

## **Nihilism Now and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra***

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the current relevance of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in terms of its potential as a counter-movement to nihilism 'now.' Nietzsche's idea of nihilism is an indispensable philosophical contribution, but one which needs to be considered critically in light of recent developments. Philosophers such as Gianni Vattimo have proposed heterodox readings of Nietzsche in order to "update" his work on nihilism, while others, such as Jean-François Lyotard, have turned away from him entirely in favour of other thinkers and writers believed to maintain more relevance for the contemporary context. What such philosophers reject as outmoded in Nietzsche's thought is the apparent attempt to replace the position vacated by God with something thought still too closely to resemble God (whether a new myth, religion, or metaphysics). If any of Nietzsche's works would seem to be so outmoded, surely it would be *Zarathustra*, with its evangelical style and its apparent ambition to create a new mythology.

Against this tendency, this paper seeks to delineate how this great and mysterious work continues to have relevance for the problem of nihilism today. In order to explain why the apparently archaic symbolism of *Zarathustra* remains relevant, I draw on a speculative naturalist (as defined by Brian Leiter) interpretation of Jungian analytical psychology, according to which our drives to interpret the world as meaningful are deeply rooted, inherited traits disposed towards forms of life meaningful in hunter-gatherer societies. These drives are effectuated through symbols derived from the natural world. Nihilism on this view is not only the result of a breakdown of cultural structures of meaning with a roughly two-and-a-half-thousand year history, but of a radical disconnect between far more "primitive" drives for meaning and contemporary values and lifestyles. From this perspective, *Zarathustra* can be seen as engaging archetypes through the plethora of symbols it deploys, as studied by Jung in his *Zarathustra* seminars in the 1930s. Various recent interpreters (such as Patricia Dickson and Lucy Huskinson) have followed Jung in proposing that Nietzsche tried to overcome nihilism through a redeployment of archetypal symbols towards a holistic integration of opposites in the Self. Yet this interpretation seems to accent what remains a fundamentally religious experience, and thus what Lyotard, Vattimo and others have seen as outdated in *Zarathustra*. I propose an alternative inflection of the Jungian reading which follows the many interpreters who have emphasised the *parodic* nature of *Zarathustra*: while the text engages the reader at a deep, archetypal level, its parodic function works to subvert the well-worn paths of our drives to meaning towards sacred transcendence, and deflects them towards investing a Godless existence without meaning or goal.

### **Exitless nothingness**

Despite several weighty academic studies, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* remains the most mysterious and unsettling of Nietzsche's books. Robert B. Pippin notes that there is "nothing close to a standard reading of the work's intention, form, development, resolution, or lack of resolution,"

and locates the crux of the problem of interpretation in the difficulty of identifying its genre.<sup>1</sup> As K. T. Seung puts it, “[w]e cannot even be sure what kind of book it is supposed to be.”<sup>2</sup> I wish to propose another approach to this enigmatic work. I am not concerned here with a historicist or close textual interpretation (which have already been undertaken by others), but rather with the living, existential problem of what value this strange and fascinating text might have for us in understanding and responding to nihilism as we confront it today.

‘Nihilism’ is a philosophical term and concept, established in the philosophical tradition as a way of talking about a crisis concerning existential meaninglessness, which is often voiced in other ways in the broader cultural context. This concept of course finds its classical expression in the works of Nietzsche, which remain indispensable for a philosophical engagement with the problem. Yet on Nietzsche’s own analysis nihilism is subject to historical process, and so his nineteenth-century understanding of the issue needs constantly to be reconsidered in the light of current philosophical and cultural developments. Over the last several decades some prominent philosophers who have been concerned with nihilism have considered it necessary either significantly to revise Nietzsche’s concept, or to abandon Nietzsche entirely in favour of alternative thinkers who have also dealt with nihilism.

An example of the first kind is Gianni Vattimo. While continuing to insist that what he is doing is interpreting Nietzsche, Vattimo has developed a heterodox reading (in dialogue with other thinkers, most importantly Heidegger) whereby nihilism has a *positive* form, and is seen as a

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<sup>1</sup> Pippin, Robert B. “Irony and Affirmation in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*” in *Nietzsche’s New Seas*, ed. by Michael Allen Gillespie and Tracy B. Strong, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 45-7.

<sup>2</sup> Seung, K.T. *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. New York: Lexington, 2005, p. ix.

‘solution’ to the various problems glossed under the heading of ‘metaphysics.’<sup>3</sup> As an example of the second kind, Jean-François Lyotard sees figures such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Spengler as tarred with the brush of romantic nostalgia, indulging a fantasy of lost meaning. Rejecting them, Lyotard formulates an alternative canon of writers on nihilism, including figures such as Paul Valéry, André Malraux, and Theodor W. Adorno.<sup>4</sup> Despite the specific differences of their views, what philosophers such as Vattimo and Lyotard agree is outmoded in Nietzsche’s thought is the apparent attempt to replace the position vacated by God with something thought too closely to resemble God; to install a new God (or, given the semantic richness of the shorthand term ‘God,’ a new myth, religion, or metaphysics).

If any of Nietzsche’s works would seem to be so outmoded, surely it would be *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, with its evangelical style and its apparent ambition to create a new mythology or religion.<sup>5</sup> This is how Lyotard argues the point:

Nietzsche ... did not succeed in removing the pathos from the “nothing is worth anything.” Writing in the form of dithyrambs and fragments does not interrupt, rather it reinforces the filiation with Romanticism and Symbolism. Zarathoustra’s poetic prose, like the late Heidegger’s sibylline writing, is well made for speaking the expected arrival of a “last god.” It is still prophesying, just as it is said that the pre-Socratics prophesied in their time; even though the circumstances are propitious, in the artificial light of the megalopolis, for a

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Gianni Vattimo. *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, tr. by John R. Snyder, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard. *Postmodern Fables*, tr. by Georges Van Den Abbeele, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 and *Soundproof Room: Malraux’s Anti-Aesthetics*, tr. by Robert Harvey, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> A significant recent interpretation which affirms this image of *Zarathustra* is T.K. Seung’s *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul* (2005). Seung argues that the central drama of *Zarathustra* is the conflict between the ‘Faustian’ autonomous individual and ‘Spinozan’ deterministic Nature. While a rational resolution of this problem is not possible, Seung sees *Zarathustra* as Nietzsche’s presentation of a religious solution, in which the individual will is reconciled with cosmic necessity in the deification of nature through the figure of Dionysus. He argues that Nietzsche’s self-described ‘fifth Gospel’ “is not meant to be a mere addition to the four Gospels. It is the Gospel for the nature-religion of Dionysus. Its function is to announce a new religion to replace the religion of the New Testament just as the latter replaced the religion of the Old Testament.” Seung asserts that “Nietzsche’s allegiance to the god of Dionysus is not only philosophical but religious. But his avowal of the Dionysian allegiance has rarely been taken as anything more than a rhetorical flourish. It is about time to take it as a pious expression of his religious reverence for Dionysus.” (xxvi)

laconism without pathos. Wittgenstein, Gertrude Stein, Joyce, or Duchamp seem like better “philosophical” minds than Nietzsche or Heidegger – by better, I mean more apt to take into consideration the exitless nothingness the West gives birth to in the first quarter of the twentieth century ...<sup>6</sup>

For Lyotard, while Wittgenstein’s style is “apt for taking it into account,” no philosopher before Adorno adequately recognized what he takes to be the true character of nihilism.<sup>7</sup> (op. cit.). Nietzsche and Heidegger, he believes, ignore its “exitless” nature by preparing the way for a new beginning, an overcoming of nihilism. The same goes for Oswald Spengler, whom he describes as “but the aborted child” of Nietzsche, “argued in a flat-footed way.”<sup>8</sup>

How, then, does nihilism appear for Lyotard, “in the artificial light of the megalopolis”? With his thesis on postmodernity, Lyotard has arguably provided one of the most significant and influential – if not generally well-understood – updates of the Nietzschean account of nihilism. Nietzsche saw very well that after the death of God, God’s position would be taken by Man. In Lyotard’s parlance, this accords with the modern era of the prominence of metanarratives, stories which give meaning and value to life and the world by construing Man (a universal subject of history) as the *hero* of the narrative, history as its *diegesis*, and the emancipation or redemption of Man as its *denourment*. This is the period in which Nietzsche found himself, and the barbs in his stinging rhetoric were directed as much against insipid humanism as against the Church. As is well-known, Lyotard characterised the late twentieth century as affected by an “incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>9</sup> He links this explicitly with Nietzsche’s story about nihilism,<sup>10</sup> and we

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<sup>6</sup> Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, tr. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. xxiv.

<sup>10</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 38-39.

may see what Lyotard calls postmodernity as a ‘progression’ of nihilism, in which disorientation deepens, because not only are religious values seen to be bankrupt, but humanist values as well.

A further stage in Lyotard’s reflections is little appreciated, in which the narrative of *development* takes the place of the metanarratives. As Bernard Reginster astutely remarks (in what is one of the most significant recent studies of Nietzsche’s understanding of nihilism), Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God amounts to the claim that God and the existence of a metaphysical world are *discredited*, and “[a] discredited belief is not, strictly speaking, refuted, but it is a belief the possible truth of which can no longer be taken seriously.”<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche understood that God was not ‘entirely refuted,’ and that he would continue to hold sway over our imaginary for a long time to come: the dead God would continue to cast his shadow (GS §108).<sup>12</sup> The same is true of Lyotard’s announcement regarding metanarratives. While in *The Postmodern Condition* he announced that our mourning for narrative legitimation was complete, he quickly realized that this was not the case; that a peculiar kind of metanarrative still circulates. This is the narrative of development, which he outlines in multiple essays written throughout the later part of the nineteen-eighties, and sometimes termed the ‘postmodern fable.’<sup>13</sup> According to him, this fable is “the great narrative that the world persists in telling itself after the great narratives have obviously failed.”<sup>14</sup> This narrative presents the process of development itself as the protagonist of the story, and at the most abstract level it is understood only as ‘order’ or ‘negentropy’ (while the antagonist is entropy, the tendency to disorder). Glossing Lyotard briefly, the upshot is that according to the narrative of development, capitalism and technoscience are legitimated because

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<sup>11</sup> Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Random House, 1991.

<sup>13</sup> See in particular the essay “A Postmodern Fable” in *Postmodern Fables*.

<sup>14</sup> Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables*, pp. 81–2.

they are the most efficient agents of development, while all other values we previously believed in are robbed of their worth. This is ‘nihilism now’ for Lyotard: religious and humanist values are devalued, while the absolute rights of development reign supreme.

It seems we are a long way from Nietzsche’s esoteric proclamations and impassioned pleas for exceptional individuals to create new values in the shadow of the dead God. Yet some of Nietzsche’s descriptions of nihilism are in fact not far from Lyotard’s dark vision of development. A *Nachlass* note from the autumn of 1887 includes the following:

Once we possess that common economic management of the earth that will soon be inevitable, mankind will be able to find its best meaning as a machine in the service of this economy – as a tremendous clockwork, composed of ever smaller, ever more subtly “adapted” gears; as an ever-growing superfluity of all dominating and commanding elements; as a whole of tremendous force, whose individual factors represent *minimal forces, minimal values*.

[...]

It is clear, what I combat is economic optimism: as if increasing expenditure of everybody must necessarily involve the increasing welfare of everybody. The opposite seems to me to be the case: *expenditure of everybody amounts to a collective loss: humanity is diminished* – so one no longer knows what *aim* this tremendous process has served. An aim? A new aim? – *that* is what humanity needs. (KSA 12: 462-3, 10 [17] Fall 1887 / WP §866 / WLN 10[17]).<sup>15</sup>

Commenting on this note, Pierre Klossowski suggests that Nietzsche is prophetic here not in any sense of heralding a ‘last God,’ but in foreseeing planetary planning or management.<sup>16</sup> In broad general agreement with Lyotard here, Nietzsche sees global economic development as a process without a meaningful aim or goal in which the value of humanity itself is negated. At least at points, then, Nietzsche’s work is not obviously obsolete for a consideration of ‘nihilism now’ as Lyotard portrays it in terms of its *content*.

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<sup>15</sup> As quoted in Pierre Klossowski. *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, tr. by Daniel W. Smith, London and New York: Continuum, 2005, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Klossowski. *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, p. 122.

However, as the above-quoted passage indicates, Lyotard's dismissal of Nietzsche's current relevance is based not so much on content, but on *style*. Lyotard argues that this style is pathetic (in the sense of making an emotional appeal) and prophetic, and that a more appropriate style with which to reflect on contemporary nihilism is a 'laconism without pathos' (that is, a minimal style which does not appeal to the emotions) which does not prophecy a new beginning, but confronts the exitlessness of our contemporary nothingness. And as Lyotard also indicates, *Zarathustra* is the paragon of the style he dismisses. The question I wish to ask here is this: In what sense, if any, can we understand Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* to have a contemporary relevance for our current nihilism? What are we to make of this strange book today? Perhaps surprisingly, in response to this question I wish to propose a hypothesis via one of the most comprehensive commentators on *Zarathustra*, whose work continues to be largely ignored by mainstream academic Nietzsche scholars: C. G. Jung. Rather than look at the detailed content of Jung's voluminous *Zarathustra* seminars,<sup>17</sup> I am interested rather in how Jung's general framework of analysis allows a reading of the contemporary meaning and significance of the book regarded in terms of its style and literary genre. After outlining a specific approach to Jung, I will then argue that we may see *Zarathustra* as a *parodic* work, which does not reinscribe a desire for God, but rather subverts deep unconscious longings for religious transcendence, and thus works to prepare its readers to live in a Godless world.

### **This mixed-up being**

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<sup>17</sup> These seminars were delivered between 1934 and 1939. For many years the transcripts circulated privately, and only became readily available in English translation with the 2-volume edition published in 1988: Jung, C.G. *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminars Given in 1934-39*, 2 vols., London and New York: Routledge.

Many academic scholars are no doubt dismissive or wary of Jung because of his apparent ‘supernaturalism,’ and his reputation in this regard has not been helped by his adoption in popular ‘New Age’ circles. The interpretation I adopt here is guided by the hypothesis that Jung, quite to the contrary, may be ‘naturalized.’ There are strong naturalistic tendencies guiding Jung’s work, and the contemporary psychologist Anthony Stevens has done important work to carry Jung’s thought further in this direction by reading it as consistent with evolutionary psychiatry.<sup>18</sup> Stevens acknowledges that Jung lacked caution, and that this allowed him to get carried away with his speculations. We may also note that he also had a disconcerting habit of speaking of the realities of the psyche in a way which refused to accord them less reality than the physical world (for example, his insistence that a patient of his had spent the last several years on the moon).<sup>19</sup> Yet, as with Nietzsche, much that Jung is popularly supposed to have believed he never actually did, and in general his work on apparently supernatural phenomena in fact functions to give it a naturalistic explanation (for example, interpreting apparent spirit possession as mental illness, or gods as psychological forces).

Before drawing out the implications of analytical psychology for *Zarathustra*, I propose to prepare the path by offering a brief sketch of how a naturalized Jung might be thought as significantly consonant with some of Nietzsche’s own concerns.<sup>20</sup> Both thinkers may be

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<sup>18</sup> See Anthony Stevens. *Jung*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994; Anthony Stevens. *Archetype Revisited: An Updated Natural History of the Self*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002; and Anthony Stevens and John Price. *Evolutionary Psychiatry: A New Beginning*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> This amusing anecdote is recounted by Marie-Louise von Franz in the 1989 PBS documentary *Carl Jung: Wisdom of the Dream*.

<sup>20</sup> While there have been a number of significant studies of Nietzsche and Jung, charting the reception and influence of Nietzsche in Jung’s thought and exploring a variety of common themes (in addition to those cited elsewhere in this essay, see Lucy Huskinson. *Nietzsche and Jung: The Whole Self in the Unity of Opposites*, London and New



understood to offer hypothesizes which should be understood under the heading of *speculative naturalism*. According to Brian Leiter, Nietzsche is a speculative naturalist (like Hume) because he sought to “construct theories that are “modeled” on the sciences ... in that they take over from science the idea that naturalistic phenomena have deterministic causes.”<sup>21</sup> Speculative naturalism is ‘speculative’ in that it works without reference to *actual* causal mechanisms that have been confirmed by the sciences, and ‘naturalistic’ in that its “speculative theories of human nature are informed by the sciences and a scientific picture of how things work.”<sup>22</sup> Both Nietzsche and Jung may be seen as speculative naturalists in this sense because their theories of human nature take inspiration from a scientific worldview, but extend to psychological and philosophical realms in which scientific knowledge is lacking, and in which the methods of the natural sciences may well not in principle ever be applied.

For both Jung and Nietzsche, Darwin’s theory of evolution may be understood as a starting point. Following Darwin, Nietzsche wants to understand human beings as wholly natural, a part of the animal kingdom (rather than beings defined by the possession of a supernatural soul). Nevertheless, Nietzsche criticizes Darwin for ignoring what is distinctive of human beings and an essential factor in our survival and evolution: human consciousness (TI “Expeditions” §14).<sup>23</sup> According to Nietzsche, human beings are naturally *interpretive* creatures; our capacity to take cognizance of ourselves and the world and impute them with values is a result of environmental adaptation. Our interpretations of the world have formed under the pressures and needs of

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York: Routledge, 2004), I am not aware of any which have made a naturalistic theory of mind the significant point of comparison, as I do here.

<sup>21</sup> Brian Leiter. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality*, London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Leiter. “Nietzsche’s Naturalism Reconsidered” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nietzsche*, ed. by J. Richardson and K. Gemes, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 577.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 1990.

survival (rather than purely abstract considerations of truth, as philosophers have imagined), and they are also conditioned by the specific sensory organs we are endowed with, which give us restricted access to the world.<sup>24</sup> According to Nietzsche, the fact of consciousness explains why human cultures have typically not supported the survival of the fittest, but of the *weakest*. (TI “Expeditions” §14) Moreover, it is consciousness which intensifies human suffering because we suffer not only from suffering itself, but from not being able to find a *meaning* in suffering (GM III §28).<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, consciousness is for Nietzsche nothing more than a natural outgrowth of the body; it is the body itself (Z I “Despisers”),<sup>26</sup> and entirely continuous with the natural world. As has often been noted, with this continuity, yet complex relation, of the mind and the body we find in Nietzsche an important precursor to Freud’s theory of the unconscious.

Jung, for his part, supplements and extends Freud’s well-known view of the mind by adding, in addition to consciousness and the ‘personal’ unconscious, what he terms the ‘collective’ unconscious. Contrary to the popular misunderstanding that this is some kind of supernatural, disembodied collective mind, the collective unconscious is a ‘deep’ part of the mind stemming from regions of the brain in which (Jung speculated) inherited predispositions to thoughts and behaviors reside. Human beings have been conditioned to interpret the world in certain ways under the pressures of survival within hunter-gatherer type communities for many thousands of years. In short, Jung’s hypothesis is that with human beings, not only behavioral functions are inherited as instincts (as is the case with other animals), but also predispositions to *interpret* the

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<sup>24</sup> Christoph Cox has convincingly argued that Nietzsche’s naturalism is entirely consistent with his perspectivism on this count. See his *Nietzsche: Naturalism and Interpretation*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. by Keith Ansell Pearson, tr. by Carol Diethe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 1974.

world in certain ways. For Jung, such interpretations have not only a cultural transmission, but a biological transmission; this is what gives his theory of mind a fundamentally naturalistic grounding. This naturalistic basis of Jung's thought is abundantly clear in one of his most widely circulated works, *Man and His Symbols*. Here he explains:

Just as the human body represents a whole museum of organs, each with a long evolutionary history behind it, so we should expect to find that the mind is organized in a similar way. It can no more be a product without history than is the body in which it exists. By "history" I do not mean that fact that the mind builds itself up by conscious reference to the past through language and other cultural traditions. I am referring to the biological, prehistoric, and unconscious development of the mind in archaic man, whose psyche was still close to that of the animal.

This immensely old psyche forms the basis of our mind, just as much as the structure of our body is based on the general anatomical pattern of the mammal. The trained eye of the anatomist or the biologist finds many traces of this original pattern in our bodies. The experienced investigator of the mind can similarly see the analogies between the dream pictures of modern man and the products of the primitive mind, its "collective images," and its mythological motifs.<sup>27</sup>

According to Jung, the basis of these collective images and mythological motifs are what he calls *archetypes*. They are predispositions to interpretations and behaviours that reside in the collective unconscious. They are "archaic remnants" – mental forms whose presence cannot be explained by anything in the individual's own life and which seem to be aboriginal, innate, and inherited shapes of the human mind."<sup>28</sup> The test of an archetype is that it can be found as a symbol in all human cultures. However, the archetype itself is not reducible to any specific symbols or representations, but is "a tendency to form such representations of a motif – representations [...] can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern."<sup>29</sup> Jung underlines the naturalistic cast of his theory of archetypes when he writes that they are "an

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<sup>27</sup> Jung, C. G., "Approaching the Unconscious" in *Man and His Symbols*, London: Aldus, 1964, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

instinctive *trend*, as marked as the impulse of birds to build nests, or ants to form organized colonies.”<sup>30</sup>

On the basis of his speculative naturalistic psychology, Jung presents his own intriguing picture of contemporary nihilism: the tragedy of modern humanity is that we are psychologically programmed, at a very deep unconscious level, to interpret life according to symbolic meanings and patterns of behaviour that are radically out of step with the typical modes of contemporary existence. In short, we are still deeply conditioned by the needs of pre-industrial, hunter-gatherer societies, even as we attempt to find fulfillment in our postindustrial megacities. Jung explains:

Modern man is in fact a curious mixture of characteristics acquired over the long ages of his mental development. This mixed-up being is the man and his symbols that we have to deal with, and we must scrutinize his mental products very carefully indeed. Skepticism and scientific conviction exist in him side by side with old-fashioned prejudices, outdated habits of thought and feeling, obstinate misinterpretations, and blind ignorance.<sup>31</sup>

Like Nietzsche and other critics of modernity, Jung sees reason as a poisonous gift: for all the good that it has done us, it has cut us off from the unconscious impulses which were previously able to give our lives a sense of meaning by being expressed in our conscious lives through living cultures and religions. He suggests that

[i]n earlier ages, as instinctive concepts welled up in the mind of man, his conscious mind could no doubt integrate them into a coherent psychic pattern. But the “civilized” man is no longer able to do this. His “advanced” consciousness has deprived itself of the means by which the auxiliary contributions of the instincts and the unconscious can be assimilated.

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<sup>30</sup> Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” p. 69. Paul Bishop has noted that Jung’s reading of Nietzsche had a significant (though somewhat indirect) role to play in the formation of his theories of archetypes and the unconscious. Jung was struck by the fact that a section of *Zarathustra* seemed to be an unconscious reproduction of a passage in a book Nietzsche read much earlier and had consciously forgotten about. This impressed him with the power of the unconscious, both in terms of its memory (the theory of cryptomnesia), and its creative drive. See Bishop, “C.J. Jung and Nietzsche: Dionysos and Analytical Psychology” in *Jung in Contexts. A Reader*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” p. 96.

These organs of assimilation and integration were numinous symbols, held holy by common consent.<sup>32</sup>

A key factor in this development is not only rationality as such, but also science and technology, through our use of them in the attempt to dominate nature, and in creating an artificial world for ourselves cut off from nature. According to Jung, the symbols which were in the past an integral part of the lives of psychologically healthy individuals and cultures were *natural* symbols; they arose through a long process of development in ages when mankind lived closer to the natural world. But now,

[t]hunder is no longer the voice of an angry god, nor is lightening his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of a man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied.<sup>33</sup>

This then is Jung's picture of our modern nihilism. For him, the capacity to interpret the world in such a way that it has meaning for us is dependent on 'effectuating' or 'constellating' archetypes through symbols, which allow our deep instincts expression and holistic integration in our conscious lives, on the personal and cultural levels. Because they have formed within natural environments, these archetypes tend to take natural objects (lightening, snakes, plants, etc.) as their symbols. Now, cut off from our religious and cultural traditions as well as from direct everyday experience of the natural world, modern humanity finds itself disoriented, lost and miserable, unable to make sense of itself in the world. For Jung as for Nietzsche, nihilism means that God is dead:

There are no longer any gods whom we can invoke to help us. The great religions of the world suffer from increasing anemia, because the helpful numina have fled from the woods, rivers, and mountains, and from animals, and the god-men have disappeared underground

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<sup>32</sup> Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Jung, "Approaching the Unconscious," p. 95.

into the unconscious. There we fool ourselves that they lead an ignominious existence among the relics of our past. Our present lives are dominated by the goddess Reason, who is our greatest and most tragic illusion. By the aid of reason, so we assure ourselves, we have “conquered nature.”<sup>34</sup>

While Jung’s language is typically evocative of the mythical, religious, and supernatural, he asserts the *psychological* (rather than metaphysical) significance of what he evokes, and underlying his mystical prose is what can be seen as a naturalistic, if highly speculative, philosophical anthropology.<sup>35</sup>

What I have suggested in underlining this naturalized Jung is that his account of nihilism may be read as consonant in important ways with Nietzsche’s. Yet the interesting difference is this: For Jung the ‘old values,’ the ‘highest values posited so far,’ are not just those of the Christian-Platonic worldview with a two-and-a-half-thousand year history; they involve basic dispositions to interpretation and behavior which have much more archaic roots. Such roots, having had much longer to burrow themselves into the earth (or into the part of the human brain which houses the chthonic unconscious), would surely be much harder to uproot. If Jung is right, it seems we are in more dire straits than even Nietzsche suggested. Having briefly sketched this Jungian approach, let me turn now to an application of this to Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.

## A river of pictures

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<sup>34</sup> Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> The scientific status of Jung’s analytical psychology is too complex an issue to be treated here. However, in brief defense of my characterization of it as a ‘speculative naturalism,’ we may note the difficulty of verifying or falsifying the theory of archetypes, since the claim to something’s being an archetype depends on it being identifiable in every human culture – despite being manifest through symbols which are not invariant – and thus requiring a great deal of interpretation. However it is also worth noting, following Stevens (*Jung*), that a hypothesis competing with the archetype theory is that of cultural transmission originating from a single common source, which could potentially explain the presence of symbolic meanings in all cultures without having recourse to the collective unconscious.

*Zarathustra* is such a bewildering phenomenon, there are so many diverse aspects, that one could hardly make a whole of it. Moreover, *Zarathustra* itself is not a whole; it is, rather, a river of pictures and it is difficult to make out the laws of the river, how it moves, or toward what goal it is meandering.<sup>36</sup>

As Jung indicates here, one of the first things that strikes the reader is that *Zarathustra* is abundantly overflowing with diverse and rich figures and images. In addition to the famous tight-rope walker, the camel, lion, and child, the eagle and the serpent, we can find the superhero and the superdragon (in addition to the superman), honey, mountains, lakes, swamps, seas, the sun and its daily cycle, the moon, the earth, dancing stars, saints, Gods, apes, free spirits, the rabble, the Devil, towers, gravediggers, towns, a hermit, rainbows, stairways, afterworldsmen, priests, the body, the Ego, the pale criminal, trees, warriors, women old and young, the New Idol, flies, market-places, friends, enemies, disciples, law-tables old and new, neighbours, snakes, Heaven and Hell, mirrors, the Evil One, Blissful Islands, shadows, tarantulas, Cross-spiders, philosophers, the Spirit of Gravity, dancing girls and other dancers, cupid, Wisdom, Life, sublime men, sportive monsters, wild beasts, houses, caves, a white ox, angels, beetles, dragonflies, fatherlands, motherlands and the children's land, fish-bones, shells, prickly leaves, a thousand breasts rising from the sea, sheep and lambs, an ivory-wreath, salty slime, peacocks, buffaloes, a volcano, two kinds of fire-dog, silky rabbits, inky fish, scribbling foxes, a horse, an ostrich, oysters, treasure pits, shells, a mole, mummies and phantoms, lickspittles and parasites,

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<sup>36</sup> Jung, C.G. *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminars Given in 1934-39*, 2 vols., London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 1339.

buffoons, prophets and astrologers, nobles, knights, goats, and geese, a leech's brain, and of course Zarathustra himself.<sup>37</sup>

It has been common to see *Zarathustra* as a work more literary than philosophical, and, as noted above, the tone of the text is evangelical and revelatory. In the section devoted to it in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche explains the process of composition of *Zarathustra* as a powerful *inspiration*:

If one had the slightest residue of superstition left in one, one would hardly be able to set aside the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely medium of overwhelming forces. (EH "Books" Z §3)<sup>38</sup>

He goes on to describe it as a 'revelation,' an 'ecstasy,' in which

[t]he involuntary nature of image, of metaphor is the most remarkable thing of all; one no longer has any idea what is image, what metaphor, everything presents itself as the readiest, the truest, the simplest means of expression. It really does seem, to allude to a saying of Zarathustra's, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors ... (EH "Books" Z §3)

Of course Nietzsche resists the religious interpretation that there is some supernatural, metaphysically transcendent force speaking through him, even as he marvels at the extent to which it *felt* that way.

A naturalized reading consonant with the hypothesis I am offering here would be that such inspiration arises from the unconscious: on a Jungian interpretation, to a large extent from the *collective* unconscious. The images in *Zarathustra* might be understood as *symbols* in Jung's sense, that is, as charged with numinous, psychic energy, expressive of archetypes.<sup>39</sup> Patricia

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<sup>37</sup> The translation of *Zarathustra* I use throughout, and from which this list is gleaned, is R. J. Hollingdale's. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 1974.

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *Ecce Homo*, tr. by R. J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 1992.

<sup>39</sup> Jung did not discount the tremendous significance of the personal unconscious and the history of the individual. For him, it is not enough for a symbol to be generally recognized within a culture; it will only work as a symbol – that is, have a deep emotional resonance which appeals to the unconscious of the individual – if they have been raised in the appropriate culture or had appropriate life experiences.



Dickson has developed such an interpretation of all of Nietzsche's work.<sup>40</sup> Dickson describes the 'transcendent function' of the psyche as its capacity to produce symbols in a two-fold process: first, "the spontaneous emergence of a unifying symbol that unites opposing elements," and "the birth, from this union, of a new attitude – a transition to a higher level of consciousness and creativity."<sup>41</sup> For Jung, the drama of psychic life is to a large extent composed of the need to unite opposing psychological impulses, allowing the individual to move from states of self-negating turmoil and tension to states of dynamic creativity, in which the opposites work not simply against each other, but in productive relation. These opposing tendencies are mediated and united by the psychic structure Jung terms the Self.<sup>42</sup> The reading Jung proposes in his *Zarathustra* seminar is governed by the view that that Nietzsche's text is structured by the psychological dynamic of 'enantiodromia,' the emergence of opposing unconscious tendencies in chronological order.<sup>43</sup>

Jung argued that Nietzsche had gained a privileged access to 'archetypal knowledge' through personal encounters with his unconscious, and saw *Zarathustra* as both a deeply personal statement and a reflection of the age with world-historical importance.<sup>44</sup> The images in *Zarathustra* can thus be seen as the generation of symbols from Nietzsche's unconscious, with the possibility of transforming both himself and his readers in order to achieve a 'higher level of consciousness' – that is, a healthier integration both of unconscious impulses themselves, and unconscious needs with conscious psychic life. The fact that these images are all contextualized

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<sup>40</sup> Patricia Dickson. *Nietzsche and Jung: Sailing a Deeper Night*, New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Dickson, *Nietzsche and Jung*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Preempting a possible Nietzschean reproach that the Jungian notion of Self is too Apollonian, Dickson emphasizes that for Jung, 'unity' is not a Hegelian dialectical synthesis in which the opposites are resolved in a higher synthesis; rather they are brought into a relationship of dynamic, creative tension, generating energy which drives further growth and change (loc. cit.).

<sup>43</sup> Paul Bishop. *The Dionysian Self: C.G. Jung's Reception of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995, p. 216.

<sup>44</sup> Bishop, *The Dionysian Self*, pp. 216-17.

within the pre-industrial world in which the book is set lends weight to this suggestion – the images are like the natural symbols that can be found in more archaic religions and cultures.<sup>45</sup> In addition to Jung’s 6-year seminar series devoted to a close commentary and analysis of the symbols in *Zarathustra*, there are numerous mentions of them throughout his *Collected Works*, demonstrating the attraction they had for him as precisely such archetypal symbols.

Does the Jungian ‘archetypal’ reading of *Zarathustra* then lend weight to Lyotard’s dismissal of it? In the book on Nietzsche most influential in Germany between the World Wars, Ernst Bertram proffered a reading that would lead in this direction. Nietzsche’s work – and *Zarathustra* in particular – may very well be interpreted, as per the title of Bertram’s book, as an *Attempt at a Mythology*.<sup>46</sup> Rüdiger Safranski concisely describes Bertram’s goal *vis-à-vis* Nietzsche as “the creation of a myth suited to uniting a nation under a common banner now that religion had faded.”<sup>47</sup> As he further notes, this idea of creating a nationalist myth has its source in the romantic tradition, and was endorsed by Wagner, as well as the young Nietzsche. Nietzsche himself alludes to a possible comparison of *Zarathustra* with Wagner’s Ring cycle,<sup>48</sup> and *Zarathustra* even has his Ring: the eternal recurrence, figured as the ring that would wed him to Eternity (“Oh how should I not lust for eternity and for the wedding ring of rings – the Ring of Recurrence!” – Z III “Seven Seals”). In his book Bertram not only wishes to present Nietzsche as

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<sup>45</sup> Sarah Kofman has noted “the almost complete absence in Nietzsche of metaphors taken from the world of the machine and modernism,” and connected this with a desire to parody old metaphors, rather than create new ones. *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, tr. by Duncan Large, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, pp. 185-6, note 23.

<sup>46</sup> Ernst Bertram. *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology*, tr. by Robert E. Norton, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009 [1918].

<sup>47</sup> Rüdiger Safranski. *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. London: Granta, 2003, p. 331.

<sup>48</sup> Soon after completing the first (3-part) version of *Zarathustra*, he described it in a letter to Peter Gast as “a small book ... my best ... It is to be called: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. With this book I have entered into a new *Ring*.” Letter of 1 February 1883 (*KSB* 6: 321). Cited by Graham Parkes, “The Symphonic Structure of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: A Preliminary Outline” in Luchte 2011: 12. For an extended comparison of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and Wagner’s *Ring*, see Hollinrake (1982).

attempting to create such a mythology, but attempts to mythologise Nietzsche himself, to turn him into a figure who can revivify German culture by reflecting in his life the ‘soul’ of Germany. Such a new mythology might perhaps be thought to heal the split in contemporary existence that Jung saw. Bertram writes that “[l]egend alone actually connects the primeval past with the present through a continuous dynamic bond; only it unites the saint and the people, the hero and the peasant; the prophet and posterity meet only here.”<sup>49</sup>

Such a reading would seem to lend itself to Lyotard’s characterization and dismissal of *Zarathustra* as the fruit of a romantic nostalgia and an attempt to create a new mythology, and Jung’s interpretation of the text as developing symbols which have the same psychological function as mythological and religious symbols could well support such a reading. Yet need this consequence follow? Lyotard’s concerns with *Zarathustra*’s ‘piety’ were something Nietzsche himself was quite aware of, and this issue is dramatized in the section of Book 4 entitled “Retired from Service,” in which *Zarathustra* encounters ‘The Last Pope.’ Melancholic for his dead God, the Pope is in search of *Zarathustra*, whom he calls “the most pious of all those who do not believe in God.” (Z IV “Retired from Service”) While acknowledging that there is a certain piety in atheism, and expressing respect for the piety he observes living on in the Last Pope, *Zarathustra* nevertheless counsels him that he cannot cure his melancholy: “Truly, we should have to wait a long time before someone reawakened your God for you. For this old god no longer lives: he is quite dead.” (ibid.) *Zarathustra* asserts that it is *piety itself* which in the end says: “Away with *such* a god! Better no god, better to produce destiny on one’s own account, better to be a fool, better to be God oneself!” (ibid.)

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<sup>49</sup> Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 1.

A reading of *Zarathustra* in terms of Jungian archetypes thus does not determine the normative implications we should draw. The text itself raises (without definitively answering) questions of what it means that God is dead, and if we are tempted to resurrect or create some new God, what this might mean. I propose that on the basis of Jung's speculative naturalistic view of human nature and the nihilistic predicament we find ourselves in, we might divide possible *responses* to nihilism into two camps. First – and this would seem to be to a large extent the line of thought of many of Jung's followers – one could take a 'reactionary' response, which would consist of remaking our psychology and our culture in conformity with the archetypes. In effect, this means molding our lives once again to the patterns of the preindustrial and our thoughts to the mythical mode. Such a strategy could be understood as a form of 're-enchanting the world'; reintroducing the sacred into the secular.<sup>50</sup>

Alternatively, however, I wish to suggest that there may be an alternative strategy: to acknowledge the depth of the archetypes, but to transform them critically. Such a critical transformation would seek a deeper engagement with human psychology and culture than the Enlightenment attempts to throw off myth and religion through the power of conscious will, and to disenchant through rational argument alone. *Zarathustra* will appear most obscure, and most outdated, to those with rationalist and modernist perspectives: those who see Reason as a mistress sufficiently wise to entrust with our wellbeing and progress. Yet, schooled in ancient philosophy - the practitioners of which knew very well that the transformation of our values and worldview requires practical exercises, habits and repetitions to engage the deepest parts of

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<sup>50</sup> Again, although he is not a Jungian, we can cite Seung (*Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul*) as an example of this tendency in reading *Zarathustra*: "This gospel and epic is addressed to all those who are struggling, in despair and yet with courage, to restore the sanctity and dignity of their precarious selfhood under the crushing weight of secular culture." (p. xxvi)

ourselves<sup>51</sup> - Nietzsche believed that more than discursive reason and theoretical discourse were required to effect existential change. How can we see this deeper, critical level of engagement in *Zarathustra*?

### *Incipit parodia*

It is well-known that *Zarathustra* makes his first appearance at the end of Nietzsche's previous book, *The Gay Science* (at the end of the fourth book, before a fifth was added in a later edition). This section is practically identical to the first section of *Zarathustra* ("Prologue" §1), and appears under the title: *Incipit tragoedia* ("the tragedy begins"). It has often been noted that *Zarathustra* may indeed be understood as a tragedy, at least in terms of its four-part structure: the ancient Greek playwrights were in the habit of composing their tragedies in three acts, and appending them with a satyr play.<sup>52</sup> Wagner's ring cycle also follows this structure, with *Das Rheingold* a Prelude roughly analogous to the more marginal satyr play, and *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* the three parts of the tragedy proper. This might appear to confirm the reading of *Zarathustra* as creating a new mythology, as was Wagner's own aim. Yet in Nietzsche's preface to the second edition of *The Gay Science*, written in 1887 (and thus after *Zarathustra*), he writes:

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<sup>51</sup> See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson, Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995 and *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, tr. by Michael Chase, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

<sup>52</sup> For a recent discussion of this reading, see Paul S. Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 91-101. Loeb cites Eugen Fink as the first to propose this reading, and provides a succinct list of others who have subscribed to the view of Part IV of *Zarathustra* as analogous to a satyr play in support of an ironic or parodic interpretation of the text (p. 91, note 13).

“*Incipit tragoedia*” we read at the end of this awesomely aweless book. Beware! Something downright wicked and malicious is announced here: *incipit parodia*, no doubt. (GS P §1)

Walter Kaufmann explains that “[w]hat Nietzsche is saying, then, is that *Zarathustra* is something of a parody – which it surely is – although most readers during the first half of the twentieth century failed to see this.” (GS, translator’s note 1, page 33) Arguably, this is also what Lyotard fails to see.

Yet what kind of parody is *Zarathustra*? As has often been noted, it is a parody of the New Testament, with its mischievous distortions of the biblical text (a pithy example: “Unless ye become *cows* ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” Z IV “Voluntary Beggar”), and with the figure of Zarathustra a parody of Jesus Christ. It is also clearly a parody of the Platonic dialogues, with Zarathustra as a parodic version of Socrates. As Kathleen Higgins explains, Zarathustra is thus a teacher who brings a teaching of a similar scope, but of a radically different meaning, to the teachers he parodies:

Jesus and Socrates are the teachers with the greatest influence on how we in the West confront questions regarding the basic meaning of human life. Zarathustra is drawn as a philosophical teacher who advocates a fundamentally different approach to these questions, and his role as a teacher is underscored by the fact that he is a parodic counterpart of Socrates and Jesus. Zarathustra offers what in effect is a parodic gospel—for it is to be taken by the reader as similar in scope to the gospels of the West’s two great teachers but diametrically opposite to them in much of its import.<sup>53</sup>

In a complementary fashion, Laurence Lampert highlights the grand scope of Nietzsche’s ambition in writing *Zarathustra*.<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche has traced the problem of contemporary nihilism to the metaphysical and moral positions (the ‘Christian-moral’ interpretation of the world) he believes were first introduced by the historical figure Zarathustra, and has resurrected him as a literary figure in order to overturn these positions. Zarathustra is thus no arbitrary figure chosen

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<sup>53</sup> Kathleen Marie Higgins. *Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, New York: Lexington, 2010, p. 65.

<sup>54</sup> Laurence Lampert. *Nietzsche’s Teaching: An Interpretation of “Thus Spoke Zarathustra.”* New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

to parody Jesus and Socrates, but the teacher who sowed the first seeds that would ripen with them. Nietzsche's ambition, then, is world-historical in scope, and paradigm-changing in intent. Yet as Lampert also sees, Nietzsche's intent cannot be simply to set up a new religion on the model of the old. He expects more of his readers than that. Summarising these points, Lampert writes:

The scope of the new Zarathustra's ambition – or of what Nietzsche wanted to do – is to be measured by the ancient Zarathustra's achievement. The founder of the view that time is progress in the moral overcoming of earthly life returns to bring a different teaching, one that is true to earthly life – a new teaching around which the world will turn. No prophet, fanatic, or preacher demanding belief, Nietzsche's Zarathustra appears as a seducer, a tempter, an "immoralist" to those moral in the old way.<sup>55</sup>

The scope and intention of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* can thus be identified by what it parodies. In short, the work seeks to be a counter-movement to the nihilism stemming from the key teachings of the Western tradition. We can see the parodic function of *Zarathustra* as precisely the 'immoral' temptation or seduction Lampert notes: it appeals to our pious or religious desires for eternal transcendent meanings, then subverts or perverts them once we are hooked. That is, the text appeals to what, in us, those texts which it parodies appeals – the yearning for meaning expressed in numinous symbols, and the desire for something like a religious or metaphysical transcendence of mundane life. Yet at the same time, the parodic function works *against* this. Frequently the quasi-religious pathos of the text explodes in laughter, and Zarathustra himself praises the value of laughter as such (see Z IV "Of the Higher Men").<sup>56</sup> The text intrigues and engages its readers through its narrative and symbols, which mirror those of the great Western traditions, yet it leads us to a very different place than do the Platonic dialogues or the New Testament. We do not, perhaps, really understand yet where that place is, but there are frequent indications that the desires we might have for a consistent morality, a set of symbols, a doctrine,

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<sup>55</sup> Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> On this theme, see Klossowski "Nietzsche, Polytheism and Parody."

and so on, are quashed in parody (Klossowski notes, for example, that the eternal return can only be understood as the parody of a doctrine<sup>57</sup>). So I suggest that we can understand *Zarathustra* as both creating a mythology, and parodying such a mythology; appealing to our desires for a new God, and ruining those desires in the very course of their apparent fulfillment.

If *Zarathustra* appears in evangelical guise, then, it is because of the need to engage the deepest levels in us from which meaning is produced, that which Jung discovered and named the collective unconscious. Understanding that meaning is so deeply rooted does not mean that it is hopelessly fixed, but precisely that it needs seductive ruses and strategies such as literary parody in order to shift. Jung's own writings display an inexhaustible fascination with the symbols of past mythical and religious traditions, and his criticisms of modernity can often give the impression that his work was directed towards reviving archaic modes of thought and feeling. Indeed, as Bishop has noted, in the last period of his correspondence with Freud, one of the things which seemed to be driving a wedge between the two psychoanalysts was Jung's developing conviction that the aim of the nascent science should be to create a new Dionysian myth as a substitute for the decline in Christian religious belief. Jung argued that only a religion can replace a religion.<sup>58</sup> Yet at least at times, Jung insists that whatever form the new myth or religion he seeks takes, it is not appropriate for contemporary humanity simply to revive the old gods. This is evident in the well-known essay "Wotan," which is an attempt to understand the phenomenon of National Socialism as an eruption of the primitive autonomous psychic power

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<sup>57</sup> Pierre Klossowski. *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* and "Nietzsche, Polytheism and Parody."

<sup>58</sup> To which Freud pointedly replied: "I am not thinking of a substitute for religion: this need must be sublimated." Quoted in Bishop, *The Dionysian Self*, p. 212.



worshiped in the past as the eponymous pagan God.<sup>59</sup> For Jung the violent consequences of this movement could be understood as the unleashing of primitive impulses which constituted ‘a step back into the past,’ as a result of these impulses finding no healthy form of release in the present forms of culture. In the *Zarathustra* seminars he explains:

It is the old assembly of the gods that begins to operate again because no other principle is on top. Where there is no recognised leading principle, the collective unconscious comes up and takes the lead. If our *Weltanschauung* is no longer in existence or is insufficient, the collective unconscious interferes. Wherever we fail in our adaptation, where we have no leading idea, the collective unconscious comes in, and in the form of the old gods. There the old gods break into our existence: the old instincts begin to rage again.<sup>60</sup>

Here it is clear that what Jung advocates is no simple revival of archaic forms of worship:

The old gods are coming to life again in a time when they should have been superseded long ago ... Do you not find it also rather suspect to nourish the metaphysical needs of our time with the stuff of old legends? ... We need some new foundations. We must dig down into the primitive in us, for only out of the conflict between the civilized Man and the Germanic barbarian will there come what we need: a new experience of God.<sup>61</sup>

So it is clear that Jung did not want a revival of the old god(s). Yet the critical issue at stake in interpreting *Zarathustra*, as we have been discussing, is the question of a *new* God, and Jung seems unambiguous on this issue, as the quote above, as well as his insistence that only a religion can replace religion, attests.

A key point of difference between Jung and Nietzsche, identified by Anthony Storr, now comes into focus.<sup>62</sup> Storr has argued that Jung and Nietzsche both developed their views in response to a loss of religious faith, and that both realized something more than a rational response was

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<sup>59</sup> Jung, C. G. “Wotan” in *Civilization in Transition: The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 10*, ed. and tr. by G. Adler and R. F. C. Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

<sup>60</sup> Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, p. 1517.

<sup>61</sup> Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, pp. 1517-18.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony Storr, *Nietzsche and Jung: J. R. Jones Lecture*, Swansea: University of Wales, 1996.

needed, and unconscious processes must be involved.<sup>63</sup> The key point of difference Storr sees between them is that while Nietzsche considered *art* to provide such an engagement with unconscious, instinctual powers, Jung tended to discount art as superficial, and considered only *religion* effective in meeting the deepest human needs. In this respect, *Zarathustra* can be understood to engage the same deep unconscious instinctual drives identified by Jung, but rather than attempting to distil them into a new Dionysian religion, to form them into a work of art with a critical, transformative function. The reading of *Zarathustra* I am suggesting here is thus positioned between what would be a ‘faithful’ Jungian reading, and the ‘deconstructive’ readings which focus on the surface play of Nietzsche’s texts.<sup>64</sup> The former seem to me to be excessively reactionary, in calling for a new myth or religion, while the latter seem to be excessively shallow, and do not appreciate the deep psychological level the text can be understood to engage.

The argument for the continuing current relevance of *Zarathustra* I have outlined here rests on the speculative naturalist interpretation of analytical psychology which suggests that the archetypes of the collective unconscious, which shape our propensities towards meaning, are deeply rooted and difficult to reshape, and thus require continued engagement with the kinds of symbols with which *Zarathustra* abounds. On this line of interpretation – which I have only been able to sketch here, briefly and speculatively – *Zarathustra* appears as a ‘transformation machine,’ an apparatus for the transvaluation of values, which reaches deep into our ancestral unconscious and constellates archetypes, but which ‘perverts’ them through parody, adapting

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<sup>63</sup> Storr, *Nietzsche and Jung*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Exemplified by Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles*, tr. by Barbara Harlow, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; Kofmann, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*; and Alexander Nehamas. *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.

them to the more recent pressures asserted by our *reason*, that is, to a Godless world.<sup>65</sup> It arouses the tragic pathos, the desire for transcendence, but instead of allowing it its direct natural course, to hurl itself into the beyond, it distorts and twists it back, insisting that it energise the *immanent* world, the here and now. It is in this way that, *pace* Lyotard, we can see *Zarathustra* as a work of continued and powerful relevance to the problem of nihilism now.

As a final point, let us remember that *Zarathustra* is ambiguously subtitled “A Book for All and None,” and we might understand it has continuing to have a strategic function for those for whom the religious tendency or the tragic pathos still compels. It will work for some, with whom its special feeling-tone resonates, and not for others. Perhaps such is not the case for many academic philosophers (like Lyotard), but for many others the shadows of gods and monsters still loom large in the artificial light of our megalopolis.

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas Burnham and Martin Jesinghousen emphasise this transformative dimension of *Zarathustra*. *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: An Edinburgh Philosophical Guide*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

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