Antichrist Psychonaut: Nietzsche and Psychedelics

– Peter Sjöstedt-H –

'… And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.'

So ends the famous fragment of *Kubla Khan* by the Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He tells us that the poem was an immediate transcription of an opium-induced dream he experienced in 1797. As is known, the Romantic poets and their kin were inspired by the use of psychoactive substances such as opium, the old world's common pain reliever. Pain elimination is its negative advantage, but its positive attribute lies in the psychedelic ('mind-revealing')[1] state it can engender – a state described no better than by the original English opium eater himself, Thomas De Quincey:

> O just and righteous opium! … thou bildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples, beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles – beyond the splendours of Babylon and Hekatómpylos; and, "from the anarchy of dreaming sleep," callest into sunny light the faces of long-buried beauties … thou hast the keys of Paradise, O just, subtle, and mighty opium![2]

Two decades following the publication of these words the First Opium War commences (1839) in which China is martially punished for trying to hinder the British trade of opium to the Chinese people. Though opium, derived from the innocent garden poppy *Papavar somniferum*, may cradle the keys to Paradise it also clutches the keys to Perdition: its addictive thus potentially ruinous nature is commonly known. Today, partly for these reasons, opiates are mostly illegal without license – stringently so in their most potent forms of morphine and heroin.

Holy dread: the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche took opium, this milk of Paradise, sometimes confessedly in dangerously high doses. He was also a heavy user of other psychoactive drugs including potassium bromide, a mysterious 'Javanese narcotic', and most unremittingly, chloral hydrate, a known hallucinogen. This narcotic aspect of Nietzsche's life is neglected; it is the aim of this text to reveal the extent of his drug use and its effects, including a report of one of Nietzsche's psychedelic trips. Moreover we shall see how this drug use inspired his philosophy – and how his philosophy inspired this use.

Nietzsche was born in 1844 to a Lutheran pastor who died five years thereafter, at the age of thirty-six, due to a 'softening of the brain'. This fatal malady of his father's was to worry Nietzsche, as a possible hereditary condition, until his own mental collapse in 1889. Friedrich Nietzsche did suffer severe afflictions of the brain and body, beginning in childhood. At the age of thirteen, the severe headaches which were to plague him for the rest of his life began in earnest.[3] So strong were these headaches that near to a whole school semester was lost as the young pupil was prevented from excessive reading by his mother. However, as a bright student, the young Nietzsche surged on and was awarded a place at Schulpforta, a boarding

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[1] 'Psychedelic' is a term coined in 1957 by psychiatrist Dr Humphry Osmond to emphasise the psychotherapeutic value of certain psychoactive drugs, notably LSD. The etymological conjuncts are *psyche* (mind) and *dēloun* (to reveal), the latter from *dēlos* (visible, clear). I use the term 'psychedelic' broadly in this text to refer to a chemically-induced state of mind that brings forth extraordinary representations.

[2] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, pleasures, p. 195. 1821AD.

[3] Curtis Cate, p. 13.

school renowned for its classical studies. Nietzsche wore spectacles as he was very myopic even at this early stage. A doctor in the school once examined his eyes and called attention to the possibility that Nietzsche may go blind at an advanced age.[4] This foresight virtually bore reality, with Nietzsche complaining that in 1879, 'in the thirty-sixth year of life, I arrived at the lowest point of my vitality – I still lived, but without being able to see three paces in front of me.'[5] As Nietzsche's mother, sister, and others believed[6], it was his poor eyesight combined with his lust for reading that caused his initial migraines. To counter the pain, Nietzsche eventually turned to drugs. This in its turn may have exacerbated the problem due to the toxicity, addiction, and withdrawal symptoms those nineteenth century drugs produced.

Nietzsche experimented with drugs early on in life. At the beginning of the 1860s, in Schulpforta, he snorted prohibited *snuff* with his fellow pupil Paul Deussen,[7] and in his fifth year he joined the 'Wild Clique': a fraternal club that endorsed smoking and drinking and spurned studiousness. Nietzsche, however, came to scorn *alcohol* but not before he was demoted from his years-long supervisory position as head of class due to an incident of excessive drinking.[8]

Whilst a student of philology at Leipzig University in 1868, Nietzsche took time out to join the Prussian military machine, training on horseback. As the best rider of the new recruits, he was given the wildest steed to tame. The steed, however, was not for taming: a jump caused Nietzsche a grievous blow to the chest as it cracked into the pommel of the saddle. Ten days of acute pain were relieved by *morphine*.[9]

In 1869, at the mere age of twenty-four, Nietzsche is appointed chair of classical philology at Basel University[10] a month before he is awarded his doctorate (from Leipzig) – awarded, furthermore, without examination. A year later Nietzsche takes leave of his position to serve as a medic in the Franco-Prussian War. He is taught how to administer *chloroform* – a popular anesthetic at the time. After chloroform's discovery in 1831 it was also used recreationally as it produced euphoria. Euphoria, however, was the furthest state of Nietzsche's mind as he treated the war wounded, a depressing mental state that could only have worsened as he himself became ill there. As Nietzsche writes to his friend Karl von Gersdorff:

> I fell very ill myself and quickly developed a severe attack of dysentery and diphtheria. … After I had been dosed with *opium* and injections of *tannin* and *silver nitrate* for several days, the worst danger was over.[11]

As well as contracting these intestinal, bacterial diseases, it is believed that he may have caught syphilis here too, if not in a brothel a few years before. It is a matter of (much) dispute as to whether Nietzsche's general malaise and cognitive downfall in 1889 was caused by this mostly sexually transmitted bacterial infection. As we have seen, however, his headaches had started from a young age, and his father may have passed the problem down to his son. Whatever the case may be, Nietzsche's suffering only increased after 1870 leading to increased drug use to ease the pain. But it was more than pain relief that the drugs caused.

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[4] Paul Deussen, 1859-1864. *Conversations with Nietzsche*, p. 15.
[5] *Ecce Homo*, Wise, §1, p. 38.
[6] Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *The Life of Nietzsche*, vol. II, ch. XXVII.
[7] Paul Deussen, 1859-1864. *Conversations with Nietzsche*, p.10.
[8] Paul Deussen, 1859-1864. *Conversations with Nietzsche*, p.15.
[9] Letter to Erwin Rohde, 3rd April 1868.
[10] Incidentally where Paracelsus is believed to have re-introduced opium (as Laudanum) to Europe in the sixteenth century.
[11] Letter to Karl von Gersdorff, 20th October 1870. My italics.

Before Nietzsche had become a professor at Basel, he had become an ardent disciple of the atheist, Idealist philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. In a sentence, Schopenhauer asserted that the world we perceive is but a human *representation* of the inner essence of everything, which is *will*. Schopenhauer inspired Nietzsche's first published book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, and he arguably returned as inspiration for Nietzsche's later works. As a highly creative individual, Nietzsche could not have overlooked these words from Schopenhauer:

> By wine or opium we can intensify and considerably heighten our mental powers, but as soon as the right measure of stimulus is exceeded, the effect will be exactly the opposite.[12]

The double role of opium as a medicinal sedative and as an intellectual, artistic catalyst was well known, and Nietzsche was certainly well aware of the creative possibilities of such substances. In his 1870 essay *The Dionysian Worldview*, a precursor to the extended *Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche begins by stating that,

> There are two states in which man arrives at the rapturous feeling of existence, namely in dreaming and in intoxication.[13]

He then identifies these two states with the gods Apollo and Dionysus, respectively. Loosely speaking, these are in turn identified with Schopenhauer's world of representation and of will. Apollo, commonly adorned with the opium poppy, is valued as signifying ordered beauty, whereas Dionysus, the forest god of wine and trance, is valued as signifying the chaotic drive of unfettered lust and the primal loss of self. In antiquity, Dionysus was regarded as an exotic god who led a procession of bearded satyrs and wild women: the *maenads*. There were a number of Dionysian cults in ancient Greece involving much sex, drugs and loss of control – later to become the orgiastic *Bacchanalia* against which the Roman authorities legislated under threat of death. Under his supposed epithet of *Iacchus*, Dionysus is also closely associated with the *Eleusinian Mysteries*, beloved of those in psychedelic circles. The son of Zeus, Dionysus is reborn after death – a story that bears equivalences to Christ. In Nietzsche's later works, however, Dionysus becomes explicitly equated to the Antichrist, as we shall show. In Nietzsche's early description of the Dionysian state, one cannot help but compare it to a psychoactive drug report with its consequential come down:

> For the rapture of the Dionysian state with its annihilation of the ordinary bounds and limits of existence contains, while it lasts, a [will-less] lethargic element in which all personal experience of the past became immersed. This chasm of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday reality and the Dionysian reality. But as soon as this everyday reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such, with nausea: an ascetic, will-negating mood is the fruit of these states. … In the consciousness of awakening from intoxication he sees everywhere the terrible and absurd in human existence: it nauseates him. Now he understands the wisdom of the forest god.[14]

The link between his coinciding opium-treated illnesses in the Franco-Prussian war and his work on Greek tragedy cannot be overlooked. Indeed Nietzsche made the connection in the later critical preface/postscript he produced for his first book, stating that,

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[12] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essay on the Freedom of the Will*, ch. III.
[13] *The Dionysian Worldview, §1.*
[14] *The Dionysian Worldview, §3.*

> slowly convalescing from an illness contracted in the field, [I] gave definite form to *The Birth of Tragedy*…[15]

This book puts forward the theory that the origins of Greek tragedy lie in the Dionysian chorus that emerged from the older Dionysian mystical festivals. When fused with the more ordered Apollonian Greek element, the play structure resulted, with Dionysus at first always the tragic protagonist. The true Dionysian state that the tragic play sought to symbolize was one of rapture, of *Rausch*: the rush of intoxication. Thus Nietzsche begins his philosophical career arguing for the emergence of an art form, Tragedy, from intoxicated inspiration. Nietzsche's understanding of this state is gleaned from literature including that of Schopenhauer, and perhaps his own intoxication at the time. Schopenhauer argued that all individuality is but a representation (the *principium individuationis*) and that in its essential depths, our individual will is not separate from the single universal will at the basis of reality. The Dionysian state causes a dread-inducing fragmentation of one's represented individuality, conducing a dispersion of oneself into that deeper metaphysical unity. Nietzsche continues,

> If we add to this dread the blissful ecstasy which, prompted by the same fragmentation of the *principium individuationis*, rises up from man's innermost core, indeed from nature, we are vouchsafed a glimpse into the nature of the Dionysiac, most immediately understandable to using the analogy of intoxication. Under the influence of the narcotic potion hymned by all primitive men and peoples, or in the powerful approach of spring, joyfully penetrating the whole of nature, those Dionysiac urges are awakened, and as they grow more intense, subjectivity becomes a complete forgetting of the self.[16]

In his later postscripted preface to the book, Nietzsche argues that this Dionysian 'madness' might be a 'neurosis of health' – that is, a *healthy madness* which would only appear to be an oxymoron to a culture in decline. In this added section he writes,

> Might visions and hallucinations not have been shared by whole communities, by whole cult gatherings? And what if … it was madness itself, to use a phrase of Plato's, that brought the greatest blessings upon Greece?[17]

Hence Nietzsche, from the outset, was enthused about narcotic, psychedelic intoxication and its value, whilst simultaneously he himself was becoming increasingly intoxicated as his illness progressed.

Progress it did: severe insomnia, stomach and intestinal pains, eyestrain and increasing blindness creeps up upon his person. In 1876 he is granted a long period of absence from Basel due to his sickness. Many of his personal letters complain of his ailments, to the extent that one judges him to be a 'justified hypochondriac', if that also be not an oxymoron. In 1879 he was forced to completely end his professorship and life at Basel University due to frequent and excessive headaches, nausea, vomiting and seizures.[18] As a result, Nietzsche was now free to pursue an unlimited life of philosophy, which had progressively become his ideal.

Though he left, his ailments did not. The beginning of the 1880s were in fact his most intense period of pain. As well as suffering physiologically, he was saddened by the loss of his friendship with Lou Salomé and Paul Rée. Just before he begins to write what he considered

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[15] *The Birth of Tragedy, Attempt at a Self-Criticism*, §1, p. 3.
[16] *The Birth of Tragedy*, §1, pp. 16-17.
[17] *The Birth of Tragedy, Attempt at a Self-Criticism*, §4, pp. 6-7.
[18] See Curtis Cate, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, p. 280.

to be his masterpiece, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,[19] he writes to his two formerly close friends the following:

> My dears, Lou and Rée:
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> … Consider me, the two of you, as a semilunatic with a sore head who has been totally bewildered by long solitude. To this, I think, sensible insight into the state of things I have come after taking a huge dose of opium – in desperation. But instead of losing my reason as a result, I seem at last to have *come* to reason. …[20]

Over a decade later Lou Salomé writes in her book, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken*, that intoxication and dreams were a central inspiration to Nietzsche's life and philosophy. She writes,

> Nietzsche … was convinced that especially during conditions of intoxication and dream, a fullness of the past could be revived in the individual's present. Dreams always played a great role in his life and thinking, and during his last years he often drew from them – as with the solution of a riddle – the contents of his teachings. In this manner he employed, for instance, the dream related in Zarathustra (II, "The Soothsayer"), which came to him in the fall of 1882 in Leipzig; he never tired of carrying it about him and interpreting it.[21]

With his concurrent opium use one can compare the inspiration derived from such opium-induced dreaming with that of the Romantics, to whom Nietzsche was ostensibly averse. Nietzsche was also, famously, averse to *alcohol* – which he compared unfavourably to opiates in his 1882 book, *The Joyous Science*:

> Perhaps Asians are distinguished above Europeans by a capacity for longer, deeper calm; even their opiates have a slow effect and require patience, as opposed to the disgusting suddenness of the European poison, alcohol.[22]

The reverence and inspiration that Nietzsche derives from opium can also be witnessed in the second edition of that same work, in two poems inspired by poppy-derived opium:

> … Only on my bed flailed,
> Poppy and good conscience, those
> Trusted soporifics, failed. …
>
> One hour passed, or two, or three–
> Or a year? – when suddenly
> All my thoughts and mind were drowned
> In timeless monotony:
> An abyss without a ground
> Opened up – not one more sound. …[23]

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[19] Published in January 1883.
[20] Letter to Lou Salomé and Paul Rée, mid-December 1882.
[21] Lou Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken,* ch. III, p. 144. Also note especially in *Zarathustra* these chapters: *Of Great Events*, the coffin-of-masks nightmare in *The Prophet*, *The Stillest Hour*, *Of The Three Evil Things*, and *The Intoxicated Song*.
[22] *The Joyous Science*, Book I, §43.
[23] *The Joyous Science,* Appendix, *The Mysterious Bark*, p. 359.

Such opium pipe-dream poetry ranks alongside those of the Kubla Khan clan. In a subsequent poem, Nietzsche poses the problem of his pain with provision of poppies:

> … Pain writes with daggers that are flying
> Into my bones:
> "World has no heart;
> The fool bears her a grudge and groans."
>
> Pour poppies, pour,
> O fever! Poison in my brain!
> You test my brow too long with pain.
> Why do you ask, "For what reward?" …
>
> You fever, I should bless?– [24]

Nietzsche's ills were treated by him as both a superficial curse and as a deeper blessing. It was the ailments that necessitated the opiates and other drugs, which in turn further inspired his thought. A physiologically healthy Nietzsche may have dissipated into the shadows of history. In this respect his drug use was a vital condition of his profound, earth-shattering philosophy which uncovered and uprooted the morbidly entrenched covert legacy of Christianity in western society.

Nietzsche pushed himself to, and perhaps beyond, the limits of human intellectualization. To fuel this heroic drive even opium-injected dreams may not have sufficed. As Lou Salomé, to whom Nietzsche twice proposed, continued to write in her biography of the man:

> And yet, the tranquil dream is insufficient for that quest. What is needed is a much more real, effective, and even more terrible experiencing, namely through orgiastic Dionysian conditions and the chaos of frenzied passions – yes madness itself as a means of sinking back down into the mass of entwined feelings and imaginings. This seemed for Nietzsche the last road into the primal depths imbedded within us.
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> Quite early Nietzsche had brooded over the meaning of madness as a possible source for knowledge and its inner sense that may have led the ancients to discern a sign of divine election.[25]

Did Nietzsche seek to induce divine madness so as to fully intuit the depths of the psyche? With this in mind, his famous maxim "What does not kill you makes you stronger"[26] takes on a form applicable to the intake of psychoactive substances. Did Nietzsche take hazardous mixes and doses of psychoactive drugs? Yes. It may have made his philosophy stronger, but it may have killed him as a philosopher too – this was certainly the view of his mother:

> He used all the sleeping medications that have ever been invented, said the professors. His worst one was chloral. That one practically killed him.[27]

Chloral, and its admixture with water, *chloral hydrate*, was a common sedative in the nineteenth century, now a controlled substance. More than opium, this drug appears to be

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[24] *The Joyous Science,* Appendix, *Rimus remedium*, p. 365.
[25] Lou Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken,* ch. III, p. 145.
[26] *Twilight of the Idols*, Maxims, §8, p. 33.
[27] 1893, as reported by Heinrich Lec in *Conversations with Nietzsche*, §75, p. 230.

Nietzsche's preferred poison. In a letter to his friend and former colleague, Franz Overbeck, he writes in 1883:

> I realized that in the last two months I have consumed 50 grams of chloral hydrate (pure). I never slept without this drug! But I have slept, now, after fourteen days in a row - oh what bliss![28]

In one of her biographies of her brother, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche – who at times took care of Nietzsche – remonstrates against his abuse of chloral:

> In the winter of 1882-3, owing to that terrible influenza, he had for the first time used chloral regularly, in large doses. He was so unfavourably impressed with its peculiar effects that in the spring of 1883 he did his best to cure himself of the habit. … [When] he took chloral before going to bed, it led next morning to a curiously excitable condition, in which men and things appeared to him in a totally false light. Towards noon, he thought, this condition vanished, and more "philanthropic sentiments" returned. Accordingly he had become very careful, although the sleep produced by chloral seems to have been remarkably pleasant – not dull and heavy but filled with delightful dreams. … If only he had kept to this one drug, however, the result might have been less serious.[29]

So his mother and sister both maintained that it was the effect of large doses and mixtures of drugs that brought Nietzsche his cognitive ruin, his madness.[30] Chloral hydrate was synthesised in 1832, and since 1869 had been used for hypnotic or sedative purposes, i.e. for sleep induction and pain relief. It is now known to be potentially hazardous with a risk of death in the case of intoxication. It is not commonly considered a psychedelic drug, yet it can produce visions and auditory 'hallucinations'.

One of Nietzsche's students reported that,

> Insomnia, which was not improved by repeated overwork, by *chloral* or *potassium bromide*, but made worse, excruciating headaches, and other neuralgic ailments tormented his life.[31]

Potassium bromide is an anticonvulsant (anti-seizure) and sedative drug, and is used today in veterinary practice, and in Germany is still administered to human beings. Nietzsche's dual use of chloral and potassium bromide is notable because it was this combination that led to the bewildering experiences of the English author Evelyn Waugh. These effects affected him to such a degree that they provide the content to his peculiar autobiographical work, *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold*. This concocted sleeping-draught caused auditory and conceptual hallucinations, often in a terrifying manner, with voices suggesting suicide. When Waugh was admitted to St Bartholomew's Hospital for treatment, his regular chloral was immediately withdrawn and replaced with paraldehyde, a move that immediately stopped the hallucinations.[32]

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[28] Letter to Franz Overbeck, 1st February 1883.
[29] Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *The Life of Nietzsche*, vol. II, ch. XXVII.
[30] His sister may have had an ulterior motive to promote this narcotic view of the cause of his madness: to dismiss claims that syphilis was to blame (see, e.g., E. F. Podach). But as we see, it was not only his sister who spoke of his excessive use of chloral – and besides, madness onset by ongoing drug abuse is hardly more respectable than student-era brothel debauchery.
[31] H. Göring, *Conversations with Nietzsche*, §38, p. 100. (My italics.)
[32] See Selina Hastings, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*.

The well-known neurologist Oliver Sacks has also written of the psychedelic experiences that chloral hydrate caused him:

> Depressed and insomniac, I was taking ever-increasing amounts of chloral hydrate to get to sleep, and was up to fifteen times the usual dose every night. … [But] for the first time in several months I went to bed without my usual knockout dose. … [Upon] waking , I found myself excruciatingly sensitive to sounds. … I went across the road, as I often did, for a cup of coffee and a sandwich. As I was stirring the coffee it suddenly turned green, then purple. I looked up, startled, and saw a huge proboscidean head, like an elephant seal. Panic seized me; I slammed a five-dollar note on the table and ran across the road to a bus on the other side. But all the passengers on the bus seemed to have smooth white heads like giant eggs, with huge glittering eyes like the faceted compound eyes of insects – their eyes seemed to move in sudden jerks, which increased the feeling of their fearfulness and alienness.[33]

In the end Sacks discovered that it was the fact that he had stopped taking chloral that caused the hallucinations, a case of *delirium tremens*. Thus we see that chloral hydrate is addictive, toxic, and directly and posteriorly hallucinatory. Taken in large doses and mixed with other drugs, the effects can only be potent. There is an account of a psychedelic experience Nietzsche had in mid-August 1884. His friend Resa von Schirnhofer decided to visit Nietzsche in Sils-Maria, Switzerland. After an absence of one and a half days, von Schirnhofer ventures to his house and is led into the dining room – then:

> As I stood waiting by the table, the door to the adjacent room on the right opened, and Nietzsche appeared. With a distraught expression on his pale face, he leaned wearily against the post of the half-opened door and immediately began to speak about the unbearableness of his ailment. He described to me how, when he closed his eyes, he saw an abundance of fantastic flowers, winding and intertwining, constantly growing and changing forms and colours in exotic luxuriance, sprouting one out of the other. "I never get any rest," he complained…[34]

Von Schirnhofer also tells of Nietzsche's unorthodox and deviant means of acquiring his drugs:

> In Rapallo and in other places of the Riviera di Levante, where he had spent his times of worst health, he had written for himself all kinds of prescriptions signed Dr Nietzsche, which had been prepared and filled without question or hesitation. Unfortunately I took no notes and the only one I remember is chloral hydrate. But since Nietzsche, as he expressly told me, had been surprised never to be asked whether he was a medical doctor authorized to prescribe this kind of medication, I conclude that some dubious medicines must have been among them.[35]

So Nietzsche, a user of the addictive substance opium since at least 1870, a heavy chloral hydrate user, and a proponent of the intoxicated Dionysian state, uses his doctoral title to prescribe himself the drugs he wants. If ever the term *drug fiend* were applied to a true philosopher, Nietzsche would fit the case. 'Psychonaut' certainly fits, a name coined by

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[33] Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations*, ch. VI, pp. 115-116.
[34] *Conversations with Nietzsche*, §52, p. 164.
[35] *Conversations with Nietzsche*, §52, p. 163.

philosopher Ernst Jünger,[36] whom Heidegger called 'the only genuine continuer of Nietzsche'.[37] Von Schirnhofer speculated over whether Nietzsche also used hashish, stating that his intensive reading of French authors must have included Charles Baudelaire who wrote of hashish and opium trances in *Artificial Paradises*, and in *The Flowers of Evil*.

In *Ecce Homo*, his autobiography, Nietzsche writes,

> If one wants to get free from an unendurable pressure one needs hashish. Very well, I needed Wagner.[38]

This suggests Nietzsche was not a hashish user, at least not a frequent one. But with Nietzsche's somewhat haughty position, his belief in a necessary 'pathos of distance'[39] between people, and his championing of great men of intellect and art, he must have felt endeared and perhaps tempted by Baudelaire's words on the drug:

> I am not asserting that hashish produces in all men all of the [fantastical] effects I have described here. I have more or less recounted the phenomena generally produced, except for a few variations, among individuals of artistic and philosophical bent. … But there are others in whom the drug raises only a raucous madness, a violent merriment resembling vertigo … [yet it can conduce] the extreme development of the poetic mind…[40]

Whether or not Nietzsche took hashish he certainly exhibited an extreme development of the poetic mind. In a passage in his autobiography, Nietzsche speaks of the singular, overwhelming type of inspiration with which he is bequeathed. Though he does not connect Nietzsche's 'inspiration' to his drug use, the Nietzsche biographer Curtis Cate asserts of this passage that 'his description of the hallucinating moments of inspiration during which he felt powerless and "possessed" merits a place in any good anthology of mystical experiences'.[41] When we consider the view that psychedelic experiences *are* mystical experiences, in the vein of William James' varieties thereof,[42] we can agree with this assessment. As we saw with Waugh and Sacks, chloral hydrate can cause auditory and visual hallucinations, a drug we know Nietzsche self-prescribed and used in high doses. It is highly plausible then that Nietzsche's 'inspiration' was drug-induced hallucination – and no less valuable for that. In fact, his revelations can be witnessed as testimony to the potential supreme value of psychedelic chemicals within the right mind:

> Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a distinct conception of what poets of strong ages called *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. The concept of revelation, in the sense that something suddenly, with unspeakable certainty and subtlety, becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes and overturns one to the depths, simply describes the fact. One hears, one does not seek; one takes, one does not ask who gives; a thought flashes up like lightning, with necessity, unfalteringly

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[36] See his *Annäherungen: Drogen und Rausch* (*Approaches to Drugs and Intoxication*), 1970. In Nietzsche's *Daybreak*, §575, he refers to himself as an '*aeronaut of the spirit*'.
[37] *Gesamtausgabe Band* 90, 227.
[38] *Ecce Homo*, Clever, §6.
[39] See *On the Genealogy of Morality*, bk I, §2.
[40] Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, On Wine and Hashish (1851), §V, p. 23.
[41] Curtis Cate, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, ch. 38, p. 541.
[42] See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ch. XVI.

> formed – I have never had any choice. An ecstasy whose tremendous tension sometimes discharges itself in a flood of tears, whilst one's steps now involuntarily rush along, now involuntarily lag; a complete being outside of oneself with the distinct consciousness of a multitude of subtle shudders and trickles down to one's toes; a depth of happiness in which the most painful and gloomy things appear … Everything is in the highest degree involuntary but takes place as in a tempest of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity. … This is *my* experience of inspiration; I do not doubt that one has to go back thousands of years to find anyone who could say to me "it is mine also".[43]

As Lou Salomé intimated, Nietzsche may have pushed himself to the edge of madness to overcome the common condition of man to taste divinity. Was it his psychedelic inspiration that caused both his psychological apotheosis and his physiological downfall? With regard to his downfall, his sister believed that,

> The correct diagnosis, perhaps, would be this: a brain exhausted by overstrain of the nerves of head and eye that could no longer resist taking drugs to excess, and thus became disabled.[44]

Nietzsche's infamous[45] sister also describes another drug that she blamed for his stroke into mental destruction in 1889: the *Javanese narcotic*:

> Above all I regard two sleeping draughts, chloral and Javanese narcotic, as responsible for his paralytic stroke … [In] 1884, so far as I remember, he got to know a Dutchman, who recommended him a Javanese narcotic, and presented him with a fairly large bottle … The stuff tasted like rather strong alcohol and had an outlandish smell … The Dutchman impressed us with the fact that only a few drops should be taken at a time in a glass of water. I tried it, and observed a somewhat exhilarating effect. … Later, in the autumn of 1885, he confessed to me that on one occasion he had taken a few drops too much, with the result that he suddenly threw himself to the ground in a fit of convulsive laughter. … During the early days of his insanity he used often to say in confidence to our mother that he "had taken twenty drops" (he did not mention of what), and that his brain had then "gone off the track." … Perhaps the worst of it all was that he used both chloral and the Javanese drug at the same time.[46]

The island of Java was part of the colonized Dutch East Indies. In 1875 coca plants were introduced to Java, eventually leading to the *Nederlandsche Cocaïne Fabriek* in 1900, the year of Nietzsche's death. The Javanese coca leaf was not as potent as its Peruvian sibling in Nietzsche's time, but it was cheaper.[47] The Javanese narcotic his sister spoke of thus likely

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[43] *Ecce Homo*, Zarathustra, §3. See also Nietzsche's description of a philosopher in *Beyond Good and Evil*, §292.
[44] Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *The Life of Nietzsche*, vol. II, ch. XXVII.
[45] Walter Benjamin sees the lady in this light in his own psychedelic *mescaline* experience: 'From the cracks of the Förster House grow tufts of hair. The Förster House: (she [Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche] has turned the Nietzsche Archive into a Förster House [forester's lodge]) the Förster house is of red stone.
I am a spindle in its banister: an obdurate, hardened post. But that is no longer the totem pole – only a wretched copy. Chamois' foot or horse's hoof of the devil: a vagina symbol.' (*On Hashish*, ch. XI, 22nd May 1934.)
[46] Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *The Life of Nietzsche*, vol. II, ch. XXVII.
[47] See Toine Pieters' *Java Coca and the Dutch Narcotics Industry: An Almost Forgotten 20th C. History of Drugs Story:* https://pointsadhsblog.wordpress.com/2012/12/10/java-coca-and-the-dutch-narcotics-industry-an-almost-forgotten-20th-c-history-of-drugs-story/

contained traces of *cocaine*, and possibly the assorted herbs of the traditional Indonesian healing concoction *Jamu*. It would be unconvincing that combining this combination with chloral, opium, potassium bromide, etc., would *not* lead to hallucinations, madness, mental breakdown, and apotheosis: Nietzsche signed off final letters of 1889 with the name Dionysus,[48] whom he had recently identified as the Antichrist:

> Who knows the true name of the Antichrist? – with the name of a Greek god: I called it the Dionysiac.[49]

In Nietzsche's mature work, Dionysus becomes the representation of the overman figure: a type that affirms and revels in pain and destruction, the polar contrary to the Christian type who only values joy in peace and comfort. In 1888 Nietzsche exclaims:

> Affirmation of life even in its strangest and sternest problems, the will to life rejoicing in its own inexhaustibility through the sacrifice of its highest types – that is what I called Dionysian … beyond pity and terror, to realize in oneself the eternal joy of becoming – that joy which also encompasses joy in destruction … I am the last disciple of the philosopher Dionysus.[50]

After *The Birth of Tragedy*, Dionysus returns to Nietzsche's philosophy in 1886 in *Beyond Good and Evil*. Now, rather than subservient to Schopenhauer's unwitting Christian values, Dionysus represents Nietzsche's radical revaluation of those values that lie hidden beneath western culture, and thus does Dionysus denote a new form of thinking – without doubt a dangerous form to many. In this extreme opposition to such sacerdotal ideology, one understands why Dionysus *is* the Antichrist, both of whom *are* Nietzsche. He is the Antichrist Psychonaut: his pagan philosopher forest god of intoxication *speaks* to him – perhaps in the mode of his aforementioned 'inspiration', or black revelation:

> "…I often think how I can help [mankind] go forward and make them stronger, deeper, and more evil than they are." "Stronger, deeper, and more evil?" I asked, frightened. "Yes," he said once again, "stronger, deeper, and more evil – more beautiful too." And at that the tempter god smiled his halcyon smile, as if he had just uttered a charming compliment.[51]

A new Dionysian cult based on Nietzsche's reformulation of the god might very well suffer the same capital jurisdictive fate as that which befell its Roman predecessors. Whatever the future yields, Nietzsche's philosophy will be a significant factor thereof. His philosophy has already, a century on, had a decisive impact upon history. That this philosophy was provoked, in a degree hitherto undiagnosed, by reveries occasioned by chemical measures exposes one to the realization of the great power of these substances, powers guiding history. Nietzsche risked himself, his sanity, his life, so to touch the heavens and taste the Hades of human mentality – he may thereby have destroyed himself. But destruction is a joy to Dionysus, a deity who shall be born again.

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[48] E.g. to Cosima Wagner: 'Ariadne, I love you. – Dionysus' (Early January, 1889). In *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295, (1886) Nietzsche writes, 'Dionysus … once said, "In certain cases I love human beings" (and he was alluding to Ariadne, who was present)…'

[49] *The Birth of Tragedy*, Attempt at a Self-Criticism, §5. 1886.

[50] *Twilight of the Idols,* Ancients, §5. A Dionysian will thus welcome the 'bad trip', and desire its eternal return.

[51] *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295.

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