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## Why Do Poets Lie Too Much?

### Nietzsche, Poetry and the Different Voices of Zarathustra<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The chapter “On Poets” in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* reveals much about Nietzsche’s ideas on language and poetry. While being critical of poetry, poets and the abuse of language, Nietzsche fashioned himself to be a poet of a specific kind, the term ‘poet’ understood both in a limited and a broad sense. This critique of Nietzsche’s runs like a current from his early essay, “Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense,” and *The Birth of Tragedy* to his later reflections on language as in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. This essay will focus on the themes of the aforementioned chapter of *Zarathustra*: what lie means in a poetic context, the function and make-up of poetry and poets, and the affects poetry creates on its audience; the last one has to do with the question of spectacle and spectacular forces. While showing the connection of this chapter to Nietzsche’s other works, the essay attempts to bring out his unique conception of poesy in which all things come together such as music, poetic techniques, and a specific kind of wisdom at the level of language’s re-creation in myth and metaphor.

In the beginning of the section “On Poets”<sup>2</sup> of Part II of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, one of Zarathustra’s disciples asks him why he once said that poets lie too much. Zarathustra prefaces his response by saying that he is not someone who deals with whys and reasons because he is not a barrel of memory to carry his reasons with him. He then presents the paradox as to why poets lie too much while he himself is too a poet. The presence of this mostly silent disciple simply accentuates the paradox even more strongly as we shall see later. Nietzsche’s relationship to poetry and poets is a complex one; he had written poems from his teen years until the onset of his insanity, and many of his books are full of discussions of poets and poetry. This essay, however, is confined to Zarathustra’s paradox of the lying poet instead of exploring the broader subject.

The chapter “On Poets” and the paradox of the lying poet reveal a stream of thought that runs through Nietzsche’s works; namely the thought of *Dichtung* (creating, composing, making)

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is an expanded version of the talk the author had given at the first public event of the Nietzsche Circle at Deutsches Haus in New York in April 2005.

<sup>2</sup> *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Penguin Books, 1976, pp.238-241.

and the world-view of the *Dichter* (poet/creator). What Nietzsche puts in the mouth of Zarathustra here applies not only to poets in the strict sense, but to all creators and myth-makers. Below I will make an attempt to work on this paradox in three stages: 1) the meaning of lie, 2) the poetry and the poet: old and new, and 3) the spectacle: peacocks and buffalos.

### **I. What is Lying? The Question of Illusion, Untruth, and Error**

In an attempt to deal with this seeming paradox, Zarathustra says: “we do lie too much.” Here he puts himself in the same camp with all poets. But what does he mean by ‘lying’? What is a lie for Zarathustra? If Zarathustra too lies like all other poets, how does he lie? What makes Zarathustra *different* than all other poets hitherto? And who is a poet after all?<sup>3</sup> Many of these questions have to do with Nietzsche’s philosophy of language, the understanding of which his earlier writings and lectures are helpful.

In an early unpublished essay, “Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense,”<sup>4</sup> written some ten years prior to TSZ, Nietzsche presents his ideas on language and poetry: concepts are nothing but metaphors which have forgotten their metaphorical origin. A metaphor is an arbitrary act of name-giving, a fortuitous co-incidence of nerve stimulus, image, and sound on the part of the name-giver who experiences the object and the act in a singular and sensuous way (singular name-giver faced with a singularly named object); the metaphor belongs primarily to the poet/artist, the myth-maker, whereas the concept to the scientist and the philosopher.

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<sup>3</sup> The German word for poet is ‘Dichter’ which means ‘composer,’ that is, someone who brings a variety of pieces such as image, symbol, thought, and sensual material into a linguistic form within a specific poetic genre. In this broader sense of the term, poet may mean more than just a poet in the conventional sense.

<sup>4</sup> I use the translation of this essay that is in *Philosophy and Truth*, although I find the translation of the title misleading. ‘Lie’ is singular in the German text; it is *Lüge* and not *Lügen*, which the translator also observes in his footnote. This gives the impression as though Nietzsche were suggesting that there is one truth, but many lies, far from being the case even in this early piece.

In “Truth and Lies” the term ‘lie’ (*Lüge*) is used in a double sense: the first sense has to do with poet’s initial name-giving; this is the first metaphor, which is a ‘lie,’ because it is, to a large extent, an arbitrary designation. Now the second sense has to do with the concept derived from the first metaphor, that is, with the forgetfulness in relation to the initial metaphor. Consequently, the poet lies in one way, and the rest, the speakers, lie in another way<sup>5</sup>; they lie the lies of poets. We all dissimulate since dissimulation is necessary for human life and culture, but we dissimulate *differently*. The poet, therefore, is a liar, a fabricator by the very nature of his activity. Moreover, as Nietzsche observes in *Human, All Too Human* Aphorism 154, the poet enjoys lying:

*Playing with life.* - The facility and frivolity of the Homeric fantasy was necessary for soothing the immoderately passionate disposition and over-subtle intellect of the Greeks and temporarily banishing them. When their intellect speaks, how cruel and bitter life appears! They do not deceive themselves, but they deliberately and playfully embellish life with lies. Simonides advised his compatriots to take life as a game; they were only too familiar with its painful seriousness (for the misery of mankind is among the favourite themes for song among the gods), and they knew that even misery could become a source of enjoyment solely through art. As a punishment for this insight, however, they were so plagued by a delight in telling stories that it was hard for them to desist from lies and deception in the course of everyday life - just as all poetical people take a delight in lying; a delight that is moreover quite innocent. The neighboring nations were no doubt sometimes reduced to despair by it.

Dissimulation is a playful act, and even human misery can be a source of enjoyment in the mouths of poets (a theme akin to what was said for the tragic in *The Birth of Tragedy*). And there is innocence to this playful dissimulation. That all art, not only poetry in the strict sense, is deceptive is again presented in *Human, All Too Human* Aphorism 160. Here Nietzsche starts

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<sup>5</sup> Based on Aphorism 222 from *The Gay Science*, one can say that the poet lies with a good conscience; the others, deprived of milk and hence left in misery, have not attained a good conscience.

with drama and poetry and moves on to visual and plastic arts; the basic insight presented here is that there is much illusion in all art-making:

*Created people.* - When we say the dramatist (and the artist in general) actually *creates* characters, this is a nice piece of deception and exaggeration in the existence and dissemination of which art celebrates one of its unintentional and as it were superfluous triumphs. In reality we understand very little of an actual living person and generalize very superficially when we attribute to him this or that character: well, the poet adopts the same *very imperfect* posture towards man as we do, in that his sketches of men are just as *superficial* as is our knowledge of men. There is much illusion involved in these created characters of the artists; they are in no way living products of nature, but, like painted people, a little too thin, they cannot endure inspection from close to. And if one should even venture to say that the character of the ordinary living man is often self-contradictory and that created by the dramatist the ideal that hovered dimly before the eye of nature, this would be quite wrong. An actual human being is something altogether *necessary* (even in those so called contradictions), but we do not always recognize this necessity. The invented human being, the phantasm, desires to signify something necessary, but only in the eyes of those who comprehend even an actual human being only in a crude, unnatural simplification: so that a couple of striking, often repeated characteristics, with a great deal of light on them and a great deal of shadow and twilight around them, suffice to meet all their demands. They are thus quite ready to treat phantasms as actual, necessary human beings because they are accustomed when dealing with actual human beings to take a phantasm, a silhouette, an arbitrary abridgement for the whole. - That the painter and the sculptor, of all people, give expression to the 'idea' of the human being is mere fantasizing and sense-deception: one is being tyrannized over by the eye when one says such a thing, since this sees even of the human body only the surface, the skin; the inner body, however, is just as much part of the idea. Plastic art wants to make characters visible on the outside; the art of speech employs the word to the same end, it delineates the character in sounds. Art begins from the natural *ignorance* of mankind as to his interior (both bodily and as regards character): it does not exist for physicists or philosophers.

All that artists of all variety do is to fantasize, invent, and deceive; “this deception is, after all, the essence of art.”<sup>6</sup> However, lying, dissimulating, and illusion-making<sup>7</sup> in themselves could not be a problem for Zarathustra, because all poets lie, but the problem is that they lie *too* much. Poets know very little (“wir wissen auch zu wenig”), and they invent lies<sup>8</sup> to compensate for what they do not *know*. Here the word *wissen* can cover a variety of knowledge and experience, since the word *wissen* is the root of both *wissenschaft* and *weisheit*. Knowledge based on all sciences, philosophical wisdom, and experience can be implied with the word *wissen*. Someone who is wise is not someone who simply knows much, but who has a certain integral experience and a way of relation to life. Zarathustra is not necessarily beating the poets for their lack of ‘knowledge,’ but for the fact that they fabricate where they do not *know* or, more importantly, where they do not have the sensuous experience that is needed in the creation of metaphor. Let us not forget: for Zarathustra bodily experience is integral to human experience, and the chapter “On Poets” opens with his affirmation of the body: “Since I have come to know the body better...The spirit is to me only quasi-spirit...”<sup>9</sup> The regime of the body covers a variety of fields for Nietzsche: the senses, the fitness of the body, sensuality, sexuality, and dance (the last one is a recurring theme in *Zarathustra*).<sup>10</sup> With this statement Zarathustra is reminding all poets that

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<sup>6</sup> *Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ed. and tr. by S. Gilman, C. Blair, and D. J. Parent, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 245.

<sup>7</sup> On the subject of illusion-making, I cannot agree with Grundlehner who dismisses illusion from Nietzsche’s vision of poetry: “Consequently, he [Nietzsche] rejects the metaphysical loftiness associated with the word *poet* and replaces it with his own formulation, the penitents of the spirit (“die Büsser des Geistes”). These are prophets who, instead of inventing illusions, strive for self-revelation...” (154). No doubt, the penitence of the spirit, or the practice of self-making, is central to Nietzsche and his *Zarathustra*; however, illusion-making too is a part of this practice, which falls to a large extent under the mythopoeic function in Nietzsche. What are at stake for Nietzsche regarding illusion-making are what the illusions are (are they healthy and life-embracing, or decadent and life-negating?) and what kinds of poets create them (in what spirit and according to what world-view).

<sup>8</sup> In an earlier note from 1875, Nietzsche explains this lie-invention as the self-deception of the poets: “The poets deceive themselves about *their own self*; they do not know where it really comes from—so high has error lifted the opinion that they are inspired. Hesiod Thnnichos (from Plato’s *Ion*).” *Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, p. 243. In another note, he refers to the poet as a trickster (or cheater), *Betrüger* (*Nietzsche Werke*, II-5, p.351).

<sup>9</sup> *Zarathustra*, p.238.

<sup>10</sup> On this topic one may consult with LaMothe’s *Nietzsche’s Dancers* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

poetry-making, though an act of dissimulation, is not merely rambling words and rhyming them, but a singular, somatic, and an integral experience.

Moreover, Zarathustra's attack on poets can be linked to Nietzsche's early diagnosis of the modern age, its logo-centricity inherited from the Socratic age, and one of its main problems in the domain of language (that is also connected to other domains and their problems); namely, the forgetting (or the underestimation) of metaphor, the forgetting that all concepts owe their origin to the sensuous act of carrying over. As Kofman observes "carrying over must not be understood here as a transition from one place to another: it must itself be taken as a metaphor which, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, condenses several meanings: transfiguration, transformation, ecstasy, self-dispossession and metamorphosis...as well as: transposition of the truth of Being into symbolic languages."<sup>11</sup> This forgetting that takes concept as the primary effects all use of language: the use of rhetoric (the art of persuasion based on unchanging concepts, still prevalent in our age), scientific constructs built on concepts that also have claim to permanence via objectivity, and the poet who is displaced from his own home because the priority of the metaphor has been forgotten and the metaphor is relegated to the lesser domain of fiction, fantasy-making. One of the targets of Zarathustra is this homeless poet who not only does not claim his home back, but worse than that, composes poetry within the hegemony of the conceptual apparatus (the poet who idealizes, who moralizes, etc.)

## **II. The Poetry and the Poet: Old and New, the Question of Epoch-Making**

There is, for Zarathustra, another type of poetry that does not tamper with the expanse of human experience or with the depth of philosophical thinking, but operates in a new horizon; a new

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<sup>11</sup> Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, translated by Duncan Large, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, p.15.

depth that the poet himself opens up in the infinity of poetry making. Poets of the old epoch, however, mix things up, cook things like alchemists, believe in gossips and folk wisdom, and dabble with the Eternal-Feminine, that is, with the ideal and the after-life. Adulterated wine and poisonous hodge-podge are what they contrive. This section, “On Poets,” has several explicit references to the ending of Goethe’s *Faust*; one could, therefore, assume that Goethe is one of the targets of the polemic, though he is not the only one<sup>12</sup>.

Poets lie too much and then empower their lies when they believe and pretend that it is nature or gods that are speaking through them, that they are the beloved of nature and the only spokespersons of all those things that are eternal. Here what is at stake for Zarathustra is what lies poets empower and how, that is in what spirit, they empower them since these empowered lies become the highest values for their people. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, written shortly after TSZ, Nietzsche presents two primary modes of value-making, the modes in and through which certain words are made into moral concepts according to their *spirit*. Although these two modes are not discussed explicitly in TSZ, they are present in the text (present in the different ways of doing poetry).

The power of the poet, however, does not begin or end here. Arguing for the utility of poetry (utility in a different sense), Nietzsche presents four primordial forces that are at work in poetry, which have strong appeal to humans and gods alike; these forces are rhythm, melody, magic, and prophecy.<sup>13</sup> (They are all inter-connected, and rhythm permeates all). Rhythm reorders the sentence, helps the speaker in choosing his words with care, and gives one’s thought a new color. Additionally, rhythm creates a bond between mortals and gods who are compelled

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout his works, Nietzsche attacks agonistically many old and new poets including Goethe, Baudelaire, Lombardi for a variety of reasons. Some of his major criticisms have to do with the idealist, other-worldly, pessimistic, nihilistic, and romantic elements in their works. They were not *thinkers* enough to undo some of the philosophical presuppositions of their age; therefore, they were not *poets* enough.

<sup>13</sup> *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books, 1974, Aphorism 84, pp.138-140.

to join this bond through poetry; “rhythm is a compulsion... Thus one tried to *compel* the gods by using rhythm.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, music functions—here Nietzsche looks out of poetry into music, song, and dance within the context of other artistic mediums—for unloading the affects, purifying the soul, and easing the ferocity of the soul (or the mind). “When the proper tension and harmony of the soul had been lost, one had to *dance*, following the singer’s beat: that was the prescription of this therapy.”<sup>15</sup> He even attributes this function of easing the ferocity of the soul to the orgiastic cults (gods have to be appeased so that they leave mortals in peace). And melody is a tranquilizer (*Besänftigungsmittel* which translates as “means of soothing or calming); “not because it is tranquil itself but because its aftereffects make one tranquil.”<sup>16</sup> Rhythm has a magical power also and magical songs were supposed to cast a spell over the demons so that mortals could act unhindered by such spirits (Nietzsche sees the magical song as a primeval form of poetry). Finally, rhythm has its role in oracles; by gaining the favor of Apollo through verse (in both directions), one could compel the future. “As the formula [of Apollo] is pronounced, with literal and rhythmic precision, it binds the future.”<sup>17</sup>

In the above quoted aphorism, Nietzsche uncovers four areas of poetry in which poets can and do lie: through rhythm they establish the musical appeal, set the psychic well-being, and the emotional make-up, through melody they can soothe mortals and gods in their own way, through magic they can control and empower themselves vis-à-vis their believers, and through prophecy they can dictate over the destiny of their people. Lie and value are thus conjoined. As Kaufmann observes in the footnote, the aphorism ends with an irony: “For as Homer says: “Many lies tell the poets,” which echoes what Zarathustra says about poets.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.139.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.140.



By using these poetic devices that have universal appeal, the poets have monopolized the realm of the spirit—they claim to hold the keys to heaven—and thus their lies are sealed forever for those who believe in their lies. Since poets borrow from gossip and folk wisdom, this sealing does not take much effort for them to achieve; people see their own reflections in the fabrications of the poets and feel elevated when they recognize themselves in poetically sublimated new forms. The gods and the overhumans, or the highest values, are the fabrications of the poets. Here Zarathustra conceives poets as value-makers and polemicizes against the ways through which they create values, that is, their *modus operandi*.

Zarathustra, therefore, is weary of poets. He is weary of the fact that all the imperfections and all the poetic shallowness have become an event (*Ereignis*); that is, they have become the highest values, and that is an event for an epoch. At this point in Zarathustra's speech "On Poets," the disciple becomes angry with him. But why does he become angry? The passive disciple is the model of a passive reader who faithfully follows Zarathustra, but what does faith matter to Zarathustra? The disciple is the model Zarathustra wants to dismantle, and his anger is a reflection of this dismantlement and a reflection of his disillusionment with Zarathustra as his idol. Zarathustra is not the poetic idol he thought he was. Zarathustra too is a liar, but not in the way that the old poets are. The disciple is the reader of the old poets and has not, up to this point in his journey, understood how Zarathustra lies. This mood of anger, that is emblematic of disillusionment and dismantling, will be followed by silence<sup>18</sup>, the moment of solitude, the possibility of self-transformation.

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<sup>18</sup> There are different kinds of silences that surround Zarathustra throughout the text, depending on where and with whom he is. The silence that appears here is the collective silence, the silence in the presence of other(s), and is the most uncanny one, because it is the most difficult silence to attain. There has to be a mythic context for such a mystical silence; Zarathustra seems to have established such a context.

But why do poets lie too much? And yet Zarathustra too is a poet. Zarathustra is not a poet of yesterday, but of tomorrow and the day after tomorrow; here we arrive at the second dissolution of the paradox. Here the previously established ‘we’ of all poets falls asunder: Zarathustra is not any poet, at least not a poet in the old sense<sup>19</sup>. This was implied in the first dissolution of the paradox, but is now clearly stated. Zarathustra is weary of all poets, old and new. They lie and their lies don’t have depth, they are superficial, shallow seas; neither their thoughts nor their feelings penetrate the depths. They are guided by boredom and lust, present shallowness as depth, pose as reconcilers, but they are, in fact, mixers who bring the unmixable together, creating eclectic forms. They are poor in style and mix eclectically where the form and the content remain apart, where a variety of disparate elements is not creatively appropriated, which is the mixing of modern style, or stylelessness. Here we are in the town of Motley Cow, the cow that passively waits to be painted with a variety of colors that do not belong together and that are not absorbed aesthetically.

Instead of good fish, Zarathustra always finds the head of some old god in the sea of the old poets; either in the form of ideals or the after life or the sentimental love stories of lovers who die in each other’s arms to meet in eternity. If it is not some old god, it is the shadow or the ghost of the old god. Instead of souls, Zarathustra often finds salted slime in the old poets. In contrast, Zarathustra is a poet who announces the death of God that stands for a symbol of a set of values and teaches the overhuman and the eternal recurrence of the same. Zarathustra’s polemic with the old poets must then be understood within the context of this epochal shift the

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<sup>19</sup> Zarathustra’s teachings on poetry does not support Grundlehner’s conclusion that “Nietzsche ultimately distrusts the validity of poetry,” although he comes to this conclusion via different routes. (*The Poetry of Friedrich Nietzsche*, p.305). No doubt, Nietzsche sees the pitfalls of language, the temptations of rhetorical devices and the seduction of words, as Grundlehner observes, and does not withhold his attack on poets where they represent what is wrong with art and poetry. And these poets may be the giants of his century like Goethe, Poe, and Baudelaire. However, one must not forget that Zarathustra too is a poet. And this must invite the reader to ask the question as to what type of poetry Nietzsche envisions for the future. Who are his poets of the future?

signpost of which is the death of God. Zarathustra is a poet who has understood the problems of the godly epoch and has undertaken the journey of a self-transformation. His poets of the future<sup>20</sup>, like his animals, will too have understood these problems and will poeticize according to the demands of the new age.

### III. The Spectacle: Peacocks and Buffalos, the Grand Spectacle of Zarathustra

*Dichter-Eitelkeit*

*Gebt mir Leim nur: denn zum Leime*

*Find' ich selber mir schon Holz!*

*Sinn in vier unsinn'ge Reime*

*Legen—ist kein kleiner Stolz!*

(GS, "Joke, Cunning, and Revenge," Poem 56)<sup>21</sup>

Why do poets lie too much? And yet Zarathustra too is a poet. In the third and the final dissolution of the paradox of the lying poet, we are presented with a parable to poets, a parable on poets and their vanity. The egos of the poets want to be at the center of the stage like beautiful peacocks, no matter who the spectators may be. Poets bring all beauties together like peacocks (especially when they open their tails); they amalgamate all folk songs and sagas and recreate a new poetry that can easily attract the crowds. In this sense, the poets are the peacock of peacocks. Insofar as their function is myth-making, poets are always, albeit unconsciously, connected to their folk, the folk whose stories, rhapsodies, cults and cult functions form the substance of poetic creation. Since poets are connected to the folk, the folk are connected to them. And the vanity of the poet is formed in this interaction; it is formed in the space of the

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<sup>20</sup> I would like to list, among many others, Rilke, Valery, Apollinaire, and Char as Zarathustra's poets of the future.

<sup>21</sup> Poet's Vanity  
 Give me glue and in good time  
 I'll find wood myself. To crowd  
 Sense into four silly rhymes  
 Is enough to make one proud.

*The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Press, 1974.

collective unconscious, or in Zarathustra's mouth it is the sea from which the poets learn their vanity.<sup>22</sup>

But what is vanity and why is vanity a problem for Nietzsche (and for Zarathustra)? Aphorism 87 from *The Gay Science* sheds light on this *eternal* human problem, however, the context is not general human vanity, but rather the vanity of the artists. "I believe that artists often do not know what they can do best, because they are too vain and have fixed their minds on something prouder..." The first problem of vanity is the lack of self-knowledge regarding one's capability. "They do not think much of what is actually good in their own garden or vineyard..." The second problem of vanity is that artists take their own native soil for granted (the inability to see the richness and the beauty in the small things that one has and the inability to view these small things anew from refreshed perspectives). Even if the artist is great in his own small domain, he will not be content with this. Nietzsche presents the case of a musician (no name is mentioned, but Kaufmann thinks what is said here is applicable to Wagner) who can create by drawing "from the very bottom of human happiness" and who is "master of the very small." But he is not satisfied, "that is not what he *wants* to be. His character prefers large walls..." He cannot see that he can create his masterpieces in his own smaller garden; "he is too vain to know it."<sup>23</sup> Finally, the last point about vanity is that one is never content with one's own garden (one does not know one's own garden) and always looks for bigger gardens in which one cannot

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<sup>22</sup> Neither the poetry of myth-makers in general nor Nietzsche's poetry in particular can be understood strictly as monological as Grundlehner claims: "Nietzsche's poetry is to a large extent monologic art in that much of it forms a dialogue with itself." (309) Despite many textual evidences, Grundlehner's conclusion is far from convincing. However important the monologue, the silence, the soliloquy may be in Nietzsche's works and for Zarathustra, these practices of the self cannot be more than half of the story. The second half consists of the collective, the community through which another set of self-making practices are possible. Here one can consider the following from *Zarathustra*: the sun that shines upon others, Zarathustra's search for his disciples (together they form the spiritual community), and his encounter with the higher men, not to mention his animals many of which symbolize human qualities. Moreover, one must not forget that the Dionysian experience is a collective experience; the dithyrambs are songs sung by the Dionysian revelers in their ecstatic moments.

<sup>23</sup> *The Gay Science*, Aphorism 87, pp.142-143.

create. Ultimately, whether it is general or that of the artist, vanity is the inability to know one self, one's own domain, who one is *truly* at a deeper level, and what one can do and becomes manifest, in different degrees, in the discrepancy between who one is and what one does or how one presents himself. The more one's vain actions pertain to others (as in collective forms of expression), the more others become affected by such vanities. Hence the discussion of the problem of vanity within the context of spectacle-making at the end of the chapter "On Poets."

Human beings are spectacular beings; there are those who create spectacles and those who experience them passively (at least, this is so in the occidental world since the rise of theater in ancient Greece). Zarathustra's parable shows the deficiency of these immediate tendencies in the problem of the creator and the non-creator and points to other possible ways of constituting spectacular experiences where there are no beautiful peacocks on one side and ugly buffaloes on the other. The problem of spectacle in Occidental civilization since the Greeks persists in Nietzsche as a problem all throughout his thinking, although he does not pursue it as rigorously as he does in his two early works, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Untimely Meditations IV*.

There will, however, always be vainglorious peacocks who will always find a herd of ugly buffaloes to stare at them and their motley outfits. In this last part of "On Poets," one cannot help but think of Richard Wagner, his Bayreuth, and why Nietzsche was appalled and sickened by the spectacle Wagner had created that attracted all that was non-artistic for the vainglory of the master. Again it is the peacock and the buffaloes it attracts, but this problem of spectacle exceeds one single artist and one single spectacle however grand it may be, and goes right into the heart of the problems of the epoch.

Nietzsche's earlier attraction to Wagner and his Bayreuth project has to do, among other things, with his admiration for the Greek theater as a form of grand artistic spectacle and its

festive spirit. In his analysis of Greek tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he not only sees drama as an agonistic union of Apollinian/imagistic and Dionysian/symbolic forces and the unity of all arts on a grand scale, but also considers the Dionysian artist, the lyric poet, who is one with all being, as an unconscious *spokesperson* of nature, the primordial unity. In other words, the Greek artist was humble before all creation and great in proportion to the greatness he had achieved. This humility, or sense of mortality, was also projected onto the tragic stage, and all of this was a collective experience with the audience. We moderns including our poets, on the other hand, are far removed from this tragic experience of selfhood and mortality. Although Nietzsche was not a maker of spectacles in the strict sense, he has a vision for a grand spectacle<sup>24</sup> that is inspired by the ancient Greeks and Wagner (despite his disagreements). And this vision (not only the concept) is most vivid, richest in terms of imagery and symbolism in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Below I would like to present briefly the type of *grand spectacle* Nietzsche attempts to create in this work.<sup>25</sup>

*Zarathustra's grand spectacle* is that he is a hero and a life-affirming poet—a self-made sage who cultivates himself in solitude in his cave and knows or comes to know the problems of his age (it is not a coincidence that Nietzsche does not use a Greek figure here—in almost all things he is a pupil of ancient Greece, but an entirely fictitious *contemporary* figure though based on a historical character). He then undertakes a journey of self-transformation as he imparts his teachings on a select audience, his disciples, and as he interacts with crowds from towns, a variety of types of the godly order, and animals or the forces of life. Throughout the journey, Zarathustra never loses touch with his cave, that is, with the symbolic place of his solitude; he is

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<sup>24</sup> Here I do not suggest that Nietzsche has a Mallarmé like vision for whom poetry for spectacle meant spectacle itself.

<sup>25</sup> Here I cannot help but think Mallarmé and other symbolists who identified a great (dramatic) poetic book with its grand artistic spectacle. Although I can see the link between the two, I cannot follow them in all respects in this identification.

not beholden to anyone, but to his own self, the cosmic cycles where his self is situated. The drama unfolds in these encounters, in the monologues and dialogues of Zarathustra. And finally his fall is symbolized by his despair, his illness, and his *final* mysterious Oedipus-like disappearance at his sign<sup>26</sup> that comprises the morning sun on the way to the great noon, his animals (the eagle, the birds, the lion, a mighty, yellow, dog-like animal, the doves), and his children (one appealing version of Zarathustra's disappearance is his dance-like walk into the sun). There should not be any doubt that Zarathustra would go to his death joyfully when it is the "right time" to die, but his death is symbolic. Zarathustra has died many times throughout his journey and come back to life again.

### **Epilogue**

Faith, blind following, or icon worshipping does not make Zarathustra blessed. Zarathustra expects that his disciples seek their own paths and create their own journeys as they appropriate other similar journeys in creative ways and as they fit them into their own journeys. There is no predetermined journey, no single path that is good for all. Zarathustra whirls around himself as he rises out of himself and expects that his disciples too would whirl and rise out of themselves on their own unique paths.

Zarathustra too is a poet; he too is a liar, but a different kind of a liar. He is not a fabricator of *dishonest* lies such as the lie of an after-life; he is not a maker of ideals because for him permanence is a parable and a lie of the poets. He has come to know the body better, he has plunged into the bottom of thinking to bring depth into his poetry, and he does not dress like a peacock to attract buffaloes. In the first part of the paradox of the lying poets Zarathustra showed that all poets lie and how they lie; in the second part he presented himself as a different kind of a

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<sup>26</sup> *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, "The Sign," pp.436-439.

poet; and finally in the last part he exposed how poets, out of vanity, seek spectators indiscriminately to place themselves at the center of all attention. Zarathustra, himself a poet but of a different kind, a poet who has seen through the vanity of the poet, sees the rise of new poetry out of the ashes of the old poets.

We have seen the dissolution of the paradox of the lying poet in three stages: the poet who fabricates (almost any poet), the poet who makes myths and thereby is a value-creator (a few poets like Homer), and the poet who makes spectacles (more than few). Through the basic poetic function (the use of language and metaphor-making), value-creation and spectacle-making, all poets are united (the *we* of poets) but they also fall asunder according to epoch-making (the old poets and the new poets). Nietzsche has shown in *Zarathustra* and elsewhere how all three and their problems are connected within the context of epoch-making. The poets of the future will have to attend to all three and their inter-connectedness.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it has been more than a century since Nietzsche created the character of Zarathustra, a new type of a poet, and placed him as the main character of the grand tragic spectacle of the epoch he envisioned. Since then there have been *spectators* who experienced the spectacle of Zarathustra attentively and recreated different forms of poetic philosophy. Since then the spectacle of Zarathustra has been unfolding in a variety of forms and artistic media, always ready for the attentive, creative spectator, to be experienced anew.



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