been there all along, as registered in the singer’s words, which imply that he has seen him *before* he describes him. Second, the line alliterates, conspicuously, the only one that does - an individualized irruption of the native, the pagan, in an externally derived form. The letter S corresponds to the serpent, the sound ES is the primitive root for being (Latin *esse*, Sanskrit *sat*, Greek *ousia*). Third, the smile, the smile, the smile.

### **Watch those flames get higher and higher**

SEEING THE SILENT SUBJECT. Within the experience of spectacle, the command to watch, the will to watch, and the act of watching are indistinguishable. Whether anybody tells you to, whether you want to, whether you think you are, you are *already watching* (Cf. the story of Alypius in Augustine’s *Confessions*, 6.7-8). Spectacle thus has the structure of consciousness itself, in which all perception is “preceded” by the observation of perception, by the ontological preexistence, acknowledged or not, of a witness (hear the sound of the monks nodding?), by a *someone* who is the subject of consciousness, an unseen seer. That is what makes spectacle beautiful and dangerous, that is reproduces the structure of consciousness in dramatic,

experiential form and so seems to offer the spectator his very self. THE SPECTACLE OF FIRE is primal and universal spectacle, fire being not only what joins earth and heavens through Agni's triple form (fire, lightning, sun) but, as light's maker, the means of spectacle itself. Fire-reverie (*vide* Bachelard) takes place within the fact that it is watching oneself watch the flame. Flame, opening the boundary between spirit and matter, helps its seer see seeing without infinite regress and thus transcend it, becoming a Seer, one who knows directly, who sees things as they really are, things themselves (*vide* Husserl). Seeing into the fire, Fu Hsi finds the I-Ching. This is because the self, being neither spirit nor matter, recognizes itself and finds a friend in the fire, which makes being with oneself, and thus intuition, easier. BEING WITH ONESELF is never easy. And in the flash of an eye, Ozzy's voice breaks, scrying becomes crying, reverie hell. Seeing into the essence of all things burns all things up in their essence. "This world-order, the same of all, no god nor man did create, but it ever was and is and will be: everliving fire, kindling in measures and being quenched in measures" (Heraclitus DK22B30). True seeing burns the eye, the thing that cannot see itself. "The lesion in her eye was there to confirm the truth of her vision" (Guibert of Nogent, *Memoirs*, I.24). True knowing destroys the I, the self that cannot know itself. "That is the Truth. That is the Self. Thou art That" (*Chandogya Upanisad*, VI.8.7). The leaping of the flames is the beginning of the end. The end is the death of the false self. The death of the false self is the beginning of real life. "The conquest of the unconscious by the conscious is complete, and the person continually dwells in the full blaze of illumination or as one with illumination. He becomes illumination itself" (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, I.41). AN UNBEARABLE BEGINNING. This new beginning is not represented, not because it does not happen, but because it cannot be re-presented. The beginning, corresponding in the song's time-structure to the ever-happening about-to-happen moment when the flames reach their borne unbearable height, happens outside of time. Rather than being figured or signified, which would reduce the beginning to something else, an event after the ending, the beginning is contained experientially as its own unrepresentability, in its *being within* the accelerating, unfinished ending that is represented. (Heavy Metal, of course, is wholly addicted to such scenes of *ending*). The beginning's being-within-ending is its truth, that which makes it an actual beginning, not a beginning in time, but a beginning *from* time.

#### **Oh no, no, please God help me!**

This is the CENTER OF THE SONG, its real beginning, not where it starts, but the place where it takes leave of time, where it *takes off*. The line holds this beginning, in the form of a suspension before the song's actual speeding up, in two forms. First, the repetition of no, like the *neti neti* of Advaita Vedanta, asserts the reality of a being that survives all subtraction and negation, a self within the person that can witness its execution. Cf. the disembodied vision produced in us by Slayer's "On my wall, your head!" ("Piece by Piece," *Reign in Blood*). Second, the tone of Ozzy's voice here approaches the *whimpering of the damned*, an unmaking of the person that discloses the babyishness of its separative ego-mind. Cf. the possessiveness mocked by Metallica's "Someone help me / Oh please God help me / They are trying to take it all away" ("Ride the Lightning," *Ride the Lightning*). This conjunction of terrified apophatic speaking and psychic infant sacrifice produces, through a kind of logospasmic birth-pang, the real presence of the true I, the present-tense being that resolves and transcends the distinction between *God* and *me*. The horrible, the unimaginable, the impossible happens, keeps on happening, and *I am* there to see it, to speak it. Watching what cannot happen, what ends all happening, happen, awakens the one who sleeps on the *other side* of happening. "At the point you perceive the irreparability of the world, at that point it is transcendent" (Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 104). THE FINAL REPETITION of the tripartite riff consolidates the transcendence of this encounter. On the one hand it means that nothing has happened. We are burned alive and everything is as it was before. On the other hand, it means that everything has happened, that we have stepped into the reality of what has *always already happened*. What is this reality? Nothing! The final repetition reestablishes the nothingness of happening. But this is a momentous nothingness, a nothing that turns out to be everything. Knowing the nothingness of happening is knowing all happening, just as hearing real silence is hearing all sound. This is the deep identity that repetition reenacts, the unity of opposites in non-duality, silence and sound equating each other in their own infinite self-equivalence.

#### **Is it the end my friend?**

THE FRI(END). As all friendship carries death within it as a future transmuted into a past - "everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*" (Jacques Derrida, *Memoires of Paul De Man*, 29) - so does dying express perfect friendship as a renunciation of the present: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Friendship is the inconclusiveness of the forgone conclusion of death. It is the life that is lived, not before death, but within it, within questioning the end, within *experiencing the end as a question*. Is this all? Of course not. Look up. Intuitively, we have already climbed the sublime signs of the internal rhyme, finding fruits like "the end of friendship is friendship with the end" and "friends end the end of friends." THE ACCELERATION OF BEING. The emergence of friendship, the immanence of the end, the speeding up of the song, Satan's impending arrival - everything combines to define an intensification rooted in being itself. This is the delight, the exuberance, that the Deictic Art produces, the amplification of *this* that

being close to the end enables. “Only in the purely negative register of this being-for-death, when it experiences the most radical impossibility, can Dasein reach its ownmost proper dwelling place and comprehend itself as a totality” (Agamben, *Language and Death*, 1-2). The essence of deixis is that it defines an originary unity of action and representation, being and speaking, that *more* than demonstrating something demonstrates demonstrating, the marvelous fact of its own taking place. So here the action and the representation of it, mirroring the action itself, are being *overtaken* by the immediacy, the urgency of their happening. So here pleasure is a pleasure in action itself, in action as the amplifier of being. “For since everything which exists desires its own being, and in acting the agent’s being is in some sense enhanced [quodammodo ampliatur], of necessity pleasure ensues” (Dante, *De Monarchia*, I.13). So this scene of acceleration, of panic, becomes archetypal within Heavy Metal.

#### **Satan’s coming ‘round the bend**

THE INEVITABLE. Within the aesthetics of inevitability governing the genre, acceleration occupies the position of inevitable occurrence or *stepping into what must happen*. The “secret power” of Heavy Metal is that it transforms the inevitable, the essence of necessity (you must run or you *will* die), into an aesthetic necessity and so enacts power over it, in short, over death. A Metal band that does not deliver the inevitable, and consequently creates no panic, is impotent. The rhetorical equivalent of Heavy Metal acceleration is the historical present, the *shift* to present tense discourse, classically, within battle scenes in epic poetry. Acceleration is Metal’s musical tense, a sonic intensification that produces the presence of the present. Like the historical present, it not merely a matter of lending vividness or verisimilitude to a represented event. It is about reentering the presentness, the presence of happening, slaying the distinction between representation and represented so that it dies in the reality of the actual and only present, the now. This is a fulfillment of art’s promise of being, that “the work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there” (Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 35). This is Metallica’s instruments becoming weapons as Hetfield leads the charge: “Attack! / Bullets are flying / People are dying / With madness surrounding, / All hell’s breaking loose” (Metallica, “No Remorse,” *Kill ‘Em All*). WYRD. The link between battle and Metal’s sonic inevitable goes beyond appropriateness. For each discloses the nature of the other as a confrontation with something greater than both, a facing of the plain-as-day fact that exceeds representation, an experience of the thing itself. As battle is an event marked by the death of representation, one in which conceptual categories are hacked open and happening is felt in its most raw, naked negativity as an undetermined determination, so Metal is an art that aims to kill representation, to slay music itself, show sound for the noise it is, and thereby hear the inexorable, ineffable music of *wyrd* or what happens. Metal does this, not nihilistically, but naively. Like Quixote suddenly decapitating papier maché Moors at the puppet show (*Don Quixote*, II.26), Metal destroys representation by realizing it, killing the false with (and within) its own fantasy.

#### **People running 'cause they're scared**

FINAL PANIC, FLAWLESS EXUBERANCE. As the now and the end asymptotically converge and experience is absorbed into the indefinable intersection of panic and exuberance, as we flail about in the finality of the moment and enter the melee of being’s struggle for itself, language contracts to *no* and *no* means everything. Dramatically, the line expresses fear becoming futile at its extremity, the perceptual place where refusal and pleading, intention and speech, pass through each other and become something else, the hopeless and thus pure negation of what is already happening, the soon-to-be-silent voice of the victim that speaks as a mere voice, as a speaking-to-itself. This is the drama that spells the death of drama, the scene in which acting ends, the moment when the word belonging to language returns to the word behind language, the voice of voice, the sound of being.

#### **The people better go and beware!**

METAL SPEAKS. The last movement of the song, its apotheosis, achieves significance as an event after language. Here the music, at once the sound of the feared-anticipated event and the event itself, *speaks* everything that *no* signified but could not say. It rushes out as a *breaking of the silence of language*, a speaking of the unsaid, unsayable thing that has been known and denied all along. And now, because we knew and denied it, because we hid behind the lie that we let language tell us, that there was no way to know it, now we get to *hear* it, and there is no telling what will happen. “And the reaction will be as instantaneous and as various as the reaction of people in a room through which a cobra suddenly and swiftly passes, when some would nervously laugh, some lose control of their bowels and some feel great courage or reasonless hope and joy” (Meher Baba). I am and am not the representation that Heavy Metal is killing. “I was born to be dead / You try and stop me” (Today is the Day, “Mayari,” *In the Eyes of God*). Hearing the final punctuation, its repetition, and the silence between them, I know three things. It is over. It is never over. It already is.

**No, no, please, no!**

## WORKS CITED

### Texts

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Agamben, Giorgio. *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*. Trans. Karen E. with Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Monarchy*. Trans. Prue Shaw. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Apuleius. *The Golden Ass*. Trans. Jack Lindsay. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960).
- Augustine. *Confessions*. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950.
- Beowulf*. Ed. Fr. Klaeber. 3d ed. New York: D.C. Heath, 1950.
- Chandogya Upanisad, With the Commentary of Sankaracarya*. Trans. Swami Gambhirananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Mmoires for Paul De Man*. Trans. Cecile Lindsay. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- Freeman, Kathleen. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Trans. Nicholas Walker. Ed. Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. 2d ed. Trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 1994.
- Guibert of Nogent. *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*. Tr. Paul J. Archambault. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.
- Guillaume de Lorris and Jean De Meun. *The Romance of the Rose*. Trans. Frances Horgan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend or Lives of the Saints, as Englished by William Caxton*. New York: AMS, 1973.
- John of the Cross. *The Collected Works*. Trans. Kiernan Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1991.
- Julian of Norwich. *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*. Ed. Georgia Ronan Crampton. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994.
- Meher Baba. *Beams from Meher Baba on the Spiritual Panorama*. San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, 1958.
- Meher Baba. *Discourses*. 6 ed. 3 vols. San Francisco: Sufism Reoriented, 1973.
- Meher Baba. *God Speaks*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. Ed. Charles Feidelson. New York: Macmillan, 1964.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Plato. *The Collected Dialogues*. Eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Bollingen Series LXXI. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads*. Trans. Stephen MacKenna. Burdett, NY: Larson, 1992.
- Poe, Edgar Allen. *The Works of the Late Edgar Allen Poe*. 4 vols. New York: Redfield, 1857.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*. Trans. Paul Rorem. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
- Shakespeare. *Hamlet*. Eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Arden, 2006.
- Tolkien, J.R.R.. *The Lord of the Rings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966.
- Wordsworth and Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads 1798*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed WJ.B. Owen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

### Albums

- Black Sabbath. *Black Sabbath*. Warner Bros., 1970.
- Black Sabbath. *Paranoid*. Warner Bros., 1970.
- Black Sabbath. *Volume 4*. Warner Bros., 1972.
- Bolt Thrower. *The IVth Crusade*. Earache, 1992.
- Metallica. *Kill 'Em All*. Megaforce/Roadrunner, 1983.
- Metallica. *Master of Puppets*. Elektra, 1986.
- Metallica. *Ride the Lightning*. Megaforce, 1984.
- Morbid Angel. *Fomulas Fatal to the Flesh*. Earache, 1997.
- Slayer. *Reign in Blood*. Def American, 1986.
- Slayer. *South of Heaven*. Def American, 1988.
- Sleep. *Volume (One)*. Tupelo, 1991.
- Today is the Day. *In the Eyes of God*. Relapse, 1999.

**Nicola Masciandaro** is Associate Professor of English at CUNY, Brooklyn College, a specialist in medieval literature, and founding editor of the journal *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary*. He is currently completing a book on the subject of mystical sorrow.

<http://glossator.org>

[http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/faculty/faculty\\_profile.jsp?faculty=552](http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/faculty/faculty_profile.jsp?faculty=552)

<http://thewhim.blogspot.it>