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# *How Spoke Zarathustra? Considerations on Style in Light of “The Other Dance Song”*

*Paolo D’Iorio*

## **I. What Is *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*?**

Mazzino Montinari once very rightly observed that nothing in Nietzsche’s writing is accidental, not even the punctuation marks.<sup>1</sup> The same holds true, to an even greater degree, of the structure of Nietzsche’s writings, of the specific ordering which he gave to his aphorisms in his aphoristic works, and of the sequence of Zarathustra’s discourses. For this reason, as a necessary preliminary to addressing the question of style in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*—and most particularly in the discourse entitled *The Other Dance Song*—we are going first to offer some reflections on the general structure of this book, beginning with the circumstances of its publication.

Nietzsche published the first part of *Zarathustra* in August 1883, the second at the end of this same year, and considered (as he stated at the time in several letters to his friends<sup>2</sup>) the work to have been brought to completion with the publication of its third part in April 1884. But, in contrast to these first three publications in the fullest sense of the term, a fourth part of *Zarathustra* was then printed in May 1885, in this case without date or name of publisher and without any copies being sent out to bookshops.<sup>3</sup> It is significant in this regard that, on the *verso* of the title page of the print-ready manuscript of this fourth part, Nietzsche wrote: “For my friends and not for the public.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, of the forty-five copies that were printed only nine ended up being sent to friends of the

philosopher; one was retained by Nietzsche himself; and the remaining thirty-five were kept stored, for years, in Peter Gast's apartment in Venice, before being lost altogether.<sup>5</sup> The copy sent to Franz Overbeck bears the following dedication: "To my dear and venerated friend Franz Overbeck with the plea to keep confidential this *ineditum*—along with many other pleas—."<sup>6</sup> At this time, then, Nietzsche considered Part Four of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to be a text that was not, indeed, intended for the general reading public but which nonetheless did constitute the concluding part of this latter work: the latter's *finale*, as he calls it in a letter to Peter Gast on 14 March 1885. Indeed, still in August 1886, on the back cover of *Beyond Good and Evil*, we find him referring to it in the following terms: "The fourth and final part of the work cited here, the composition of which dates back to the start of the year 1885, has not yet been given over to booksellers."<sup>7</sup> For all that, though, at the end of 1886 Nietzsche commissioned the printing of an edition of *Zarathustra* comprising just the first three parts of the work bound into a single volume, with the fourth part excluded and a title page indicating that the work was indeed "in three parts" ["in drei Theilen"]. At the same time he made the proposal to his publisher that the fourth part be published under a different title—namely, *Zarathustra's Versuchung* [*Zarathustra's Temptation*]<sup>8</sup>—as the first part of a whole new series of Zarathustrian writings. Finally, when writing, in the autumn of 1888, his intellectual biography *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche devoted an entire chapter to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which the account of the work's slow genesis clearly restated it to have been a work consisting of just three parts. The "first *Zarathustra*," as Nietzsche phrases it, came into being during the winter of 1882, when the author was living near Genoa on the calm and graceful bay of Rapallo, which lies on the Ligurian coast between Chiavari and the headland of Portofino. It was on long walks through the hills and coastland of this region, Nietzsche continues, "that there occurred to me all that makes up the first *Zarathustra*, above all Zarathustra himself, as a type: to speak more correctly, it was on these walks that Zarathustra *befell me*..." (EH-ZA-1). Later in the same chapter Nietzsche writes:

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In the summer, having returned, as if to a home, to that sacred place at which I had been struck by that first lightning bolt of the thought of Zarathustra, I found also the second Zarathustra. Ten days sufficed for setting it to paper. Never in this connection, neither for the first part nor for the third and final one, did I ever need longer than this. In the succeeding winter, under the halcyon sky of Nice, which shone then for the first time into my life, I found the third Zarathustra – and I was finished (EH-ZA-4).

This clearly raises the most serious questions regarding the editorial status, the philological foundation, and the philosophical significance of the here-mentioned fourth part of the work. From an editorial viewpoint, it must be firmly borne in mind that the fourth part of *Zarathustra* was a *Privatdruck*, that is to say, a private publication never intended to be put on sale to the public, since, although Nietzsche authorized its printing, he never authorized the distribution to bookshops of the printed copies. The German critical edition clearly signals this fact; translations into other languages often fail to do so; and most printed editions offer to their readers all four of the work's parts together in a single book. The digital critical edition, by contrast, since it is not conditioned by the traditional form of the book or by the demands of editing for commercial publication, has been able to permit itself the publication of the fourth *Zarathustra* not under the rubric of Published Works but rather under that of Private Publications.<sup>8</sup>

From a philological viewpoint, Wolfram Groddeck, basing himself both on the facts to which we've already alluded and on other philological and poetological considerations, arrives at the conclusion that "the Zarathustrian work of Nietzsche consists of the three books of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and of the nine poems of the *Dionysian Dithyramb*s."<sup>9</sup> Groddeck's main argument runs as follows: The first version of the *Dionysian Dithyramb*s, put together in the autumn of 1888, was entitled *The Songs of Zarathustra* and consisted of six poems drawn from the poetic materials that Nietzsche had set to paper at the time of his writing of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* itself. At the beginning of January 1889 Nietzsche

added three other poems, which were nothing other than the three poems (in slightly modified versions and with slightly modified titles) that had been contained in the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, and then, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, announced the *Dionysian Dithyramb*s to have been completed. According to Groddeck, by this authorial provision Nietzsche definitively pushes the fourth *Zarathustra*, thus mutilated, into the status of a posthumous writing. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, then, would consist, on this account, of three parts, plus a fourth part which took the form, initially, of a *Privatdruck* but was later superseded by the *Dionysian Dithyramb*s.

As regards the philosophical interpretation, there is no blinking the fact that on the very first page of the first *Zarathustra* we read: “Thus began Zarathustra’s going under” and that in the discourse *The Convalescent*, situated toward the end of the third *Zarathustra*, we read: “I spoke my word [...] Thus—ends Zarathustra’s going under.” The philosophical itinerary of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* finds its term, then, at the end of the third part at the point where Zarathustra finally succeeds in evoking the thought of eternal return. This is also confirmed by the fact that, in the draft manuscripts, the discourse *The Convalescent* was entitled *The Evocation [Die Beschwörung]* and the evocation of the eternal return did indeed represent the conclusion of the work.<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche later added, in the published version, three more speeches or discourses that together form a sort of *coda*. The second of these three *coda* discourses is *The Other Dance Song*. In order, then, to understand *The Other Dance Song* as an example of the style of *Zarathustra* we need first to consider its strategic position within the structure of the work as a whole. We need to bear in mind the fact that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* consists of three parts; that Zarathustra’s philosophical and existential itinerary attains, as we have said, to its endpoint with that evocation of the eternal return contained in *The Convalescent*, the fourth-to-last discourse of the third part; and that *The Other Dance Song* is located only subsequent to this evocation and provides an additional element that we will analyze later. But before undertaking this analysis of *Zarathustra*’s style as work’s structure, we want briefly to describe its style as it is expressed through the creation of Zarathustra himself and of his language.

## II. Who Is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?

Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra? Why did Nietzsche choose the figure of a religious reformer as the protagonist of a work which is atheist, not to say blasphemous? Several explanations have been given for this fact. Before offering my own hypothesis, we ought first to attend to Nietzsche's own account of the matter in a famous passage of *Ecce Homo*:

People have never asked me, as they should have done, what the name of Zarathustra means precisely in *my* mouth, in the mouth of the first immoralist. For what constitutes the immense uniqueness of that Persian in history is precisely the opposite. Zarathustra was the first to see in the struggle between good and evil the essential wheel in the working of things. The translation of morality into the realm of metaphysics, as force, as cause, as end in itself, is *his* work. But this question would in fact already be the answer. It was Zarathustra who *created* this most portentous of all errors: morality. Consequently, he must also be the first to *recognize* it as such (EH-*Schicksal*-3).

But could it be that Nietzsche here, in this work of 1888, is engaging, unawares, in an *a posteriori* reconception or reconfiguration of processes of thought and creation that had occurred some years before? What is it that we learn from Nietzsche's manuscripts from the summer of 1881, i.e., from the period at which he confided for the very first time the name Zarathustra to one of his notebooks? Zarathustra appears for the first time in August 1881 in Nietzsche's manuscript notes in the following formulation:

Noon and Eternity.

*Pointers Toward a New Life.*

Zarathustra, born by Lake Urmi, left his homeland when he was thirty years old, went into the province of Aria and, during his ten years of solitude in the mountains, composed the Zend-Avesta.

A slightly altered version of this text forms the opening of aphorism 342 of *The Gay Science*, the concluding aphorism of the first edition of this book, which in turn is reproduced, once again with some very slight modifications, as the beginning of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>11</sup> But where did Nietzsche acquire the knowledge that he imparts here about the figure of the Persian sage? In order to answer this question, I drew up a list of all the books that Nietzsche had available to him in Sils-Maria in the course of the summer of 1881 and noted that on 8 July Nietzsche asked his friend Overbeck to send him, among other works, a volume by Friedrich Anton von Hellwald entitled *Cultural History in Its Natural Development Up to the Present Day*.<sup>12</sup> Page 128 of this work proved to be the source from which Nietzsche drew the various pieces of information regarding the figure of Zarathustra and of his importance in the history of culture:

Nietzsche, NF-1881,11[195]: “Zarathustra, born by Lake Urmi, left his homeland when he was thirty years old, went into the province of Aria and, during his ten years of solitude in the mountains, composed the Zend-Avesta.”

Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte*: “Zarathustra, the great prophet of the Persians, who is usually called by the name Zoroaster (Ζωροάστρηρ) handed down within the Greek tradition (but whose name in the Zend language possesses, nonetheless, a plain and simple meaning), was a native of Azerbaijan, born in the city of Urmi by the lake of the same name lying between the Caspian Sea and Lake Van.—When he was thirty years old he left his homeland, travelled westward into the province of Aria, and spent ten years in the solitude of the mountain regions there occupied with the composition of the Zend-Avesta.”<sup>13</sup>

On the following page Hellwald writes that Zarathustra had introduced for the first time in human history the idea of a moral order of the world:

The religion of Zarathustra is a simple deism inasmuch as it recognizes only one God, the Creator, Ruler and

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Preserver of the world, who is without form and invisible. This primal godhead (*Zaruana akarana*) combined within himself, as his "two faces", a white, or holy, and a dark, or unholy, spirit [...]. The light side and the dark side of the divine will come eventually to separate out from one another into two different beings: Ormuzd and Ahriman. These Lords of Light and Darkness have been vying for victory over one another ever since—though this is a struggle whose outcome is set and decided from the start.

We encounter, then, for the first time in history among these ancient Persians the phantasm of a *moral world-order*: an idea which can only be arrived at by peoples who have already ascended to a certain cultural level and the influence of which on the further development of culture is of incalculable value.<sup>14</sup>

This is exactly the same concept as Nietzsche expresses in the passage from *Ecce Homo* that we have cited above: "Zarathustra was the first to see in the struggle between good and evil the essential wheel in the working of things. The translation of morality into the realm of metaphysics, as force, as cause, as end in itself, is *his* work (EH-Schicksal-3).

Nietzsche's texts and manuscripts thus tell us the story of the birth of *Zarathustra* from the spirit of parody. Nietzsche chooses the oldest of the prophets, the wisest of the wise, the man who was the very first to translate morality into metaphysics and to create the error of an absolute morality, and causes him to return again specifically to *recognize* his error. This is the fundamental trait of this figure: the indispensable element, in our view, required in order to understand who Nietzsche's Zarathustra is, the process of his literary genesis, the quality of his style considered as a personage within a developing drama, and finally even his philosophical meaning.

Certain other traits of the historical Zarathustra as presented by Hellwald are also used by Nietzsche in order to construct his own image of Zarathustra: truthfulness, for example, as a distinctive characteristic of the Persians in general and of Zarathustra in particular. On pages 130-31



of his *Culturgeschichte* Hellwald had written: “Truth is the basis of every excellence. Untruth, on the other hand, is one of the most gravely punishable sins. [...] As already mentioned, nothing was more important to the ancient Persians than to speak the truth. [...] Propriety in speech, love of truth, and a legality based upon a strict and constant keeping of a word once given were, it was said, prominent traits of the Persian national character.”<sup>15</sup> And Nietzsche writes in *Zarathustra*: “Speak the truth and be skilled with the bow and arrow—this seemed both dear and difficult to the people from whom my name derives” (Za-I-Ziel). In *Ecce homo*, Nietzsche was even more explicit regarding the veracity of Zarathustra:

[...] the more important fact is that Zarathustra was the most truthful of thinkers. In his teaching alone is truthfulness upheld as the highest virtue—that is to say, as the reverse of the *cowardice* of the “idealist,” who takes to his heels at the sight of reality. Zarathustra has more pluck in his body than all other thinkers put together. To speak the truth *and shoot well with arrows*: this is Persian virtue.—Have I been understood? ... The self-overcoming of morality out of truthfulness, the self-overcoming of the moralist by which he becomes his opposite: namely, *me*. *This* is what the name Zarathustra means when I take it into my mouth. (EH-Schicksal-3)

Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, moreover, shares with the historical Zarathustra a natural enmity toward priests:

“Zarathustra, of course, ended up acquiring many enemies, especially among the priests of the old religion”<sup>16</sup>; “Here are priests, and though they are my enemies, go quietly past them with sleeping swords” (Za-II-Priester).

In other regards too Nietzsche makes use of a technique of parody by inversion. Whereas the historical Zarathustra teaches the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the dead, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra relieves the dying tightrope-walker of the marketplace from his fear of death, and

of the consignment to hell and to the devil that might come after it, by assuring him that his soul will be dead even sooner than his body:

Hand in hand with this went the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which was likewise a characteristically Zoroastrian article of faith"; "Zoroaster taught the immortality of the soul."<sup>17</sup>

Contrast this with Nietzsche:

By my honor, friend, replied Zarathustra,—all that you are talking about does not exist. There is no devil and no hell. Your soul will be dead even sooner than your body—fear no more! (Za-I-Vorrede-6).

Finally, then, who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra? He is the parody by inversion of the historical Zarathustra. Marx had set the Hegelian dialectic back on its feet in order to make it materialist; Nietzsche turns topsy-turvy the most ancient of all human wisdoms, the metaphysical dichotomy of good and evil as absolute principles, in order to hold it up to ridicule and to demand, at the same time, of the wise men and philosophers to keep their heads in contact with the earth.<sup>18</sup>

### III. How Spake Zarathustra?

The parodic nature of Nietzsche's personage Zarathustra comes to expression, of course, also through the language associated with this figure and it is certainly from this overarching parodic context that we must take our bearings in learning to read the speeches that this figure gives. Though in fact, in our view, in order properly to read *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* no less than three factors or aspects must be taken into account: 1) the parodic nature of the figure of Zarathustra, 2) relations of *Zarathustra* to Nietzsche's preceding works, and 3) the evolution of Nietzsche's narrative.

#### 1) *The parodic nature of the figure of Zarathustra*

Nietzsche makes no secret of the parodic nature of his Zarathustra. The final aphorism of the first edition of *The Gay Science*, which presents

for the first time in Nietzsche's work the figure of the Persian sage, is entitled indeed *Incipit tragoedia* but in the preface to the second edition of the same book Nietzsche reveals to us that this title ought rather to have been read as *Incipit parodia*. Anyone, writes Nietzsche here, who had experienced all the mortally arduous things that the author had experienced during the years preceding this book's composition

would surely pardon even more than a bit of foolishness, exuberance, "gay science"—for example, the handful of songs that have been added to this book this time, songs in which a poet makes fun of all poets in a manner that is hard to forgive. Alas, it is not only the poets and their beautiful "lyrical sentiments" on whom this resurrected author has to vent his malice. Who knows what kind of victim he is really seeking, what a truly tremendous object will strike and charm him next as potential prey for his parody? *Incipit tragœdia*, we read at the end of this dangerously inoffensive book. A reminder to stay alert and aware! Something quite exceptionally bad and wicked is in the air here: *incipit parodia*, there can be no doubt....<sup>19</sup>

Just as in the rhymes that open *The Gay Science* a poet makes fun of all poets, a prophet is soon, in *Zarathustra*, to set about making fun of all prophets. The object of parody in this latter case will be not only poetry but philosophy and religion, i.e., the theological and metaphysical values of Platonism and of Christianity.

One of Nietzsche's unpublished notes from the same period alludes to the fact that, from a physiological point of view, parody is an expression of vitality: "NB: Zarathustra, constantly adopting a parodistic attitude vis-à-vis all earlier values, with this arising from his own fullness." This idea is developed in aphorism 382 of Book Five of *The Gay Science* (1887) entitled *The Great Health*. It will also be taken up by Nietzsche once again the following year, in the chapter of *Ecce Homo* devoted specifically to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, to characterize the type of Zarathustra:

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[...] the ideal of a spirit that plays naively, i.e., not deliberately but from an overflowing abundance and power, with everything that was hitherto called holy, good, untouchable, divine. [...] the ideal of a human, super-human wellbeing and benevolence that will often enough appear *inhuman*—for example, when it places itself next to all earthly seriousness heretofore, all forms of solemnity in gesture, word, tone, look, morality and task as if it were their most incarnate and involuntary parody.<sup>20</sup>

From the reader's point of view, indeed, the use of parody instead of explicit refutation has the drawback of risking misunderstanding by those who are not in a position to recognize the conceptual game being played. These latter readers of *Zarathustra* can often be misled by the air and manner of ancient wisdom or evangelical parable that Nietzsche parodies in this particular work, as they tell themselves that the words must match the music and that some grave and ponderous holy-scripture-like revelation is being attempted here. But for those who understand the procedure, parody is often more effective than any argument-based refutation. In the end, as Zarathustra himself puts it in the speech entitled *On Reading and Writing*: "Not by wrath does one kill but by laughing. Up, let us kill the spirit of gravity!"<sup>21</sup>

Parody can be carried out in several different ways. To parody is to take the same music and set to it a different text, or to match up the same rhymes, or the same rhythmical pattern, with a different set of words. But to parody can mean also to use the same words in a different sense—sometimes in a sense that deviates from, or is even directly contrary to, or completely reversed vis-à-vis the sense in which these words were originally used. For example, in the speech given in the second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* entitled *On the Poets*, Zarathustra takes pleasure in inverting, one by one, the senses and significances of all the verses making up the famous *Chorus Mysticus* that ends the second of Goethe's two parts of his *Faust* drama, including its *most* famous line: "Alles

Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichniß” [“all that passes away is but a symbol”], which becomes in Zarathustra’s mouth, “Alles *Unvergängliche* ist nur ein Gleichniß” [“all that does *not* pass away is just a symbol”]. Such parodies by inversion are to be found throughout the whole of *Zarathustra*. But we also encounter here a more subtle form of parody that often makes use of paradox. Indeed, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a whole revolves around one fundamental paradox whereby what is taught therein is not that one should follow the teaching of Zarathustra, but rather that one should follow one’s own way and that, in doing so . . . one will follow the teaching of Zarathustra. One of the little poems that Nietzsche included as a “Prelude” already in the first edition of *The Gay Science* expresses this paradox effectively:

*Vademecum-Vadetecum*

Lured by my style and tendency,

You follow and come after me?

Follow your own self faithfully:

Take time—and thus you follow me.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, at the end of the book’s first part, Zarathustra takes leave of his disciples in the following somewhat rude and abrupt manner: “You had not yet sought yourselves, then you found me. All believers do this; that’s why all faith amounts to so little. Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you” (*Za-I-Tugend-1*). These words not only convey a paradox; they also represent a parody, by inversion, of the famous passage from the Gospel of Matthew (10:32-33): “Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in heaven.” Zarathustra is not a guru who tells you “follow me instead of following the other gurus”; rather, he tells you that you should not follow gurus at all but rather follow your own selves—and that only in this way will you follow him. He adds, however, that to discover who or what we are and to follow our own selves is neither a simple nor an immediate process. From a philosophical viewpoint, this position involves questioning universal moral imperatives. From a

pedagogical viewpoint it represents a fundamental station on the path that must be taken if autonomous individuals are to come into being. The fact that virtue, like happiness, is something necessarily particular and that one cannot, therefore, issue universal formulae for either, is one of the fundamental points of Nietzsche's philosophy that as already repeatedly advanced in his earlier, aphoristic works, as for example in passage 108 of *Daybreak*:

*Insofar* as the individual is seeking happiness, one ought not to tender him any prescriptions as to the path to happiness: for individual happiness springs from one's own unknown laws, and prescriptions from without can only obstruct and hinder it.—The prescriptions called "moral" are in truth directed against individuals and are in no way aimed at promoting their happiness. They have just as little to do with "the happiness and welfare of mankind"—a phrase to which it is impossible, in any case, to attach any distinct concepts, let alone employ it as a guiding star on the dark ocean of moral aspirations. (M-108)

This aphorism can be considered as a sort of commentary, written some years beforehand, on several claims advanced by Zarathustra in the sections *On the Passions of Pleasure and Pain*, *On the Thousand and One Goals*, and *On the Spirit of Gravity* to the effect that each of us must seek out his own good and evil, his own truth, and his own way:

And truly, this is not a command just for today or tomorrow, this *learning* to love oneself. Rather, it is of all arts the subtlest, the most cunning, the tardiest because the most demanding of patience. [...] That man, however, has indeed discovered his own self who says to himself: "This is *my* good and *my* evil." Thereby he renders dumb the mole and the dwarf that says: "good is good for all; evil is evil for all." [...] By many a trail and manner I came to my truth. [...] This—it turns out—is *my* way—where is *yours*? That is how I answered those who asked me "the way." *The* way, after all—does not exist!" (Za-III-Geist-2).

Zarathustra is alluding here, of course, to the words of the Gospel of John: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.”—He adds, moreover, sarcastically, in the discourse of *Zarathustra* entitled *On Priests*: “Zealously and with shouting they drove their herd over their bridge, as if there were only one bridge to the future! Indeed, these shepherds too still belonged among the sheep!” (Za-II-Priester). More generally, however, Nietzsche is aiming, with these remarks, at all those who subscribe to the notion of a single and universal morality who, in *Zarathustra*, are collectively represented by the figure of “the spirit of gravity” [*Geist der Schwere*] because not following one’s own path makes life something grave and heavy to bear.

## 2) *Relations of Zarathustra to Nietzsche’s preceding works*

The second factor or aspect that must be borne in mind when reading *Zarathustra* is that, as we have just seen, a significant part of what Zarathustra teaches has its roots in themes already developed by Nietzsche in his aphoristic works of the immediately preceding period. Which is to say that the philosophy taught by Zarathustra remains in large part Nietzsche’s philosophy of the free spirit. Nietzsche is perfectly aware of this and he says as much explicitly to Malwida von Meysenbug in a letter of 20 April 1883: “I have indeed ‘committed’ the acrobatic feat (and the act of madness) of writing *commentaries* to the text prior to writing the text itself.—But who has *read* these commentaries? And I mean by that: studied them over a period of years?” He says much the same thing in the same terms in a letter to Overbeck of 7 April 1884: “Reading once again through *Daybreak* and *The Gay Science* I found, moreover, that there is hardly a single line in these books that could not serve as an introduction, preparation, and commentary to [...] *Zarathustra*. It is a simple *fact*: I wrote the commentary before I wrote the text—.”<sup>23</sup>The style of Zarathustra’s language, then, is formed and fashioned by both parody and condensation.

3) *The evolution of Nietzsche's narrative*

The third thing to bear in mind when one reads *Zarathustra* is that one is reading a narrative or, in other words, a text involving a development toward a denouement, the movement of which it is necessary to follow even if this movement is (and indeed above all inasmuch as it is) a movement of thought. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is not a philosophical treatise that presents a fixed and frozen state of reflection. Rather, it is a sort of performance, philosophical and dramatic at once, which needs to be followed, if we are really to understand it, through its various dramatic characters and in its own particular dramatic motion.

In the first place, one must always bear in mind that *Zarathustra* is a character created by Nietzsche and that, therefore, the philosophy of *Zarathustra* does not necessarily coincide, or at least does not necessarily completely coincide, with the philosophy of Nietzsche. And just as Nietzsche is different from *Zarathustra*, so too is *Zarathustra* himself different from the other characters who make their appearances in the course of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. To really understand the meaning of what is said here at any given time, then, close attention must be paid to who is speaking and who is listening to the speech in question. Furthermore, *Zarathustra* is also different from himself within the temporality of the narrative, since his character evolves. He learns from his own errors: for example, from the error of attempting to speak directly to the populace in the marketplace of the "town lying on the edge of the forest" into which he descends after his ten years of mountain solitude. In particular, he struggles with the thought of the eternal return of the same for a whole long stretch of time before he finally succeeds in bringing it to articulation and expression. In fact, as we shall see, *Zarathustra* narrates two parallel processes of maturation: namely, the maturation of *Zarathustra's* disciples, who will become, in the course of the story, autonomous individuals and bridges toward the *Übermensch*, and the maturation of *Zarathustra* himself through his arduous assimilation of the thought of the eternal return of the same. To the devices of parody and condensation, then, the style of *Zarathustra* adds the further molding and



forming factors of the multiple voices of the *dramatis personae* and of the specific temporality of the narrative recounted.

#### **IV. Zarathustra, Teacher of the Eternal Return**

In the chapter of *Ecce Homo* devoted to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* Nietzsche writes that the fundamental conception [*Grundconception*] of this work is the thought of the eternal return. And in the text itself of *Zarathustra*, in the discourse entitled *The Convalescent*, we read “Because your animals know well, oh Zarathustra, who you are and must become: behold, you are *the teacher of the eternal return*—that now is *your destiny!*”<sup>24</sup> This is, moreover, only logical: the historical Zarathustra had taught transcendence; Nietzsche’s inverted Zarathustra teaches immanence—that is to say, the eternal return of the same, which is for Nietzsche the most coherent expression of a philosophy of immanence.

But if this is the case then one would expect Zarathustra to begin the very first speech after his ten years’ solitude—namely, that delivered to the crowd in the marketplace in the town lying on the edge of the forest—with some such phrase as: “I teach you the eternal return.” Now, he does not do so but begins rather with the words: “*Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen,*” “I teach you the superman.” It is in fact only at the very end of the work that we learn that Zarathustra is in reality the teacher of the eternal return. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, it would appear, is a work that, if it is to be understood, must first be read through to its end and then taken up again from its beginning, with the reader being only the second time around equipped with the comprehension really needed from the start, of just what Zarathustra’s teaching truly is. A fine circular structure, then, particularly apt for a work which speaks of an eternal circle. But why is it that Nietzsche makes use of this literary structure in order to construct his work? What is the *philosophical* reason which explains his so proceeding? What is the relationship obtaining between the eternal return and the superman? Zarathustra replies that he cannot bear the thought of the eternal return without at the same time having some hope in a progress of humanity. Nietzsche sees, in his own era, a dystopia in the process of

coming into being. This is the dystopia of "the last man," or of a humanity composed of individuals who are such ingrained conformists that they really are all of an identical format, all exactly equal in every respect, like mutually replaceable cogs within one great social machine or, as Nietzsche also puts it, like "super-apes": "Man condemned to stand still, like the *super-ape*, image of the last man become eternal man."<sup>25</sup> Zarathustra cannot bear this image and above all cannot bear the thought of the eternal return of the last man: "Alas! [...] The small human beings recur eternally! [...] That was my surfeit of all existence!" (Za-III-Genesende-2). In the face of this dystopia Nietzsche responds with a utopia: the forming and educating of his disciples, every one of them different from every other, who will deny their own teacher, will go forth to the Blessed Isles (ever since More and Campanella, the site of the utopia has typically been the island), will form and educate in their turn certain chosen peoples in whose bosoms the true supermen will then arise, all different from one another: "We created the heaviest of all thoughts—now let us create the being for whom this thought is a light and happy one!"<sup>26</sup>

We might call this the social effect of the doctrine of eternal return, which implies a setting of mankind upon one possible path toward the superman. It is only once this path has been set out on—only once, that is to say, there have been formed the first communities of Zarathustra's master-denying disciples—that Zarathustra himself will finally find the courage to articulate and express the thought of the eternal return and that his animals will tell him that it is his destiny to be the teacher of just this doctrine. But to articulate and teach the eternal return does not necessarily imply being able to accept it for one's self, because side by side with this social aspect of the doctrine there also exists an individual aspect of the thought of eternal return. We will now focus on this aspect, which is the object of the discourse entitled *The Other Dance Song*.

#### **V. *Vita femina*: The New Meaning of the Eternal Return**

*The Other Dance Song* consists of three divisions. The first division stages Zarathustra's difficult relationship with life: that of someone who

is fundamentally inept at living. The keystone of the discourse is found in the second division and consists in what Zarathustra murmurs into the ear of life: namely, the new meaning of the doctrine of eternal return. It is this knowledge that allows Zarathustra to accept life, to love life, and to become its master all at once. This knowledge counterbalances the weight of his own ineptness for life and living. The discourse's third division, then, which consists in the "circle song" of Zarathustra's own making and gives its title to the discourse as a whole, makes this knowledge audible, explaining the mode of action of the eternal return on both a psychological and ontological level.

Zarathustra is the advocate of life. But life is a woman, as indeed is wisdom. These two women prove sometimes to resemble one another so closely that they cannot be distinguished, as in *The Dance Song* in the second part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. At other times, however, they are jealous of one another. The first division, as we have said, points up the maladroitness of Zarathustra's relations, up to this point, with the woman life who, like a sorceress, seduces him, misleads him and causes him to stumble and fall in his pursuit of her. This goes on until the moment when Zarathustra begins to crack the whip (which he has "not forgotten" to bring with him). This ushers in the discourse's second division, which begins with life saying to Zarathustra: "Oh Zarathustra! Please do not crack your whip so fearfully! Surely you know: noise murders thoughts—and just now the most tender thoughts are coming to me."

From this point on, the dialogue continues in a significantly altered tone:

Then life looked pensively behind her and around her and said softly: "Oh Zarathustra, you are not faithful enough for me!

You do not love me nearly as much as you say; I know that you are thinking of leaving me soon.

There is an old heavy, heavy growling bell; it growls at night all the way up to your cave.

When you hear this bell toll the hour at midnight, then

Paolo D'Iorio, "How Spake Zarathustra?"

you think between one and twelve about—

You think, oh Zarathustra, I know it, about how you will soon leave me!"

"Yes," I answered, hesitating. "But you also know..."—and I said something in her ear, right in it between her tangled, yellow, foolish, shaggy locks.

"You *know* that, oh Zarathustra? But no one knows that..."

How are we to interpret this text? In the first place, we need to recognize here yet another game of parody on Nietzsche's part. A glance cast at some of the books which we know for certain Nietzsche had read and re-read reveals the passage to be strongly intertextual. This image of the "sound of cracking whips murdering thoughts" clearly evokes, in fact, the figure of Arthur Schopenhauer:

I must denounce as the most inexcusable and scandalous noise the truly infernal cracking of whips in the narrow resounding streets of towns; for it robs life of all peace and pensiveness [...]. Hammering, the barking of dogs, and the screaming of children are terrible. But the real murderer of ideas is only the crack of a whip.<sup>27</sup>

But why is it that Nietzsche would feel the need to evoke Schopenhauer at just this moment in his philosophical narrative? Because, in certain famous passages of *The World As Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer had expressed himself in the most trenchant manner regarding the possibility of an individual's beginning his life over again once it had come to an end: "But perhaps at the end of his life, no man, if he be sincere and in possession of his faculties, will ever wish to go through it again. Rather than this, he will much prefer to choose complete non-existence." To those who needed still to be persuaded of this the philosopher recommended that they "knock on the graves and ask the dead whether they would like to rise again. They would shake their heads."<sup>28</sup>

Following Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann—the philosopher of pessimism who was a contemporary of Nietzsche's and very much the

beneficiary of a Europe-wide intellectual mode in both men's day—considered the repetition of the same to be an irrefutable test of the truth of pessimist teaching. In a key passage of his work *The Philosophy of the Unconscious* Hartmann imagines *death* asking a satisfied and well-to-do bourgeois if he would agree to live over again the life that he has lived:

Let us imagine death to draw nigh this man and say: "Thy life-period is run out and at this hour thou art on the brink of annihilation. But it depends on thy present voluntary decision, once again, precisely in the same way, to go through thy now-closed life, with complete oblivion of all that has passed. Now choose!" I question whether the man would prefer the repetition of the past performance to non-existence.<sup>29</sup>

Nietzsche took up this same image in his turn in the very first public formulation of the doctrine of the eternal return, namely, in aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*. This time, it is a *demon* that comes to a man, "stealing into his loneliest loneliness," and asks him if he would like to live his life over once again just as he has already lived it.

In *The Other Dance Song*, then, Nietzsche takes pleasure in parodying not just Schopenhauer and Hartmann but even himself—because this time it is not life, death, or a demon that rattles the eternal return like a terrible scarecrow in the face of a man who has lived a quite agreeable life. Rather, it is Zarathustra himself, in a condition of despair and close to suicide, who announces *to life herself* the doctrine of the eternal return. We see then, in fact, at work in this text every one of those three principles requisite for a proper reading, along with every one of the three main characteristics of the style of *Zarathustra* to which we have alluded above: namely, parody (and self-parody), condensation (or the commentary written before the text), and the specific temporality of the narrative (which distributes different speeches to the different characters of the drama and follows the process of maturation of the protagonist).

But what is it exactly that Zarathustra murmurs into the ear of life "between her tangled, yellow, foolish, shaggy locks"? He surely did not

browbeat her with a dissertation on the laws of thermodynamics or a lecture on the antinomies of cosmology, i.e., with the arguments that demonstrate the philosophical and scientific plausibility of the hypothesis of the eternal return of the same. In any case, these arguments were already very familiar to the entire educated culture of Nietzsche's epoch. This eternal return of the same was in fact one of the theories that fed and inspired the scientific debate of the day. Ludwig Boltzmann, for example, quite independently of Nietzsche, proposed this theory at the end of his famous lectures on the kinetic theory of gases.<sup>30</sup> It is not this, then, that Zarathustra has discovered. What Zarathustra murmurs in the ear of life is *the new meaning* that the eternal return has acquired for him. In fact, to the question posed by the demon in the penultimate aphorism of the original edition *The Gay Science*, side by side with the typical pessimist response ("Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus?"), had also evoked the possibility of a response consisting in a joyful acceptance of this endless return of the same: "Or have you once experienced an immense moment when you would have answered him: 'you are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine?'" (FW-341). *The Gay Science*, then, tells us precisely this: that Nietzsche did glimpse the possibility of an affirmative response being given to the demon's question.

And must we not now, then, conclude that it is indeed just such a response to the demon that Zarathustra murmurs softly into the ear of life?—The response, namely, that he really has himself experienced such an "immense moment" and that, through the love of this moment, all human things now have for him an immense worth and value, since all other events exist in a concatenation with this moment and will necessarily return again and again along with it. It is for this reason that he has been able to make life dance to the sound of his whip: the (gentle) whip of the eternal return. Now, indeed, he is ready to accept anything and everything that life may bring him because he knows that misfortune and unhappiness count among the causes of the eternal return of his happiness and that a single happiness suffices in order for one to love life and not only to put up with, but actively to want, all the unhappy rest of life as well.

Zarathustra declares himself to be both the teacher of the eternal return and the advocate of life. This is strange because the eternal return of the same is the strongest of the arguments traditionally used by pessimist philosophers in order to denigrate and devalue human existence on earth and turn their readers' attention rather toward the super-sensible, the immutable, the eternal. Nietzsche did not discover eternal return; he only discovered that this doctrine can be used not just in the service of a nihilistic devaluation of human existence but also in the service of its more vigorous affirmation. Even if he was already long since familiar with those cyclical theories of time which had been well established since antiquity, it was only in the course of the summer of 1881 in Sils-Maria that Nietzsche came to understand for the first time that the eternal return could even restore value to that which appeared ephemeral. After the revelation of this new meaning for the eternal return Nietzsche wrote in one of his notebooks, alluding to that recurrence of the motif that "there is nothing new under the sun," long since sounded in *Ecclesiastes* and in the writings of Marcus Aurelius: "This emperor reminds himself constantly of the ephemeral nature of all things so as to prevent himself from ascribing too much importance to them and to remain *calm*. Ephemerality has quite a different effect on me—it seems to me that all things are far too valuable for them to be allowed to be so ephemeral. Were they so, it would be, for me, as if the most precious wines and ointments were being thrown into the sea" (NF-1881,12[145]). And some years later, transcribing this fragment into another notebook, Nietzsche adds one further, highly revelatory phrase: "and my consolation is that everything which was, even once, is indeed eternal:—the sea always brings it back to the surface once again" (NF-1887,11[94]).

The initial title of *The Other Dance Song* was *Vita femina*, which is also the title of a magnificent aphorism of *The Gay Science* (FW-339) in which one reads that the beautiful things in life unveil themselves once and once only. And in fact, it is exactly this that Zarathustra whispers into the ear of life: that, for the first time, the beauty of the eternal return has revealed itself to him. When life learns this, there arises between her and

*Paolo D'Iorio, "How Spake Zarathustra?"*

Zarathustra a profound consonance of feeling: they weep together and very likely sing together the circle song of Zarathustra's which evokes the strokes of the old midnight bell:

One!  
O Man, attend!  
Two!  
What does deep midnight's voice contend?  
Three!  
"I slept my sleep,  
Four!  
And now awake at dreaming's end:  
Five!  
The world is deep,  
Six!  
Deeper than day can comprehend.  
Seven!  
Deep is its woe,  
Eight!  
Joy—deeper than heart's agony:  
Nine!  
Woe says: Fade! Go!  
Ten!  
But all joy wants eternity,  
Eleven!  
—Wants deep, deep, deep eternity!"  
Twelve!<sup>31</sup>

## **VI. The Bell of Nihilism**

The old growling midnight bell is, for Nietzsche, an image of nihilism at its most extreme point, an image of human existence emptied of all its value.<sup>32</sup> It is an image, in fact, that bears within it a very important biographical element that stretches very far back in the author's life—right back, indeed, to his childhood.



In the poetry and in the autobiographical writings that Nietzsche produced already in his early youth we find numerous testimonies to the deep impression that was always made on him—in this regard he was still very much the son of the pastor of the little village of Röcken—by the bells that marked the passing hours of the day and accompanied all religious offices (“As a plant I was born next to the cemetery, as a human being in a presbytery.”<sup>33</sup> In a text from 1858, Nietzsche, then aged fourteen, describes the happy period of his very early childhood in Röcken, using the church bells and the belltower that housed them as the visual and aural representations of this happiness, both of them associated with the image of his father and of his father’s important role in this small village community. All of this holds true, however, only up to the moment when, at the age of five, the boy Nietzsche hears these same bells ringing to accompany his father’s mortal remains to his grave. From this point on, this sound, which had formerly represented for him the happiness of childhood, home and family, was going to be associated with the horror of death.<sup>34</sup>

This experience from very early in Nietzsche’s life then becomes ever more filtered and mediated through a whole series of literary reminiscences. The dead bell, as every German schoolboy knows, is prominent among the many fates and functions of the eponymous artefact that Schiller treats of in his famous poem *The Song of the Bell*: “From the ponderous and fearful cathedral/ The bell sounds its funeral knell/ Earnestly its strokes accompany/ A wanderer to his journey’s end.”<sup>35</sup> And Goethe, in his *Epilogue to Schiller’s “Song of the Bell,”* takes up this same motif in order to recall the death of his friend, the poem’s author: “But there I hear a terrible toll at midnight/ Which thickly and heavily swells a song of mourning/ Can it be so? Is this really for our friend?”<sup>36</sup> In his *Letters on French Theater* Heinrich Heine had also made use of the sound of the bell as an acoustic image of death: “In autumn the sound of the bell is much graver, more terrible. One thinks one is hearing the voice of a ghost. Especially when someone is being buried the tolling of the bells displays a reverberation of the most inexpressible melancholy. At each

single peal some sickly yellow leaves fall from the tree—and this leaf-fall accompanied by bell-toll, this sonorous allegory of death itself, filled me, when I heard it, with so overwhelming a sadness that I began to cry like a child.”<sup>37</sup> The allusion to the graveness or seriousness of the sound of the bells was present also in those verses of Schiller’s that we have cited above, and it recurs, indeed, in the concluding strophes of this great poem in which the bell, from the height of the cathedral belfry, recalls the vanity of earthly things in contrast with the earnestness and eternity of the things belonging to heaven: “And as the sound fades in the ear/ In which it had rung, just now, so mightily/ So may we learn from the bell the lesson/ That nothing earthly stands, that all must pass away” (v.403 sq.). In these illustrious examples Nietzsche finds a common vocabulary and literary *topos* that allow him to express in a way more general and shareable with others an experience that was, at its origin, limited to the individual sphere alone.

In aphorism 628 of *Human, All Too Human*, which describes the sound of bells heard at evening in Genoa, Nietzsche makes use of certain terms that play the role of intertextual references to the texts of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine and also links these terms to Plato’s words that “human affairs are unworthy of earnest effort.”<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche thus seals, in this aphorism, the literary *topos* of the bells to the philosophical theme of existence’s lack of value and creates thereby a symbolic image to which he attributes a precise philosophical meaning: the bell as extreme symbol of pessimism, nihilism, and Christianity. In its draft versions, this aphorism evoking the bells of Genoa also contains a clear evocation of the thought of suicide: “The desire for death [*Sehnsucht nach dem Tode*]—like the seasick man who, looking out in the early hours of the morning at the lights of the harbor, has a desire for land.” This reference was not published in *Human, All Too Human* but, as we have seen, it re-emerges again some years later in *The Other Dance Song*.<sup>39</sup>

These considerations provide the occasion for drawing attention to yet another characteristic of the style of *Zarathustra* and indeed of Nietzsche’s philosophical writing in general: namely, the practice of an

external intertextuality, involving subtle references to the work of other authors, along with an internal intertextuality consisting of auto-references to other works of Nietzsche, both constantly accompanied by a great coherence and consistency in the use of terms and images. This is in fact a stylistic characteristic that Nietzsche shares with many great writers, as was well explained by Jean-Paul Sartre:

The work of style such as I understand it necessarily supposes a concern with *writing per se*. Many young people today have no concern for style at all and are of the view that, if one has something to say, one should simply say it and that is that. For me, however, style—which is by no means something that excludes simplicity; on the contrary—is above all a way of saying three or four things even in saying one. There is, first of all, the simple sentence, with its instantly and directly evident meaning. And then, underneath it, at the same time, there are other, different meanings or senses, arranged in different degrees of depth. If one is unable to make language yield up this plurality of senses and meanings, then there is no point in writing at all.<sup>40</sup>

Sartre, indeed, maintains here that this superposition of different strata of meaning and of intertextual references is a characteristic of *literary* style, i.e., of the novel, and not of philosophical writing: “In philosophy, each phrase must have only one single meaning.”<sup>41</sup> Now, Nietzsche is at once a great philosopher and a great writer, who uses the techniques of literary style in order to enrich with still more meaning his philosophical text. His writing is always clear and comprehensible, even at a first level of reading. But with a little time and patience the reader can discover the great richness of intertextual references; the allusions, in one passage, to other passages in the same or in some other work of Nietzsche’s; the “echo effects” that result from the positioning of the texts. It is also in this sense that Nietzsche’s writing is conceived “for all and for none.” It must be firmly grasped that we do not have to do here with any sort of mystical

dichotomy whereby a certain class of *illuminati* would understand everything and other readers nothing at all. Rather, Nietzsche's phrase "for all and none" evokes a whole series of intermediate degrees of comprehension corresponding to different degrees of erudition. "All" indeed experience the sheer pleasure of reading Nietzsche's texts. Above and beyond this, however, literary critics, as well as certain well-informed "lay" readers, will pick up the philosophical and intertextual references; structuralists will discover the games of symmetry and correspondence; biographers and psychoanalysts will perhaps add elements drawn from Nietzsche's private and intimate life; and philologists, especially "genetic" philologists, compelled by the obligation to exhaustiveness imposed especially by this latter approach, will need to take on the burden of trying to take into account, in their interpretations, all these elements together, even while knowing that no one could ever really be in a position to be able to grasp all the implications of any given text in its relations to the entirety of other texts.

## VII. An Immense Moment

Why is joy deeper than pain? This is explained in the penultimate discourse of the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, *The Sleepwalker Song*, which can in this sense be said to be a pendant to *The Other Dance Song*, which is the penultimate discourse of the book's third part. In this discourse too there resound the strokes of the old midnight bell. After the Ass Festival, "something happened that was the most amazing thing of that amazing long day." The ugliest man—one of those higher men to whom the fourth part of *Zarathustra* is devoted—reveals that he has learned to love life and that he desires the eternal return of the life that he has lived. As we have said above, the principal aim of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is to proclaim the thought of the eternal return. But this proclamation is effected in several stages, arranged according to a precise rhetorical progression. The fact that there is progression here should not at all be taken to indicate a change in the content of the doctrine,<sup>42</sup> but rather expresses a change of mind in the protagonist and in his interlocutors. The thought of eternal return causes

Zarathustra slowly to mature, and his maturation occurs specifically through his confrontation with different ways of perceiving the circular temporality here in question, which in turn correspond to different levels of the sense of history. The more developed a being's sense of history is, the more difficult it is for him to accept the eternal return. Zarathustra's animals, for example, have no fear of the eternal return for the simple reason that they possess no historical memory. The ugliest man, by contrast, is the very personification of the sense of history: he is thoroughly familiar with all the pain and all the absurdity of human history and is aware of how difficult it is to bear even the thought of the repetition of this long succession of massacres and disappointed hopes.<sup>43</sup> However, after having encountered Zarathustra, the ugliest man declares:

For the sake of this day – *I* am satisfied for the first time  
that I have lived my whole life.

And it's still not enough for me to attest as much as I do.

It's worth it to live on earth. One day, one festival, with  
Zarathustra taught me to love the earth.

“Was *that* life?” I want to say to death. “Very well then!

One more time!”

Just at this moment the old bell begins once again to sound midnight and Zarathustra accompanies the twelve strokes by reciting once again the verses of his circle song, this time expanded with remarks which provide a broader commentary on these pithy strophes. In these commentaries to the song of the bell Zarathustra tries to explain how this strongest symbol of nihilism can indeed be transformed into an affirmation of existence. The discourse entitled *The Sleepwalker Song* is composed of twelve paragraphs. The sixth paragraph forms the keystone of the whole construction. Here, the words and images used begin, almost imperceptibly, to take on a tone and color of sweetness and felicity. We cannot, here, analyze this whole transformation in detail but we can at least note how the old midnight bell is transformed. Nietzsche writes that a happiness from past times, a single instant of profound beatitude, can redeem and make good all pain and that pain and felicity, *Glocke* and *Glücke*, are intimately bound together. To

indicate this bond between the two notions Nietzsche coins the term *Sterbeglücke*, happiness in death, a transformation of *Sterbeglocke*, the death-bell.<sup>44</sup> The bell of pain now expresses a felicity stronger than death, to the sound of the sweet lyre of Zarathustra's circle song.

The draft version of the ninth paragraph of the *Sleepwalker Song* reveals to us, in fact, the extent to which a certain reminiscence or recollection of the Genoan epiphany recorded in *Human, All Too Human* continues to be present in this text composed several years later on. In this draft version, as a commentary to that strophe of the circle song that runs (in the English translation we have given above) "Woe says: Fade! Go!" Nietzsche had written that "woe is desirous of death" [*sehnsüchtig nach dem Tode*], thus taking up once again the title of the Genoan aphorism on the theme of suicide [*Sehnsucht nach dem Tod*].<sup>45</sup> Finally, in the tenth paragraph a more explicit formulation is given to the ugliest man's process of reasoning: one that takes up again, and transforms, the Faustian sense of the moment. In the first part of *Faust* Goethe had written:

If ever I say to a single moment:  
"Linger! Thou art so fair!"  
Then may I be put in chains,  
Then will I die willingly,  
Then may the death-bell for me toll.<sup>46</sup>

It is to be noted that already in Goethe's lines mention is made of a *Totenglocke*, a death-bell. In his commentary on the tenth stroke of the bell of nihilism, Zarathustra responds to Faust with these words:

Have you ever said yes to one joy? Oh my friends, then you also said yes to *all* pain. All things are enchained, entwined, enamored.

—If you ever wanted one time to be two times, if you ever said: "You please me, moment of happiness! Hurry back, oh happy moment!" then you wished *everything* to come back!

—Everything all over again, everything forever, everything linked together, entangled together,

everything enamored of everything else—oh, so and so much did you *love* the world!

—You eternal ones, love it eternally and forever; and say to pain too: “Pass away but return!” *Because all joy wants eternity!*<sup>47</sup>

Faust was looking for a moment that would be such that one would be able to say to it: “Linger! Thou art so fair!” Zarathustra, for his part, awaits a type of man who will be able to say to *every* moment: “Pass away, but return again exactly as you are, for all eternity.” The drafts reveal to us that this same mechanism applied also to Nietzsche himself who, in the midst of the fragments that were to be assembled to form *Zarathustra*, scribbled down, in one of his notebooks, also the remark: “I do not want my life to *come again*. How did I ever bear it? Through creating. What brings it about that I can stand to look at it? My being able to look forward to the superman, who *affirms* life. I tried to affirm it *myself*—alas!” And a little later, on another page, Nietzsche responds to himself in the following terms: “Immortal is the moment in which I begot the return. It is because of this moment that I can *bear* the return.”<sup>48</sup>

The man of knowledge that Nietzsche was reached the summit of his life at the moment when he acquired the knowledge that he considered to be the most important of all. When, at the end of his life, he became aware of having reached this summit, he no longer had need of any double in order to affirm that life that always returns again and, in the very last lines published by him at the end of *Twilight of the Idols*, he writes: “I, the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus—I, the teacher of the eternal return...” (GD-Alten-5).

### **VIII. Glory and Eternity**

In conclusion, we would like to go back and consider once again the new meaning of eternal return that emerges, even if only by implication, at the end of the third part of *Zarathustra* in *The Other Dance Song*. This is probably the most important of all the messages that Nietzsche wanted to convey with his style, which is at once parodic, condensed, and

dramatic, constructed via multiple levels, woven through with intertextual references and subtle allusions to Nietzsche's own other writings, but profoundly coherent both in the architecture of the work and in the various use of terms and images. We find this message once again, in fact, in the very last work authorized for publication by Nietzsche, the *Dionysian Dithyramb*s, and most particularly in the dithyramb *Glory and Eternity*.

All the tradition of the ancient world believed that immortality was acquired through glory. For the ancients, even those who lived only thirty years (like Alexander the Great), and who would be sung of by the poets and remembered for centuries to come, had lived more than any centenarian whose name would die along with him. Christianity, for its part, assures us of an eternal life not through glory but in the world beyond. But in both cases, no less in that of pagan glory than in that of Christian paradise, real life is sacrificed to one or another life after death. But life after death is not *our* life: it is *no longer* our life; we ourselves are no longer there. The eternal return, by contrast, attributes the highest value to *this* life, to *our* life, the sole and only life, which here returns again and again, forever.

One of the consequences of the doctrine of eternal return is that not only the notion of the life beyond but also that of glory both tend to lose their value. This is the substance of the dithyramb entitled *Glory and Eternity*. And it is also the deep philosophical reason why it is by the *Dionysian Dithyramb*s, not by the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, that the Zarathustrian cycle of Nietzsche's work is completed: namely, by bringing about a shift of emphasis from the expectation of the superman to the assimilation of the eternal return. The fourth part of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's first attempt to conclude the Zarathustrian cycle of his works, was a text that sought to influence its own era. It hoped to do so by making clear that, whereas this era's higher men were no supermen, Zarathustra continued nonetheless, up in his high mountain retreat, to await the arrival of his spiritual children and thereby, eventually, the advent of the superman after all. But in the *Dithyramb*s, by contrast, Zarathustra no longer awaits anything. Perhaps he has lost hope; perhaps he is here less a



poet in the sense of a maker than in the sense of a contemplator. In any case, he now expects and awaits no more than that human beings come to understand all the beauty of the eternal return, this beauty that no one has hitherto even perceived. Thus concludes Zarathustra's message that the *vita femina* revealed to him once before and that no one up to this point had ever seen or known:

*You* come to me?—  
What no one has yet seen  
Your mute beauty,—  
What? It does not flee from my gaze?

Shield of necessity!  
Table of eternal sculptural images!<sup>49</sup>  
—But you know well:  
What everyone hates,  
What *I* alone love:  
That you are indeed *eternal!*  
That you are *necessary!*  
The flame of my love ignites  
Eternally only at necessity.<sup>50</sup>

As Giuliano Campioni has shown, the term “higher man” used in the fourth part of *Zarathustra* is of French origin and takes its place in the debate about the culture of *décadence* that was going on in France and throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Today, Nietzsche certainly enjoys more fame and “glory” than do the most famous and glorious figures among his contemporaries, such as Taine, Renan, Bourget, or the Goncourt brothers, who in their day played a much more prominent role in this debate. Even at the time, the philosopher must have seen that these higher men of his era stood in deepest need of him and that his work was going, very soon, to become more celebrated than theirs. But at the end of his conscious life Nietzsche was no longer interested in celebrity or in glorious renown. This is why we began by speaking of the bibliographical and philological relationship between the fourth part of *Zarathustra* and the *Dithyrambs*.

Now we can also see the philosophical meaning of this relationship. In completing his *Dithyrambs* in the first days of January 1889, Nietzsche relinquishes all aspiration to future glory because he knows that he already has, as do we all, eternity.

*Ecole Normale Paris*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Kein Bild, kein Wort, auch kein Interpunktionszeichen ist bei Nietzsche zufällig," Mazzino Montinari, *Nietzsche Lesen* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1980), 4.

<sup>2</sup> "Mein 'Zarathustra' ist fertig geworden, in seinen drei Akten" ["My 'Zarathustra' is now finished, in all its three acts"] BVN-1884,490; see also BVN-1884,479; BVN-1884,490; BVN-1884,498. Nietzsche's texts are referred to here in the digital version of the Colli/Montinari critical edition: F. Nietzsche: *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe* (eKGWB), directed by Paolo D'Iorio, Paris, Nietzsche Source, 2009–, [www.nietzchesource.org/eKGWB](http://www.nietzchesource.org/eKGWB); in order to consult the texts referred to, one need only add the abbreviations used in the present essay to the online address of this digital edition, e.g., [www.nietzchesource.org/eKGWB/BVN-1884,490](http://www.nietzchesource.org/eKGWB/BVN-1884,490).

<sup>3</sup> See the critical apparatus to the sixth section of the Colli/Montinari edition (F. Nietzsche, *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGW), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967–), Vol. VI/4, 951–57; and William H. Schaberg, *Nietzsches Werke. Eine Publikationsgeschichte und kommentierte Bibliographie* (Basel: Schwabe, 2002), 123–51, 286–89, 292.

<sup>4</sup> "Für meine Freunde und nicht für die Öffentlichkeit." A facsimile reproduction of this print-ready manuscript of the fourth part of *Zarathustra* is published in F. Nietzsche: *Digitale Faksimile-Gesamtausgabe*, ed. P. D'Iorio, *Nietzsche Source* (Paris, 2009–, [www.nietzchesource.org/DFGA](http://www.nietzchesource.org/DFGA)); the *verso* of the frontispiece is to be found at the address: D-17,2.

<sup>5</sup> From a letter written by Gast to Overbeck dated 4 April 1891 we know that at this time, six years after their printing, Gast still had in his possession

there in Venice these thirty-five copies of Part Four, all trace of which was later lost. See Franz Overbeck, *Heinrich Köselitz. Briefwechsel*, ed. David Marc Hoffmann, Niklaus Peter, and Theo Salfinger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 328.

<sup>6</sup> “Meinem verehrten lieben Freunde Franz Overbeck mit der Bitte um Geheimhaltung dieses *ineditum*—und vielen anderen Bitten—.” This copy, given as a gift to Overbeck, is today preserved in Sils-Maria. A facsimile of the page bearing the cited dedication is to be found in F. Nietzsche, *Handschriften, Erstausgaben und Widmungsexemplare. Die Sammlung Rosenthal-Levy im Nietzsche-Haus in Sils Maria*, ed. Julia Rosenthal, Peter André Bloch, and David Marc Hoffmann (Basel: Schwabe, 2009), 255.

<sup>7</sup> “Der vierte und letzte Theil des genannten Werkes, aus dem Anfange des Jahres 1885, wurde bisher dem Buchhandel noch nicht übergeben.” This letter of 14 March to Gast can be found at BVN-1885,580.

<sup>8</sup> See KGW VI/4, 955-57; KSA 4, 7; KSA 14, 281-82; eKGWB/Za-IV. See also P. D’Iorio, “The Digital Critical Edition of the Works and Letters of Nietzsche,” *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 40 (2010), 75.

<sup>9</sup> “Nietzsches Zarathustra-Werk besteht aus den drei Büchern von *Also sprach Zarathustra* und den neun Gedichten der *Dionysos-Dithyramben*,” in *Friedrich Nietzsche. “Dionysos-Dithyramben,”* ed. Wolfram Groddeck (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1991, Vol. 1, p. LVI.

<sup>10</sup> See, in this regard, the facsimile published at DFGA/Z-II-3,76 as well as the Editors’ Notes in KGW VI/4, pp. 514 and 968 and in KSA, 14, p. 323; see also NF-1883,17[69] et NF-1883,21[6]. Considered in relation to the main orientation of Zarathustra’s message, which is one toward humanity’s near or distant future, Part Four presents itself rather as a direct confrontation with the culture of Nietzsche’s present day, above all with the main figures of French culture in this period, which Nietzsche looked upon as that of Europe’s *décadence* (Taine, Renan, Bourget, Brunetière, the Goncourt brothers...). As Giuliano Campioni has very rightly observed with reference to Paul Bourget *Essais*: “The fourth part of *Zarathustra* might be read, given these conditions, as Nietzsche’s *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*.” G. Campioni, *Les lectures françaises de Nietzsche* (Paris: PUF, 2001), 260.

<sup>11</sup> See the facsimile of the manuscript at DFGA/M-III-1,3 and its transcription at NF-1881,11[195] as well as the published texts of *The Gay Science* at FW-342 and of the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* at Za-I-Vorrede-1.

<sup>12</sup> See Friedrich Anton von Hellwald: *Culturgeschichte in ihrer natürlichen Entwicklung bis zur Gegenwart* (Augsburg: Lampart & Comp, 1875), 128-29. See also in this connection P. D'Iorio, *Beiträge zur Quellenforschung*, in *Nietzsche-Studien* 22 (1993), 395-402; and Friedrich Anton von Hellwald, "Genèse, parodie et modernité dans *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*," in *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, ed. Gilbert Merlio (Paris: Éditions du Temps, 2000), 25-43.

<sup>13</sup> "Zarathustra, der grosse Prophet der Erânier, gewöhnlich nach der von den Griechen überlieferten Form Zoroaster (Ζωροάστρηρ) genannt, dessen Name in Zend übrigens eine schmucklose Bedeutung besitzt, stammte aus Azerbeidschan und war geboren in der Stadt Urmi am gleichnamigen See zwischen Kaspi- und Van-See. Im dreissigsten Lebensjahre verliess er die Heimat, zog östlich in die Provinz Aria und verbrachte dort zehn Jahre in der Einsamkeit des Gebirges mit der Abfassung des Zend-Avesta beschäftigt," Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte*, 128.

<sup>14</sup> "Die Religion des Zarathustra ist ein einfacher Deismus, indem sie nur Einen Gott, den Schöpfer, Regierer und Erhalter der Welt erkennt, welcher ohne Gestalt und unsichtbar ist. Diese Urgottheit (*Zaruana akarana*) vereinigte doppelseitig in sich einen weissen oder heiligen und einen dunkeln oder finsternen Geist. [...] Die Lichtseite und die Nachtseite des göttlichen Willens trennten sich ab als doppelte Wesen: Ormuzd und Ahriman. Die Herren des Lichts und der Finsterniss streiten sich seitdem um den Sieg, der übrigens von Anbeginn entschieden ist. So begegnen wir bei den alten Erâniern zum ersten Male dem Wahngelbde von einer *sittlichen Weltordnung*, eine Vorstellung, zu welcher nur höher gestiegene Völker gelangen und deren Einfluss auf die Culturentfaltung von unberechenbarem Werthe ist," Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte*, 129.

<sup>15</sup> "Wahrheit ist die Grundlage jeder Trefflichkeit, Unwahrheit dagegen eine der strafbarsten Sünden. [...] Wie schon erwähnt, ging es den Erânier über

Alles die Wahrheit zu sprechen. [...] Wohlانständigkeit im Reden, Wahrheitsliebe und Rechtlichkeit mit strengem Worthalten seien hervorstechende Züge des persischen Nationalcharakters gewesen,” Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte*, 129.

<sup>16</sup> “Zarathustra fand natürlich viele Gegner, namentlich in den Priestern der alten Religion,” Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte*, 128.

<sup>17</sup> “Daran schloss sich die Lehre von der Auferweckung der Todten, ebenfalls ein echt zoroastrischer Glaubenssatz,” “Zoroaster lehrt die Unsterblichkeit der Seele,” Hellwald, *Culturgeschichte*, 129-30.

<sup>18</sup> See Za-I-Tugend-2 and Za-IV-Menschen-17.

<sup>19</sup> See FW-342 and FW-Vorrede-1.

<sup>20</sup> See NF-1886,7[54], FW-382, EH-ZA-2.

<sup>21</sup> See Za-I-Lesen and also Za-IV-Eselsfest-1.

<sup>22</sup> FW-Vorspiel-7. The English translation given here is Walter Kaufmann’s.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche gives expression once again to the same idea at the beginning of May 1884 in a letter to Resa von Schirnhöfer. See BVN-1883,404; BVN-1884,504; BVN-1884,510. In certain cases the thematic affinity between the text of *Zarathustra* and that of the immediately preceding works comes strikingly to light in the draft manuscripts. Such is the case, for example, of the notebook bearing the designation ZI3, containing some two hundred aphorisms drawn from *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak*, and *The Gay Science*, which Nietzsche put to new use in *Zarathustra*, turning them into pronouncements of the Persian sage (see DFGA/Z-I-3 and NF-1883,12).

<sup>24</sup> “Denn deine Thiere wissen es wohl, oh Zarathustra, wer du bist und werden musst: siehe, *du bist der Lehrer der ewigen Wiederkunft* –, das ist nun *dein Schicksal*”, Za-III-Genesende-2.

<sup>25</sup> “Der Mensch bestimmt stehen zu bleiben, als der *Überaffe*, Bild des letzten Menschen, der der ewige ist,” NF-1882,4[163].

<sup>26</sup> “Wir schufen den schwersten Gedanken—nun laßt uns das Wesen schaffen, dem er leicht und selig ist!” NF-1883,21[6].

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, II, chap. XXX “On Din and Noise.” I have already analyzed this particular intertextual game in

detail elsewhere, namely in P. D'Iorio, "Nietzsche et l'éternel retour. Genèse et interprétation," in *Nietzsche. Cahiers de l'Herne* (Paris: l'Herne, 2000, 361-39).

<sup>28</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), Vol. I, 324, §59, and Vol. II, Ch. XLI, 465.

<sup>29</sup> Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, Trench, Tubner and Co. Ltd. 1931), Vol. 3, 4-5.

<sup>30</sup> See on this subject P. D'Iorio, *Nietzsche et l'éternel retour*, cit., (n. 20) et P. D'Iorio, "Le temps cyclique chez Nietzsche et Boltzmann," in *Les historicités de Nietzsche*, ed. Bertrand Binoche and Arnaud Sorosina, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2016), 127-46.

<sup>31</sup> Za-III-Tanzlied-3. As Peter André Bloch has remarked, the poetic meter of this circle song of Zarathustra's is constructed in such a way as to imitate the sound of bells. Moreover, we find in Nietzsche's own unpublished drafts the remark that Zarathustra "liked to count off, and sing along in rhymes to, the striking of the midnight bell," NF-1884,31[64]. (It is to be regretted that Mahler did not take account of this fact when he set this text to music in his *Third Symphony*); see Peter André Bloch, "'Aus meinem Leben.' Der selbstporträtcharakter von Nietzsches frühen Lebensbeschreibungen: Selbstdialog als Selbstbefragung," in *Nietzscheforschung* 2 (1995), 70, note.

<sup>32</sup> See P. D'Iorio, *Nietzsche's Journey to Sorrento. Genesis of the Philosophy of the Free Spirit* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), Chapter V, "The Bells of Genoa and Nietzschean Epiphany."

<sup>33</sup> Posthumous fragment 15[41] 1863, KGW I/3, S.190.

<sup>34</sup> Posthumous fragment 4[77] 1858, KGW I/1, S.286.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Das Lied von der Glocke* (1800), v. 244 sq.: "Von dem Dome/Schwer und bang/ Tönt die Glocke/Grabgesang/Ernst begleiten ihre Trauerschläge/Einen Wanderer auf dem letzten Wege," in which the three vowels "o," "e," and "a" alternate with one another, imitating the poignant sound of the funeral knell itself. Nietzsche was familiar with this famous poem of Schiller's, if not earlier, then at least from the year 1859 of the celebrations of the centenary of the poet's birth at Schulpforta on—celebrations in which we know he participated as a member of the chorus in

the rehearsals for the cantata version of the poem with music by Andreas Romberg; see the posthumous fragment 7[3] 1859 (KGW I/3, 175) and the letter to his mother written in mid-November 1859, BVN-1859,114. Paul Deussen recalls that he used himself to recite Schiller's *Lied von der Glocke* at Schulpforta while Nietzsche improvised a piano accompaniment, (Paul Deussen, *Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche* [Leipzig: Brockhaus, 190], 8).

<sup>36</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Epilog zu Schillers Glocke* (1805), v.9sq. Goethe's *Epilogue* naturally also formed part of the centenary celebrations in honor of Schiller. Nietzsche, moreover, was to cite this poem in the posthumous publication *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, §I and IV (BA-I and IV), in the first of the *Untimely Meditations*, §4 (DS-4), and in an unpublished note of 1879: "I have to cry when I read Goethe's lines about Schiller: 'And behind him, in a seeming without being...' etc. Why is this?" NF-1879,41[68].

<sup>37</sup> Heinrich Heine, *Über die französische Bühne. Vertraute Briefe an August Lewald*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe), Vol. I, 133. Nietzsche cites this work in a letter to Rohde dated 8 October 1868, BVN-1868,591.

<sup>38</sup> See Plato, *The Laws*, 803b-d, in Plato, *Dialogi Secundum Thrasylli tetralogias dispositi*, Vol. V, Lipsiæ, Teubneri, 1862, 218 (edition used by Nietzsche).

<sup>39</sup> See notebook NII2, 4, facsimile at DFGA/N-II-2,4; the transcription is to be found at KGW IV/4, 451. A more developed version of this passage is to be found in notebook DFGA/Mp-XIV-1,222 transcribed at eKGWB/NF-1877,23[188].

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, "Self-Portrait at Seventy: An Interview with Michel Contat," published in English in the 7 August 1975 issue of the *New York Review of Books* and in French in *Situations X* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 137.

<sup>41</sup> Sartre, 137-38.

<sup>42</sup> Contrary to that which is claimed by Gilles Deleuze, "Conclusions. Sur la volonté de puissance et l'éternel retour," in *Nietzsche. Actes du colloque de Royaumont du 4 au 8 juillet 1964*, ed. G. Deleuze (Paris: Les éditions de Minuit, 1967), 284.

<sup>43</sup> The fact that the ugliest human being represents the historical sense (as well as being the murderer of God) is attested to by the draft manuscripts of Part Four of *Zarathustra*: NF-1884,25[101], 31[10], 32[4].

<sup>44</sup> Za-IV-Nachtwandler-6. It should be emphasized that in the draft manuscript for Part Four of *Zarathustra* Nietzsche had initially written *von trunkenem Mitternachts-Sterbe-Glück* before finally, in the version given to the printer, deciding to remove the hyphen between *Sterbe* and *Glück* and to add to the latter term the "e" of the dative (*von trunkenem Mitternachts-Sterbeglücke*), justified by the preceding *von*, in order to create, for this composite term, a closer assonance and analogy with *Sterbeglocke* (see notebook ZII9, 12, facsimile DFGA/Z-II-9,12, transcription at KGW VI/4, 791, and the manuscript for printer: D-17,124).

<sup>45</sup> See notebook Z-II-9,26 transcribed in KGW VI/4, 793.

<sup>46</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Faust*, "Faust's Study" scene, v.1698sq.

<sup>47</sup> Za-IV-Nachtwandler-1.

<sup>48</sup> NF-1882,4[81] and NF-1882,5[1] n205.

<sup>49</sup> "Schild der Nothwendigkeit! / Ewiger Bildwerke Tafel": these images too refer back to the doctrine of eternal return, as is made clear by the fragment NF-1883,15[3]: "Wenn nur Ein Augenblick der Welt wiederkehrte,—sagte der Blitz—so müßten alle wiederkehren. Absolute Nothwendigkeit als Schild mit Bildwerken geschaut!" ["If only a single moment of the world returned, said the lightning, then everything would have to return. Absolute necessity looked on as a shield sculpted with images."]

<sup>50</sup> DD-Ewigkeit-4.

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