Zarathustra’s Lucid Dream, Zhuangzi’s Supreme Swindle, and the Emptiness of Emptiness: Resonances in Nietzsche’s Written and Painted Thoughts and Asian Philosophy

He who dreams of drinking wine may weep when morning comes; he who dreams of weeping may in the morning go off to hunt. While he is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he wakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe that they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things, calling this man ruler, that one herdsman—how dense! Confucius and you are both dreaming! And when I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. Words like these will be labeled the Supreme Swindle. Yet, after ten thousand generations, a great sage may appear who will know their meaning, and it will still be as though he appeared with astonishing speed. (Zhuangzi, Section 2: “Discussion on Making All Things Equal”)

Nietzsche comes on the scene of postmodern thought like Dionysus, in The Bacchae, entering Thebes. The tragic play begins with Dionysus announcing his identity. He has come to "reveal himself" to Pentheus and all of Thebes as "the god I really am." And yet Dionysus comes with his divine form exchanged for that of a mortal. That is, he comes masked. His identity is that of a masked god. Through the enigmatic mask his identity is both manifested and disguised.²

Nietzsche comes as the masked philosopher. His writings are full with the play of masks and veiled in their enigma. Nietzsche addresses his readers in different voices and tones and shifting glances, as if he is always on stage, wearing a constantly changing series of masks. On numerous occasions Nietzsche self-consciously draws attention to this mask play; and yet his stance toward the mask is marked by its own ambiguity. On the one hand, he simply seems to be emphasizing to the reader that any thinker of depth will remain masked due to shallow interpretations of his texts. “Everything profound loves a mask,” Nietzsche tells us; and then, a little further on, he will explain why: “Every profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually, owing to the constantly false, namely shallow, interpretation of every word, every step, every sign of life he gives” (BGE 40). Here it seems he is warning the reader not to stay at the surface, but to plumb the depths if one wants to understand anything at all profound. Such a stance might suggest that the mask is a result of misinterpretation, and thus, that interpretation aims at pulling away the mask and revealing the face, or the truth, beneath the appearance of the mask. Yet later on in the same text, in a passage in which Nietzsche reveals himself as the masked philosopher, he seems to call into question whether it is even possible to reveal what is behind the mask:

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² Jean-Pierre Vernant draws out the play of revealing and concealing in the mask of enigmatic god: "Dionysus wants to be seen to be a god, to be manifest to mortals as a god, to make himself known, to reveal himself, to be known, recognized, understood. This 'manifestness' that must, in certain conditions, be a feature of the god's presence, is expressed forcefully in the fourth stasimon by the chorus of Lydian women devotees, who first state their desire that justice should "be manifest (phaneros)" (993), then declare what is for them a matter of principle: 'My happiness depends upon pursuing what is great and manifest (phanera)" (1007). Next they proceed to invoke the Dionysus of epiphanies, calling upon the god to show himself too, to make himself manifest: 'Appear!'(phanethi) (1018). But Dionysus reveals himself by concealing himself, makes himself manifest by hiding himself from the eyes of all those who believe only in what they can see, in what is 'evident before their eyes,' as Pentheus himself puts it at line 501, when Dionysus is there before him, under his very nose, but invisible to him beneath his disguise. It is an epiphany alright, but of a god who is masked." Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 391.
The hermit does not believe that any philosopher—assuming that every philosopher was first of all a hermit—ever expressed his real and ultimate opinions in books: does one not write books precisely to conceal what one harbors? Indeed, he will doubt whether a philosopher could possibly have "ultimate and real" opinions, whether behind every one of his caves there is not, must not be, another deeper cave—a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abysmally deep ground behind every ground, under every attempt to furnish "grounds." Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy—that is a hermit's judgment: "There is something arbitrary in his stopping here to look back and look around, in his not digging deeper here but laying his spade aside; there is something suspicious about it." Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word also a mask. (BGE 289)

Nietzsche’s masquerade presents a considerable challenge to the reader: one knows that perhaps one should never, even when he appears to be most in straight face, take what he has to say at face value. If there is only another abysmally deep ground behind every ground, only another deeper cave behind every cave, only another mask behind the mask, and especially so for the hermit-philosopher, then one might wonder how it is even possible to heed this warning at the outset of Ecce Homo—that strange "autobiography" penned just prior to Nietzsche’s final collapse:

"Seeing that before long I must confront humanity with the most difficult demand ever made of it, it seems indispensable to me to say who I am. Really, one should know it, for I have not left myself "without testimony." But the disproportion between the greatness of my task and the smallness of my contemporaries has found expression in the fact that one has neither heard nor even seen me. I live on my own credit; it is perhaps a mere prejudice that I live.

I only need to speak with one of the "educated" who come to the Upper Engadine for the summer, and I am convinced that I do not live.

Under these circumstances I have a duty against which my habits, even more the pride of my instincts, revolt at bottom—namely, to say: Hear me! For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else! (EH, Preface 1)

If one understands Nietzsche’s fascination with masks, it is easy to see why this duty—to identify himself, to scream this warning to his readers not to mistake him for someone else—is so revolting to his habits, his usual mode of writing, and even more the pride of his instincts as a writer. But one might well ask, just how is one not to mistake Nietzsche for someone else if he is the masked philosopher? If there is only another mask behind the mask, and thus no unmasking of Nietzsche, the question arises how it can be said he has ever been mistaken for someone else. Yet surely we know how tragically he was mistaken for someone else. It is not surprising that many interpreters who wish to take Nietzsche seriously see their task as unmasking Nietzsche. Even Heidegger, whose own view of interpretation seems to call in question the very possibility of unmasking, seems to think he has unmasked Nietzsche, finding in his unpublished notes the masked philosopher offstage with the masks withdrawn and his philosophy proper revealed. Derrida,

3 W.D. Williams, for example, reads Nietzsche as "playing a game with the reader, forcing him not only to think about the subject under discussion but also to follow the elusive scent that is being laid and to attempt to discover the 'real' Nietzsche underneath the mask." W.D. Williams, "Nietzsche's Masks" Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought, ed. Malcom Pasley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 84.

4 It is well-known that the key to Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche in his massive four-volume Nietzsche critically turns on an unpublished note. In defending his focus upon the Nachlass Heidegger writes: "What Nietzsche himself published during his creative life was always foreground. . . . His philosophy proper was left behind as a posthumous, unpublished work." Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche. Volume One: The Will to Power as Art, translated by David F. Krell (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1979), p. 9. This is a translation of Heidegger's Nietzsche, Band I (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1961), pp. 11-254. Further references to this text will cite Nietzsche, I, followed by page number.
on the other hand, has a little fun with the seriousness of Heidegger’s insistence that he has unmasked Nietzsche in this unpublished note, absurdly drawing attention to the scribbled remark “I have forgotten my umbrella” in the margins of Nietzsche’s unpublished notebook. Derrida’s reading of Nietzsche, in which he says “there is no such thing either of the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche’s text” opens up a postmodern interpretation of Nietzsche in which Nietzsche is recognized as the masked philosopher, and the goal of unmasking, of ever revealing the true face behind the mask, is finally abandoned. 

Another way of approaching the postmodern reading of Nietzsche, or to see in what way Nietzsche opens up the scene of postmodern thought, is through the relationship between art and truth in Nietzsche’s thought. Since Plato, who would make kings of philosophers and exiles of artists, philosophers in the West have generally understood themselves to be occupying a higher, more exalted role than that reserved for artists. While the philosopher is dedicated to the serious task of discovering the truth, artists, consigned to the realm of mere appearance, can only play with fictions. Nietzsche’s response to Plato, and the tradition of Western philosophy which follows from Plato, is to suggest that the “philosophers of the future” will be those who recognize that philosophers are artists. Nietzsche’s celebration of art, and the philosopher as artist, certainly has its precedent in Romanticism, yet Nietzsche differs from his Romanticist forebears in rejecting the idea that art can provide the access to truth where reason had failed. Nietzsche’s thought is characterized instead, by what Heidegger referred to as a “raging discordance between art and truth.” Heidegger finds this discordance in the unpublished note in which he finds the key to Nietzsche’s philosophy. It is a late note, from the period in 1888 in which Nietzsche is writing Twilight of the Idols and thinking through the “History of an Error,” that extremely succinct synopsis of the history of Western metaphysics:

> Very early in life I took the question of the relation of art to truth seriously: even now I stand in holy dread in the face of this discordance. My first book was devoted to it. The Birth of Tragedy believes in art on the background of another belief—that it is not possible to live with truth, that the "will to truth" is already a symptom of degeneration. 

The discordance between art and truth is found in another note from the unpublished Nachlass: “art is worth more than truth” (WP 853); but it never rages more intensely, however, than in the remark, another unpublished late note Heidegger calls attention to, and which Erich Heller has described as "at once crystalline and tumultuous, brilliant and violent":

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6 Derrida, Spurs, p. 103. Charles Scott develops this reading: “The 'mask' does not suggest in Nietzsche's writing a deceptive countenance placed on a self-revealing identity. It is not an ontological opposite to 'ground' or to transcendental reality. It does not mean something that covers something else that is more basic but indicates rather the enigma and dissemblance of phenomena." Scott thus suggests "that one of Nietzsche's projects is to let the mask show itself as mask." Charles E. Scott, "The Mask of Nietzsche's Self-Overcoming," Nietzsche as Postmodernist, ed. Clayton Koelb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 217.

7 Chapter 19 of Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art bears the title “The Raging Discordance Between Art and Truth.” Heidegger, Nietzsche, I, p.142-150.

“For a philosopher to say 'the good and the beautiful are one' is infamy; if he goes on to add, 'also the true', one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly. We possess art lest we perish of the truth.”

The development of Nietzsche’s thought, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to the last writings, has been described as "a more and more radical meditation" on this thought that we have art lest we perish of the truth.9 That Heidegger finds Nietzsche standing in holy dread before this raging discordance between art and truth, not only during the writing of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but also at the end of his career, at the point where Nietzsche’s thought is “permeated by a new a singular brilliance,” is the reason for his judgement that the crisis of modernity, or nihilism, is not overcome even in Nietzsche’s mature thought.10

A discordance between art and truth certainly resounds throughout Nietzsche’s writings; but in the published writings, at least, we don’t always seem to find Nietzsche standing in holy dread before the discordance. One might even say the exuberance of *The Joyful Science* arises precisely as a result of, or out of, the discordance between art and truth. At the end of the preface, Nietzsche draws together his critique of the traditional notion of truth with his anticipation of an artistic philosophy of the future. The attitude is certainly not one which could be characterized as dread. Nietzsche seems instead to celebrate the recognition that philosophers are artists and even makes a bit of a risqué joke of the desire of philosophers to unmask or unveil the naked truth:

... And as for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths who endanger temples by night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. No, this bad taste, this will to truth, to "truth at any price," this youthful madness in the love of truth have lost their charm for us: for that we are too experienced, too serious, too merry, too burned, too profound . . . We no longer believe that truth remains truth when the veils are withdrawn; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, or to be present at everything, or to understand and "know" everything.

"Is it true that God is present everywhere?" a little girl asked her mother; "I think that's indecent"a hint for philosophers! One should have more respect for the modesty with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is to speak Greek *Baubo*?

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to *live*.* What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearances. Those Greeks were superficial *out of profundity*. And is not this precisely what we are again coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of present thought and looked around from up there we who have looked down from there? Are we not, precisely in this respect, Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, of words? And therefore—*artists*? (*JS*, Preface)

The philosophers of the future will be artists in that they no longer look for a truth without masks; they will have given up the youthful madness in the love of truth that once led philosophers to so impudently attempt to strip away the veils of appearance and reveal a truth without veils. Its not that Nietzsche denies that there is truth, its just that he reminds us—for the Greek word for truth, *ἀλήθεια*, is feminine—that truth is a woman. Twisting the literal meaning of the Greek, which is “to uncover or reveal,” Nietzsche suggests that perhaps this woman-truth does not let herself become unveiled. The philosophers of the future will have understood this, and thus they no longer believe that truth remains truth if one thinks one has unveiled her.

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9 "Wir haben die Kunst, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zu Grunde gehen" (WP 822; *KGW* VIII 3: 296).


In a parting shot to those philosophers who seek to strip away the veils and discover the naked truth, Nietzsche suggests that maybe her name—if she is to be named, this woman-truth—is Baubo. In Greek mythology Baubo is an old woman who exposes herself to Demeter in order to break the goddess from her mourning, which followed from the loss of her daughter Persephone. She is, however, also a goddess herself, perhaps of Egyptian origin, and always depicted in the Baubo figurines of Greek art as a woman exposing herself, and is perhaps even a personification of the fecundity of the female represented by the exposed vulva. In revealing the woman-truth an abyss opens up. The woman-truth is thus not something present, a presence which could serve as a ground, a solid foundation upon which to build an unshakeable edifice of knowledge. She is instead the very absence of ground. She is the abysmally deep ground which undermines every attempt to furnish grounds. She is what might be called the void or emptiness.

For those who have always sought the security of a solid ground in their truths, the spectacle of the yawning abyss can leave one whirling. This is exactly where Nietzsche sees humankind at the end of the “History of an Error” which is the history of Western thought since Plato. The crisis of modernity is an experience of vertigo. Nietzsche’s most well-known metaphor for this is, of course, the death of God:

What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we need to light lanterns in the morning? So we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. (JS 125)

The sun, of course, surely would be Plato’s sun, a metaphor for the form of the good, the final object of knowledge, the absolute truth that would be the ultimate ground. ‘God’ here is thus a metaphor for Plato’s truth. Since such a truth has become unbelievable to modern humans, God is dead and “we have killed him.” In Nietzsche’s late, unpublished writings he is focused intently on the crisis of modernity which follows in the wake of the death of God. In the preface to the magnum opus he would never finish, Nietzsche sees “our whole European culture” moving seemingly inexorably toward a catastrophe, the “advent of nihilism, which he foresees will be the “history of the next two centuries” (WP, Preface, 2). Certainly the tone here could be characterized as a kind of dread. But this tone only opens a work that was never finished, so we don’t know what tone the end of the work would have had.

If we return, however, to The Joyful Science we find a very different tone in a passage titled “the meaning of our cheerfulness.” Nietzsche is commenting on the event of the ‘death of God,’ an event in which “some sun seems to have set” and the tone certainly seems dire enough at first:

Much less may one suppose that many people know as yet what this event really means—and how much must collapse now that this faith has been undermined because it was built upon this faith, propped up by it, grown into it; for example, the whole of our European morality. This long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm that is now impending—who could guess

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12 Baubo: A primitive and obscene female demon; according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, originally a personification of the female genitals. “At that time Eleusis was inhabited by aborigines, whose names were Baubo, Dysaules, Triptolemus, and also Eumolpus and Eubouleus. Triptolemus was a herdsman, Eumolpus a shepherd, and Eubouleus and swineherd. These were progenitors of the Eumolpidae and of the Heracles, who form the priestly [hierophantic] clan at Athens. But to continue; for I will not forfear to tell the rest of the story. Baubo, having received Demeter as a guest, offers her a draught of wine and meal. She declines to take it, being unwilling to drink on account of her mourning. Baubo is deeply hurt, thinking she has been slighted, and thereupon uncovers her secret parts and exhibits them to the goddess. Demeter is pleased at the sight, and now at least receives the draught,—delighted by the spectacle!” Clement of Alexandria. Translated by Butterworth, G W. Loeb Classical Library Volume 92. (Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press. 1919). p. ?
enough of it today to be compelled to play the teacher and advance proclaimer of this monstrous logic of terror, the prophet of a gloom and an eclipse of the sun whose like has probably never yet occurred on earth?

On the one hand, Nietzsche sees that the eclipse of Plato’s sun will lead to an unprecedented crisis—the very foundation of the “whole of our European morality” will be undermined. Toward the end of the passage, however, the tone of the writer changes quite dramatically. Instead of being overcome with dread, Nietzsche finds the consequences of the death of God to be “not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn.” At the end the tone is cheerful, looking forward to the future, even if there are dark clouds on the horizon:

Indeed, we philosophers and "free spirits" feel, when we hear the news that "the old god is dead," as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, our sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an "open sea."— (JS 343)

Why is there this cheerfulness in the face of the oncoming storm? On the one hand, while the eclipse of the notion of a truth without veils may undermine the traditional foundation of both knowledge and morality, it also liberates the philosopher to be free to experiment in thinking. Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future will have abandoned the Cartesian quest for certainty, the whole attempt to establish some solid ground for knowledge and morality which has driven the history of modern philosophy. Nietzsche sees the philosophers of the future as seafarers, risking the dangers of the open sea. In one of Nietzsche’s favorite word-plays, he ventures to baptize the philosophers of the future with the name Versucher. A Versuch is an attempt or an experiment, such as a Scientific experiment; a Versucher is thus an attempter or experimenter, but also a tempter. Nietzsche admits then that the “name itself is in the end a mere attempt (Versuch) and, if you will, a temptation (Versuchung)” (BGE, 42). Much of Nietzsche’s writings, perhaps all of it, has the tentative character of a thought experiment. It is often not clear whether the author even wants the reader to agree with him. Nietzsche once made this curious revelation in a letter: “It is not at all necessary or even desirable to side with me; on the contrary, a dose of curiosity . . . and an ironic resistance would be an incomparably more intelligent position to adopt.” (footnote) Nietzsche often tempts the reader with thought experiments which he acknowledges are not free of danger, and he leaves the reader with the freedom and the responsibility of deciding what to make of them.

This experimental, tentative and tempting character of Nietzsche’s philosophy of the future is connected with his perspectivism. Just after baptizing the philosophers of the future with the name that is “not free of danger” he raises the question of whether these philosophers of the future will still be friends of “truth.” He admits it is likely since “all philosophers so far have loved their truths.” These philosophers, however, will no longer think their truths are for everyone: "My judgment is my judgment": no one else is easily entitled to it—that is what such a philosopher of the future may perhaps say of himself. . . . (BGE, 43). Instead of claiming that they have discovered or revealed the truth—the naked truth, the undistorted objective truth that would be a truth for everyone—these philosophers will understand that there can only be a only a perspective truth. To think that one has somehow unearthed and revealed a truth that is not a perspective truth, a truth without veils, Nietzsche writes in The Joyful Science is the height of immodesty:

How far the perspective character of existence extends or indeed whether existence has any other character than this; whether existence without interpretation, without "sense," does not become "nonsense"; whether, on the other hand, all existence is not essentially actively engaged in interpretation that cannot be decided even by the most industrious and most scrupulously conscientious analysis and self-examination of the intellect; for in the course of this analysis the human intellect cannot avoid seeing itself in its own perspectives, and only in these. We cannot look around our own corner: it is a hopeless curiosity that wants to know what other kinds of intellects and perspectives there might be . . . But I should think that today we are at least far from the ridiculous
immodesty that would be involved in decreeing from our corner that perspectives are permitted only from this corner. Rather has the world become "infinite" for us all over again, inasmuch as we cannot reject the possibility that it may include infinite interpretations. (JS 374)

The modesty of Nietzsche’s perspectivism is, of course, connected with the theme of the woman-truth. In the opening to the preface to Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche explicitly connects his supposition that truth is a woman with perspectivism. The problem with dogmatic philosophers, Nietzsche explains, is that they just haven’t understood this woman-truth. Not understanding that perspectivism is a basic condition of life itself, these philosophers sought in their love of wisdom to possess a truth without veils, and they end up as lovesick suitors all depressed because the woman-truth has not allowed herself to be possessed:

Supposing truth is a woman—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they were dogmatists, have been very inexpert about women? That the gruesome seriousness, the clumsy obtrusiveness with which they have usually approached truth so far have been awkward and very improper methods for winning a woman’s heart? What is certain is that she has not allowed herself to be won—and today every kind of dogmatism is left standing dispirited and discouraged. If it is left standing at all! For there are scoffers who claim that it has fallen, that all dogmatism lies on the ground—even more, that all dogmatism is dying. . . .

Let us not be ungrateful to it, although it must certainly be conceded that the worst, most durable, and most dangerous of all errors so far was a dogmatist’s error—namely, Plato’s invention of the pure spirit and the good as such. But now that it is overcome, now that Europe is breathing freely again after this nightmare and at least can enjoy a healthier—sleep, we, whose task is wakefulness itself, are the heirs of all that strength which has been fostered by the fight against this error. To be sure, it meant standing truth on her head and denying perspective, the basic condition of all life, when one spoke of spirit and the good as Plato did. Indeed, as a physician one might ask: "How could the most beautiful growth of antiquity, Plato, contract such a disease? Did the wicked Socrates corrupt him after all? Could Socrates have been the corrupter of youth after all? And did he deserve his hemlock?" (Beyond Good and Evil, Preface)

There is, perhaps, more than a bit of irony here in Nietzsche’s joke at Socrates’ expense. While he indicts Socrates for corrupting Plato with the idea of an absolute truth, the modesty of Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future suggests maybe they are the ones who have finally grasped the point of the famous story Socrates recounts at the beginning of his trial about what the oracle at Delphi once said. Perhaps in having a better understanding of the woman-truth, Nietzsche’s philosophers of the future will be the ones who will have finally understood the oracle’s pronouncement that the true lover of wisdom is, like Socrates, the one who knows that wisdom cannot be possessed.

The crisis of modernity, the nihilism which seems to follow in the wake of the death of God, is, for Nietzsche, a symptom of a lovesickness which has plagued all lovers of wisdom since Plato. How will the philosophers of the future have overcome this lovesickness? One answer is to say that the remedy for this lovesickness is art—we have art lest we perish of the truth.13 The philosophers of the future will have gotten over this lovesickness because they understand that they are artists. In the closing aphorism of Beyond Good and Evil, a book which contains some of Nietzsche’s most dangerous thought experiments, the author turns to address what he has just written:

Alas, what are you after all, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young, and malicious, full of thorns and secret spices—you made me sneeze and laugh—and now? You have already taken off your novelty, and some of you are ready, I fear, to become truths: they already look so immortal, so pathetically decent, so dull! And has it ever been different? What things do we copy, writing and painting, we mandarins

13 In summing up his treatment of Nietzsche, Richard Schacht observes that "of all the points he seeks to make none is of greater interest and importance than his contention that art is the clue and key to the possibility of discovering a way beyond nihilism." Richard Schacht, Nietzsche (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 529.
with Chinese brushes, we immortalizers of things that can be written—what are the only things we are able to paint? Alas, always only what is on the verge of withering and losing its fragrance! Alas, always only storms that are passing, exhausted, and feelings that are autumnal and yellow! Alas, always only birds that grew weary of flying and flew astray and now can be caught by hand—by our hand! We immortalize what cannot live and fly much longer—only weary and mellow things! And it is only your afternoon, you, my written and painted thoughts, for which alone I have colors, many colors perhaps, many motley caresses and fifty yellows and browns and greens and reds: but nobody will guess from that how you looked in your morning, you sudden sparks and wonders of my solitude, you my old beloved—wicked thoughts! (BGE 296)

Nietzsche’s closing address to his written and painted thoughts is something of a lament. He fears that what he has written, some of his written and painted thoughts anyway, may become truths. As truths they may gain immortality, but at the cost of becoming pathetically decent and dull. Perhaps most lamentable of all, no longer would they make one laugh. By the time they become truths they will be as dead as the moon. The embalmers will have to be summoned. As truths his written and painted thoughts face mummification. In Twilight of the Idols Nietzsche comments on the “Egypticism" of philosophers:

They think that they show their respect for a subject when they de-historicize it, sub specie aeterni—when they turn it into a mummy. All that philosophers have handled for thousands of years have been concept-mummies; nothing real escaped their grasp alive. When these honorable idolaters of concepts worship something, they kill it and stuff it; they threaten the life of everything they worship. (TI 3.1)

The problem Nietzsche sees, however, is that there seems to be something unavoidable about this process of ossification. Something about writing, or about language itself, determines that it has always been this way. Nothing alive survives the passage from thought to inscription. All that can be captured in writing are birds weary of flying, storms already spent—only what is withered and faded, what is afternoon and thus ready to go under like the sun. As a result of this problem with writing it may be the case, Nietzsche laments, that philosophers can never be anything more than mandarins with Chinese brushes.

The imagery of Nietzsche’s lament echoes a number of themes in Plato’s texts and thus recalls a certain chain of significations that have determined the understanding of philosophy and of the philosopher’s text in the West since Plato. There is, first of all, the simile in the Theaetetus in which Socrates describes the possession of knowledge to be like capturing birds and keeping them in an aviary. Nietzsche’s lament suggests that the only birds that can be caught by our hand, and through our hand put into writing, are those that are weary of flying and have not long to live. The

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14 “Now consider whether knowledge is a thing you can possess in that way without having it about you, like a man who has caught some wild birds—pigeons or what not—and keeps them in an aviary he has made for them at home." Plato, Theaetetus 197c. The translations to Plato’s dialogues to which I will refer is The Collected Dialogues of Plato (ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns), Bollingen Series LXXI (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961). The dialogues have been translated by the following: R. Hackforth (Phaedrus); Paul Shorey (Republic); F.M. Cornford (Theaetetus). Nietzsche's lament that writing can not capture the living but only birds weary of flying would only echo the condemnation of writing in Plato. Nietzsche had elsewhere made use of the same metaphor to a similar effect: "I caught this insight on the way and quickly seized the rather poor words that were closest to hand to pin it down lest it fly away again. And now it has died of these arid words and shakes and flaps in them—and I hardly know any more when I look at it how I could ever have felt so happy when I caught this bird" (JS 298). Note Graham Parkes' consideration of these allusions in his treatment of Nietzsche's psychology in Graham Parkes, Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 216-217.
philosopher’s text which would hold these captured birds turns out to be not an aviary but a mausoleum.

This link between writing and death also recalls Plato’s condemnation of writing in favor of speech in the Phaedrus. It is here, too, where writing is explicitly connected with painting, and thus with art in Plato’s text. In his well known deconstruction of the Platonic opposition that debases writing in favor of speech, Derrida draws together these various themes and thus suggests a possible reading of Nietzsche’s parting address to his written and painted thoughts. Derrida’s text is woven around the play of the pharmakon that goes on in the back room of “Plato’s pharmacy,” the place in the Phaedrus where Socrates tells the story of the myth of Theuth, the Egyptian myth which recounts the origin of writing.\(^\text{15}\) Writing is condemned in the Phaedrus because it is a pharmakon, a word that is often mistranslated, as Derrida points out, in that in the original it contains both the sense of "remedy" and "poison." In the myth, Theuth, the inventor and god of writing, presents to Thamus, the king, the god of gods, the gift of writing, a “recipe (pharmakon) for memory and wisdom" which Theuth promises “will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories” (Phaedrus 274e). The king, however, rejects the gift because he recognizes in it a poisoned present, “a recipe (pharmakon) not for memory, but for reminder” which would plant forgetfulness in the soul, leading men to have not wisdom, but the “conceit of wisdom” (Phaedrus 275a-b). Writing is rejected by the king because of an inherent dangerousness that can be attributed to its pharmaceutical operation, its double nature, its undecidability that subverts the logic of identity upon which the hierarchy of oppositions depends. Derrida’s strategy in deconstructing Plato’s condemnation of writing involves suggesting how Plato’s text is caught up in the play of the pharmakon and thus cannot escape its effects. Even as he opposes the pharmakon of writing, Socrates, “he who does not write,” is also master of the pharmakon.\(^\text{16}\)

Writing and painting are linked in Plato’s text through the pharmakon. Derrida points out that not only is writing explicitly identified as a pharmakon in the Phaedrus, but that elsewhere the painter’s colors are called pharmaka (Republic 420c).\(^\text{17}\) After recalling the myth of Theuth, Socrates, the pharmacist in the back room of the pharmacy, then draws this analogy between writing and painting:

> You know, Phaedrus, that's the strange thing about writing, which makes it truly analogous to painting. The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though

\(^{15}\) The deconstruction of Platonism is already at work in Plato's text, as Derrida’s title, “La pharmacie de Platon,” playfully suggests, since the condemnation of writing takes place in "Plato's Pharmacy," that is, since the condemnation of writing also relies upon the pharmakon and thus cannot escape its effects. This all goes on in the "back room" of the pharmacy in the sense that, on the one hand, Derrida focuses on the "myth of Theuth" recounted at the end of the Phaedrus, a myth regarded by traditional interpretations as extraneous to the main argument of the dialogue, and thus relegated, so to speak, to the "back room" of the pharmacy. But there is also the further sense in that, for Derrida, it is explicitly "in the back room, in the shadows of the pharmacy, prior to the oppositions between conscious and unconscious, freedom and constraint, voluntary and involuntary, speech and language, that these textual 'operations' occur." Jacques Derrida, La dissemination (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972), 69-198; English translation: "Plato's Pharmacy," in Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 61-171, 129.

\(^{16}\) Derrida suggests that behind the portrait of Eros in the Symposium one can make out the face of Socrates, the face of a pharmakeus (magician). "Plato's Pharmacy," 117. In a more radical move, Derrida then connects Socrates to the pharmakos, a sorcerer or even the "scapegoat." Derrida's suggestion, perhaps something of a little joke, challenges the very notion of the "text" since pharmakos is not a word Plato actually used and is thus supposedly "outside" of Plato's text. Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 128-134.

\(^{17}\) Derrida further points out that in Greek, "pharmakon also means to paint, not a natural color but an artificial tint, a chemical dye that imitates the chromatic scale given in nature." Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 129.

Derrida further draws the connection between the pharmakon of writing and painting and the mask: "The magic of writing and painting is like a cosmetic concealing the dead under the appearance of the living. The pharmakon introduces and harbors death. It makes the corpse presentable, masks it, makes it up, perfumes it with its essence, as it is said in Aeschylus. Pharmakon is also a word for perfume. A perfume without essence, as we earlier called it a drug without substance." Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 142.

For Derrida the pharmakon has this effect: “It transforms order into ornament, the cosmos into a cosmetic. Death, masks, makeup, all are part of the festival that subverts the order of the city, its smooth regulation by the dialectician and the science of being. Plato, as we shall see, is not long in identifying writing with festivity. And play. A certain festival, a certain game.” Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 142.
tragedy is born from the mysterious coupling of two completely opposed art impulses
the Apollonian and Dionysian

Apollonian as the impulse to impose order upon chaos
the sculptor imposing form out of the uncarved block
the principle of identity, individuation
all our attempts to make sense of existence are the products of this Apollonian drive

the world as representation
as appearance

beautiful illusions
the shining of dreams

Dionysian as the movement of ecstasy which subverts identity
Dionysus as the masked god
a doubled identity

that which is revealed behind Apollonian veils
not a ground but an abyss, an abysmal ground
emptiness
reveals the veil as veil
and the shining of the dream as dream

tragedy bring together both movements
the Apollonian dreaming
the ability to impose order, interpret existence
and the Dionysian experience
which enables one to recognize that one is dreaming
and still continue the dream

the lucid dream

philosophers who think they have revealed the naked truth
are like dreamers who don’t know they are dreaming
in recognizing that their truths are only perspective truths
products of the drive to interpret and make sense of existence
the philosophers of the future
are like dreamers who have woken up to the fact that they’re dreaming

to the controversy surrounding postmodern thought
like that concerning the figure of Dionysus in the Bacchae
Zhuangzi and the Supreme Swindle
part of critique of language
critique of the Confucian and Mohist dispute concerning the *dao*
the problem with words
*dao* cannot be named

*Daodejing*
*wuming*
emptiness
the female
the uncarved block

Nagarjuna and the emptiness of emptiness
emptiness is the absence of inherent existence
of separate identity
not nihilistic nothingness

the problem of suffering

*Zarathustra’s lucid dream*
eternal recurrence and the bodhisattva vow