

THE BLACKISH GREEN OF THE GREENISH BLACK, OR, THE EARTH'S CORUSCATING DARKNESS

Ben Woodard

(A Shimmering Radiance) Diadem of 12 Stars

The strength that resides in contemplation
Bathes me in silver starlight
I will lead this beast on a chain of flowers
Fear not the jaws that devour soul

Between two pillars I have sat
Great oxen in the periphery
I ride in full course swift
Through the dark night and the rain pours down

You are a daughter of heaven
12 stars circle your brow
But you do not see them and the rain pours down
Our time in this garden is past¹

Vastness and Sorrow

Behold the vastness and sorrow of this empty land
A dark and fell rider clad in garments of shadow
Is the lord of this place
A cruel and wanton king,
A priest of a black religion is he

The hoof beat of the rider's steed pound a mournful drumbeat upon
the dry cracked earth
To this rhythm the world moves

¹ Wolves in the Throne Room, *Diadem of 12 Stars* (Vendlus Records, 2006).

The sun blasts down upon the earth
Until the soil turns to powder and blows away

Lifeless chaos is the order for the rider has mastered the seasons
Ancient kings cairns now have been defiled
The gates of strongholds long breached left swinging lifelessly in the
fetid wind
The pillars of holy places lie dead
He rides day and night
The relentless hoof beats echoes²

Cleansing

Behold all that you now know... evil, evil

Let's to the darkest place we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places
To the clearing in the forest enchanted

Yes, to the darkest place that we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places beyond the briar thickets

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

Our skin drum and rattle
Know the tune
Jaw bone driven through
The skull of a great foe
Bested with wooden spear
The tip hardened in fire

Bathe in the clear cold stream
Fresh water from the unsullied endless spring that flows from the
mountain
We will sing the most ancient song
Spark the fire upon dry tinder

² Wolves in the Throne Room, *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2007).

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

Our skin drum and rattle
Know the tune
Jaw bone driven through
The skull of a great foe
Bested with wooden spear
The tip hardened in fire³

I Will Lay Down My Bones Among the Rocks and Roots

The torment has ended
The beast has done his work
Great fires rage outside of this wooded sanctuary

But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
The embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
I am alone here no more

The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness
The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
This will be my new home
Deep within the most sacred grove
The sun god is born anew

I will lay down my bones among the rocks and roots of the deepest
hollow next to the streambed
The quiet hum of the earth's dreaming is my new song

When I awake, the world will be born anew⁴

A Looming Resonance

Staring onward,
As time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,

³ Wolves in the Throne Room, *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2007).

⁴ Wolves in the Throne Room, *Two Hunters* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2007).

While time stands still.
Starlight breaks this darkened haze,
Filter through decay.
Moonstruck children indisposed,
Malignant culture thriving on.
Defile the sanctum,
Of this place.

Winter now converges,
Drenched in all its blackness.
The last stalks of light are devoured,
Shadows
And so they march on hallowed ground.
History repeating,
Behavior that has been burned into the bone.

When time stands still.
A thousand years of fruitless searching,
Object of desire beyond the reach,
Of old and brittle hands,
with bated breath, anticipate the end.
Voices of the vanquished echo in the dreams

Where is the fire
That dwells inside,
Darkness returns with cold embrace.
Staring onward,
When time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,
Time stands still.
Staring onward,
Time stands still⁵

The above surfeit is the lyrical totality of *Wolves in the Throne Room*.ⁱ The question that improperly dogs the listener (or reader) is *from where?* Cosmological lightⁱⁱ radiates from starlight and fire that seems to transport itself across the bounds of the interior and exterior as satellites around the rebooting of a sun god. Forms of light that dissect darkness and blackness, that individuate shadows, thickets, briar patches, and woods. A shimmering radiance that, like a clumsy lantern, seems to only point forward as the givenness of its light accelerates the expiration of its fuel.

⁵ *Wolves in the Throne Room*, *Malevolent Grain* (Southern Lord Recordings, 2009).

Yet, is this radiance intentional or accidental, is it all too human or completely alien? How does this radiance continue to be, in a state of ruin, on the ancient and dusty earth on which it barely maintains dominion?

The strength that resides in contemplation
Bathes me in silver starlight
I will lead this beast on a chain of flowers
Fear not the jaws that devour soul

It's already there in four lines (but hopefully not always-already),ⁱⁱⁱ thought-light-dominion (contemplation-starlight-chain of flowers) where thought lights the light on the chain of flowers (though maybe on a marble corpse) somewhere between a festoon and the bind between thought and nature, that which leads soul eating jawed monster. But is the beast natural or unnatural? Is it that monstrous nature banned from the garden, enlightenment-caused banishment, that which would crush all the flowered growths of the earth into dust? Passage from one regime of ruin to another, the non-fabricated to the fabricated, the strand of a partial technology. And, in the end, the jaws of nature devour the unnatural attempts to escape it.^{iv}

Between two pillars I have sat
Great oxen in the periphery
I ride in full course swift
Through the dark night and the rain pours down

You are a daughter of heaven
12 stars circle your brow
But you do not see them and the rain pours down
Our time in this garden is past

Amongst the ruins there remains the technology (first technology?) of domesticating animals. Or more, the modesty to the immodesty of technology, the rearranging of the earth to burying the earth under the heavy stones of civilization. The garden that is to be left behind, the edenic, is to be churned, and broken, and covered in rain, and with a dozen stars burning down on it.

Behold the vastness and sorrow of this empty land
A dark and fell rider clad in garments of shadow
Is the lord of this place
A cruel and wanton king,

A priest of a black religion is he

The geological burns out the astral, or maybe merely pulls away from it in the obscurity of its particular corner, one inky fold of the cosmos.^v The sublunar is corrupted by riders, and yoked beasts or was there some kingdom, tethered to Gaia, which did not war against the earth in any way?⁶ Vastness is a field of magnitudes and sorrow is either the inability to center oneself in that field or the willful atomization of the illusion of the self in that endless continuum.^{vi} What is the black or dark religion? Is it only the salve to the creeping magnitudes of darkness hopelessly pecked at by the luminous. The black or the dark is not an obfuscation—lightness becomes the obscuring act. There becomes then a covered blackness and in that cover (that shade of lightness) a greenness and a blackness both of which stitch together that nature which is not human and those strange structures, those massive stones which keep back that darkness which, we convince ourselves, is not part of the stone.

The separation, of wolves and thrones, of vastness and sorrow, of the green and the black, allows for kings which can empty the land.

The hoof beat of the rider's steed pound a mournful drumbeat upon
the dry cracked earth
To this rhythm the world moves

The sun blasts down upon the earth
Until the soil turns to powder and blows away

With these lines maybe we've struck a balance or admitted the non-separation of a nature and not-nature, non-nature, as they share "a mournful drumbeat" and the rhythm which binds them together. Yet there is still the mastery of the horse, the luminous plague which purports to ply the animal from the animal that thinks it is not an animal. And the worst light of all, that sun, the rotten gelatinous creature, is turned to as that aspect of nature which will undo all others, undo all kings and thrones—the dominion of the earth becomes a temporary and laughable exercise. Dominion becomes simply another aspect of the earth turned to powder, destroyed within the solar economy.

Lifeless chaos is the order for the rider has mastered the seasons
Ancient kings cairns now have been defiled

⁶ They are, after all, Wolves in the Throne Room and are thereby an invasion of animality into non-animality, so-called nature into so-called non-nature.

The gates of strongholds long breached left swinging lifelessly in the fetid wind
The pillars of holy places lie dead
He rides day and night
The relentless hoof beats echoes

Chaos draws what would be said in the previous lines. The stratifications and layers of the scorched earth muddle the kingdom and the rock. The defiling of a cairn, of a man-made pile of stones, man-made only to the slightest degree, a mere rearrangement of hunks of hardened earth. The stronghold, is the same, only on a different magnitude. The rotten light of the sun falls clumsily on ten thousand degrees of stone, with some hope that the force-of-thought makes a difference that is neither found in stone or in light.

Behold all that you now know . . . evil, evil

Let's to the darkest place we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places
To the clearing in the forest enchanted

The rider, the rider. The rider is the wretched man, the human with one of the first technologies—the object of burden and flight, the first invasion machine. The rider is a doubled invasion (invasion and burdening of animality artificially separated from human(imality) and into the woods, the nature to be carved up for the manufacture of items, of the fleshes for saddle, bridal, on and on. How does the enchantment of the wood hold this back—is the lure of the wood inseparable from the pleasure of digging up the roots?^{vii}

Yes, to the darkest place that we know
Outside of the rider's domain
To the heart of the wood
To the hidden places beyond the briar thickets

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

But immediately the outside intrudes, but leads us to the same but different place where the enchantment becomes a more materialized thicket. But does this merely physicalize the outside, make the outside somewhere the rider can go. Or is the radical (imperfect) internalization of

the outside into the inside, the invitation of the cosmic butchery in tension with the ecological?

Our skin drum and rattle
Know the tune
Jaw bone driven through
The skull of a great foe
Bested with wooden spear
The tip hardened in fire

Maybe before there was some possibility of understanding nature, some slight turn back towards the briar but instead we jump into war—between human and human or human and beast seems unclear, unclear as to whether a human can be a great foe. And that technology, is dug up from around the roots, taken out of the trees—is it the birth of the worst technologies, those that come out of fire? Is the only technology not that far removed, that of the caveman or the post-apocalyptic survivor’s dog? Is domestication less hardened in fire than technology?

Bathe in the clear cold stream
Fresh water from the unsullied endless spring that flows from the mountain
We will sing the most ancient song
Spark the fire upon dry tinder

But from elsewhere there remains the aesthetic. That clear water. That water which grants that nature somewhere else is clear though we have pulled ourselves away from it.

The dance must begin as dusk gathers around

There’s no ecological time left for repetition.

The torment has ended
The beast has done his work
Great fires rage outside of this wooded sanctuary

But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
The embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
I am alone here no more

The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness

The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
This will be my new home
Deep within the most sacred grove
The sun god is born anew

What beast can work out the suffering, one that does not think? The beast that burns the world but leaves out a separate piece, a bit of ecological separatist piece, the assertion of a soft nature, of a nature that changes at the hands of some or some unthinking or perhaps thinking beast. Does any work, a work of burning or otherwise, posses nature – is there any work that could end torment (an operation of twisting) of changing but not quite breaking the world?

But soon they will be quenched by a purifying rain
The embers of the ceremonial fire burn to ash
A new warmth stirs within the center of the earth
I am alone here no more

The earth will turn (and twist) and release the deluge, quench the fire, the fire which rages but is ceremonial in its origin, in its comportment. Started with intent or just by the rage of the earth itself. If the latter, then it is to be followed by an aquatic self-canceling. The survivors come and heap praise upon the new Sun God, or on themselves, or merely stay close to the fire. Are the beasts caught in the fire, is the torment that's ended only every ended through death and never for the survivors in the light of their new sun god? The outside fire is canceled by an inner fire. Let the world burn.^{viii}

The wood is filled with the sounds of wildness
The songs of birds fill the forest on this new morning
This will be my new home
Deep within the most sacred grove
The sun god is born anew

The external world becomes a microcosm, the inverted world, the wilderness is internalized and made sacred, what's the construction of the sanctuary, from what are the brambled walls made? Birds ash black, the signaling out of the worshipers, perhaps only one can worship, a self-worship, the creator that seems to escaping destruction in their particular grove.

I will lay down my bones among the rocks and roots of the deepest hollow next to the streambed

The quiet hum of the earth's dreaming is my new song
When I awake, the world will be born anew

And again, the withdrawal into the one, the self-sun-king, or the one that worships, or the fire starter. And perhaps even a suicidal gesture, or just that of the self-destroyed body which claims its givenness to nature but stands apart, but is held in protection by the grove, by the brambles and the thorns. The earth is given a life, what that invades so dreamily, one that does not seem to change as the surface burns, as the roots die out.

Staring onward,
As time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,
While time stands still.
Starlight breaks this darkened haze,
Filter through decay.
Moonstruck children indisposed,
Malignant culture thriving on.
Defile the sanctum,
Of this place.

The place of no place, the natural earth, the earth which is untouched but defiled. The detached thought stares onward through eternity to grasp and maybe corrupted by the decay mediated moonlight. An onward on nothing, floating out in the eternal black, but a black peppered with spheres of burning gas, giving the onward a place, a particular location, this 'sanctum' of the earth.

Winter now converges,
Drenched in all its blackness.
The last stalks of light are devoured,
Shadows
And so they march on hallowed ground.
History repeating,
Behavior that has been burned into the bone.

The cosmological darkness is spread out by the winter, drenched in blackness and drenching the light pouring up from the earth and that pouring down from theunset heavens. The cosmological outside illustrates the internal darkness of the wanton marches, or does it merely mark an altogether different form of difference. Those bones, those not laid among the rocks and the roots, are corrupted by the burn of desire, the fire of that desiring blackness now engulfing all light?

When time stands still.
A thousand years of fruitless searching,
Object of desire beyond the reach,
Of old and brittle hands,
with bated breath, anticipate the end.
Voices of the vanquished echo in the dreams

Again the negation of the staring-from-place but this time in a temporal sense. But then the metrics of time creep in, the thousands of years of the bone burning, that strange monster desire, that strange desire which is separated from the desire to have a sanctum. There is only this desire which eats away at the human being but then this is turned outward, this is the falling darkness, the long winter?

Where is the fire
That dwells inside,
Darkness returns with cold embrace.
Staring onward,
When time stands still.
Devoid of tribulation,
Time stands still.
Staring onward,
Time stands still

There is a self-burning desire, which is somehow separated from that desire which has burned the bones of the desiring masses, that has not been corrupted by the blackness of winter, the cosmological blackness. Time burns but will not burn out, but why, what of the sanctum of the earth?^{ix} Won't this burn, won't this all burn without us?

ⁱ There are more lyrics (and lyrics within lyrics). Or perhaps it is better to conceive of lyric corpus, with its more and less obscure layers of legibility, audibility, and dissemination, on the model of non-totalizable palimpsest, a la Derrida's *Choral Work*: "this structure of the non-totalizable palimpsest which draws from one of its elements the resources for the others . . . and which makes an unrepresentable and unobjectifiable labyrinth out of this play of internal differences (scale without end, *scaling* without hierarchy): this is precisely the structure of *Choral Work*. Its structure of stone and metal, the superimposition of layers . . . plunges into the abyss of the 'platonic' *chora*. 'Lyre', 'layers' . . . the truth which *lyre* or *layer* says and does and gives is not a truth: it is not presentable, representable, totalizable" (Neil Leach, *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* [London: Routledge, 1997], 344). The co-intimate impulses to collect, order, and comment upon lyrics are inherent to lyric tradition, from the troubadour anthologies of the thirteenth century, to the auto-commentarial works by Dante and his inheritors, to Continuum's 33 1/3 series of album commentaries. The musical album itself is grounded in this continuity. When will the album die? NM

ⁱⁱ The cosmological light is a connective operator that weaves the incommensurable regions of spacetime into a web of electromagnetic radiance. Its scope of illumination is that of a vast web of entangled connections that approximates the scope of the open and represents its abyssality not through commonalities between different regional horizons and points of subjectification but by the irreducible and real lack thereof. The illumination of depth as the index for the coherency of the abyss—that is, a cosmic feat of enlightenment—proceeds via an indifference to the common ground: Light breaks and enters on its own accord and so does that which is universal. In this sense, illumination reclaims the abyssality of the universal by liberating its coherence from the logic of the common. If the lumpenism of the common is the transcendental enforcement of commonalities as a myopic means to approach a universal depth, the task of the enlightenment is to restore the coherency of the abyssal by accentuating the lack of such commonality and by shedding light on systematic entanglements and connections implicit to complicities, that is to say, coalitions without commonalities. Only in following the global logic of light, one can approach that which cannot be commonly shared because it belongs to no one . . . and sing the hymn to the abyss. What is a Black Metal fully acclimatized to the thought of the abyss not through darkness but instead a global conception of light that reveals the scope of the abyss and reestablishes its coherency? RN

ⁱⁱⁱ *but hopefully not always-already*: “Every experience of eternity presupposes a leap and a transfiguration, and few and far between are those capable of the tension necessary to arrive at the blissful contemplation of the eternal. It is not the length but the intensity of contemplation that matters. The return to normal will not impair the richness of this fertile experience” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, trans. Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992], 64). NM

^{iv} The moral lesson of predation: Preying is distinguishing yourself from your food. Escaping predation is distinguishing yourself from both your food and the predator. Underlying both is the gesture of self-identification. One who preys is as much bound to self-identification as the one who is preyed upon, and therefore, susceptible, to the same degree, to an abrupt shift of position in the chain of predation: Yesterday a predator, today a prey. To this extent, what is the nature of a nature endowed with self-identification, if the qualitative homogeneity of nature is indifferent to self-identification? Is it indeed nature or thought? . . . a sheep in wolf’s clothing who is again in sheep’s clothing *ad infinitum* . . . the circularity of predation and self-identification that simultaneously marks the peculiarity of thought and its unnerving relation to nature, the blank sheet of assertion against which the line of predation is formed before once again—together with its hypothetical preys and predators—sinks back into the bottomless environment. RN

^v The local image of the correspondence between the stellar light and the planetary receptor is more concerned with heat than light. The evolution of the planetary and its differentiation to contrasting regions—upon which the prevalent but twisted regionalism of Black Metal is anchored—is determined by the conversion of light to heat in the planetary environment. The planetary can then be understood as a spatiotemporal/regional obstacle against light which converts the global scope of light into the local environment of heat. Within this regional ambit of light—wherein light is converted to heat—the geological appears to burn out the astral and the stellar pitilessly engulfs the planetary in light. Light is embedded within the dynamic of thought as heat, its scope is reduced to that of organic vision and its ability to chromatically differentiate regions of spacetime (the food from itself from the predator). In this sense, we can say that heat is the manifest image of light insofar as it mirrors the heat principle ingrained within life and respectively thought . . . and in doing so it truncates the full scope of light to that which is relevant to the regional ambit of the planetary. The ambivalent attitude of

Black Metal toward light must be located in the aforementioned archaic confusion between heat and light embedded within planetary contingencies—namely, life and thought. It is this confusion that equates the insurrection against the hegemony of life and the wholesome earth with the dark (a universe devoid of light) and darkness with the cold (loss of heat). But just as the light is not equal to heat, the dark is not equal to the cold either. Evocation of one in the face of another is simply a conformity to the ingrained myth of ‘light = heat’. In the same vein, the insurrection against the wholesome earth in the context of reestablishing an earth devoid of heat and therefore, incapable of integrating the inorganic, life, and thought together into a wholesome sanctuary does not mean to surrender to the reign of darkness. To go beyond the planetary myopia preserved by heat and accustomed to the narrow spectrum of light, it is imperative to embrace the global conception of light that connects the regional to the planetary to the stellar to the galactic to the abyssal. RN

^{vi} The relation between vastness and sorrow is the expansive domain of lyricism. “Why can’t we stay closed up inside ourselves? . . . to be tormented by a sense of inner infinity means to live so intensely that you feel that you are about to die of life . . . One does not become lyrical except after a *total organic affliction*” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, 4-5, my emphasis). NM

^{vii} A tactical scheme to disenchant the woods: Reinvent the trunk as the ratio between roots and branches. The ratio is accordingly the relation between the enchanted immobile earth (the rooted earth) and the enchanted firmament (the inaccessible sky) whose blueness or gloominess are equally the expressions of its impenetrable uniformity. In other words, ratio is the relation that translates and transfers the immobility of one into the inaccessibility of the other and vice versa. By infinitely expanding and twisting roots, the earth can no longer be posited as the *topos* for roots but itself a ghoulish edifice without integrity and support. In the wake of the infinite twist and entanglement of roots, the supposed necessary correspondence between the root (the heritage, the family, the nation, the territory) and regions of the earth will collapse. At the other extreme, by growing and gnarling branches, in the same fashion, the inaccessible sky—the lattice of gods—loses its correspondence with the root (that is, the heritage). Marked at two ends by the endless twist of the root and the infinite gnarl of the branch, the trunk becomes no longer a trivial translation of the root-earth to the branch-sky, a relation through which the heritage and gods can enchant the tree of the woods. It instead

becomes a configuration of all possible twists, a ratio endowed with torsion that corkscrews the immobile earth and the impenetrable sky, abolishing the difference between them. An earth within the sky is a perpetually descending earth, a sky opened to the earth a navigable—hence, disenchanted—abyss. Only once this tactical scheme is collectively exercised upon all trees, the woods is thoroughly disenchanted, the heritage is swallowed up by the abyss and gods collapse, once and for all, upon a dancing speck of dust, namely, the mobile earth.

What is the shape of a Black Metal that commits neither to the twist of the root nor the gnarl of the branch alone but conceives itself as the relation between one twist to another, a convoluted earth and an open abyss which cannot be separated from one another in the first or the last instance? And what is the relation of this chimeric Black Metal to a modern conception of reason (ratio) that celebrates the abolishment of the difference between the ‘world below’ and the ‘world above’ on the wreckage of heritage and corpses of gods? RN

^{viii} Why not? No use in living here if it is *not* burning. “There are so many ways to achieve the sensation of immateriality that it would be difficult, if not futile, to make a classification. Nevertheless, I think that the bath of fire is one of the best. The bath of fire: your being ablaze, all flashes and sparks, consumed by flames in Hell. The bath of fire purifies so radically that it does away with existence. Its heat waves and scorching flames burn the kernel of life, smothering its vital élan, turning its aggressiveness into inspiration. To live in a bath of fire, transfigured by its rich glow—such is the state of immaterial purity where one is nothing but a dancing flame” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, 45). NM

^{ix} Time burns but will not burn out, but . . . what is time without space that allows for the translation of indifference into non-qualitative difference? A frozen fixity, a universal englaciation, an aborted flame? RN