



# WHO IS NIETZSCHE’S JESTER? OR BIRTHING COMEDY IN CAVE SHADOWS

**JAN GRESIL S. KAHAMBING**

LEYTE STATE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM

LEYTE STATE UNIVERSITY

vince\_jb7@hotmail.com

*This essay delves into Nietzsche’s understanding of the jester in Thus Spoke Zarathustra. I argue here that its existence explains the shifting ethos from tragedy to comedy. The jester in the societal context exhibits the figure of fictionalism that redirects reality into a detour of comic interplays. As such, he embodies fictional overcoming from the modern backdrop. I then employ On the Genealogy of Morals to explain further four principles that aid in taking into effect the birth of the jester. Nietzsche’s critique of morality attacks such principles as ressentiment, guilt and bad conscience taken together, free will, and ascetic ideal. Later, I present a way of going into the shadows as a manner of confronting the jester and overcoming it.*

Keywords: Nietzsche, Jester, Ascetic Ideal, Ressentiment, Comedy, Fictionalism, Overcoming, Shadows, Caves, Plato

**Dates:**

Received: May 18, 2020

Accepted: August 20, 2020

Published(Online): Sept. 30, 2020

**How to cite this article:**

Kahambing, Jan Gresil S., “Who is Nietzsche’s Jester? Or Birthing Comedy in Cave Shadows”, *Scientia* Vol 9 no. 2. (2020), p. 53-65.

**Copyright:**

Online: Asean Citation Index, DOAJ.

This work is licensed under the Creative Common Attribution License © 2020.

Print: Philippine Copyright © September 2020 San Beda University

**Read online**



Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online





## I. WHO IS NIETZSCHE'S JESTER?

In contextualizing modern culture and morality, Zarathustra says that 'only a fool: a fool would succeed (Nietzsche, 1969, IV, 5).'<sup>1</sup> This fool represents, in the early part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the last man or the jester/buffoon in the tower whose advocacy points to haste overcoming. As early as the prologue, Nietzsche introduces the tightrope walker as representative of humanity, i.e. as a rope over an abyss. Then the buffoon enters. Says Nietzsche,

...something happened that silenced every mouth and fixed every eye. In the meantime, of course, the tightrope walker had begun his work: he had emerged from a little door and was proceeding across the rope, which was stretched between two towers and thus hung over the people and the market square. Just as he had reached the middle of his course the little door opened again and a brightly-dressed fellow like a buffoon (jester) sprang out and followed the former with rapid steps. 'Forward, lame-foot!' cried his fearsome voice, 'forward sluggard, intruder, pallid-face! Lest I tickle you with my heels! What are you doing here between towers? You belong in the tower, you should be locked up, you are blocking the way of a better man than you!' And with each word he came nearer and neared to him: but when he was only a single pace behind him, there occurred the dreadful thing that silenced every mouth and fixed every eye: he emitted a cry like a devil and sprang over the man standing in his path. But the latter, when he saw his rival thus triumph, lost his head and the rope; he threw away his pole and fell, faster even than it, like a vortex of legs and arms. The market square and the people were like a sea in a storm: they flew apart in disorder, especially where the body would come crashing down (Nietzsche, 1969, prologue 6).

In this essay, the jester comically represents the figure of modernity who wants things fast: 'forward, lame-foot!' he says. But the jester also embodies the overcoming of man: 'you

are blocking the way of a better man than you!' Moreover, there is a difference in the manner this man overcomes. The way of the jester is comic (with the 'tickle'), carefree (outside the tower, in contrast to man whom he thinks belongs *in* the tower), and triumphant over man.

The figure of the jester, however, is an elusive figure due to its many faces and functions in the text. As such, there is a limitation in the hermeneutical ground where the jester dwells, layer after layer.

In Carl Jung's "Lecture VIII," on 27 June 1934<sup>2</sup>, he laid down the possible interpretations that provide insight into the metonymic character of Nietzsche's usage of terms in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Herein lies the possible allusions to the jester:

1. Nietzsche = Rope-dancer (tightrope-walker)
2. Zarathustra = Demon
  - a. Superman = Demon
  - b. Jester = Demon
  - c. Jester = Superman
  - d. Jester = Zarathustra
  - e. Jester = Shadow of Zarathustra
3. Jester = Shadow of Rope-dancer
  - a. Rope-dancer = Nietzsche
  - b. Jester = Shadow of Nietzsche
  - c. Jester = Shadow of Zarathustra
  - d. Nietzsche = Zarathustra

From the foregoing, the roles of the jester portray that of the demon, the *shadows* of the Rope-dancer, Nietzsche, and Zarathustra. But the roles here are interchangeable, so much so that the jester can be anyone and anyone can be

<sup>1</sup> A series of abbreviations are henceforth employed in this essay for Nietzsche's works: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (TSZ), *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM), *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT), *The Will to Power* (TWP), *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE), *The Gay Science* (GS), the *Antichrist* (A), *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (NCW).

<sup>2</sup> Carl Jung, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939*, vol. 1, (Routledge, December 2014), 130.



the jester. The jester thus can be Zarathustra or even the Superman whom Nietzsche presents as its antagonist. And because Nietzsche, for Jung, is Zarathustra, the Rope-dancer, it can be said that they are jesters too.

It is still imperative then to ask what the term “jester” means. In *The Jester and the Sages: Mark Twain in Conversation with Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx*, Carlstroem says that “he is so easily dismissed as a fool, his observations shrugged off as amusing but trivial, can say with near impunity what others are censured or marginalized for, his incisiveness protected by society’s deliberate underestimation.”<sup>3</sup> Something like this enables one to realize how downplayed the existence of the jester, almost as if it remains to be a *shadowy* figure: “amusing but trivial.” It is in this sense that Zarathustra is regarded as a jester: “They just look upon him as a strange jester, whose talk of the superman makes no sense.”<sup>4</sup> This is no surprise since “Zarathustra’s other prototype for such communication is, of course, the jester, who communicates through jokes or pranks (inversions, surprises, exaggerations, nonsense, puns and other wordplay, irony and parody), who appears most foolish when he is most serious, and vice versa.”<sup>5</sup> There is a certain take that Nietzsche here had in mind Shakespeare’s fools. But as is analogized, Zarathustra’s brand of overcoming and his teaching on the *Superman* are also elusive manifestations of a kind of *überwindung*.

Zarathustra using the same complex verb phrase (*hinwegspringen über* – ‘to spring over and away’) that was used in connection with the jester. Is Zarathustra also the jester? ... He must become the serious prankster, the one that gives to human under-going the meaning that is the sense of the earth. Since

the next section ends ‘Thus began Zarathustra’s going under’, we realise that he does not exempt himself from this leaping over.<sup>6</sup>

It is an initial contention therefore that this project of procuring the images of the jesters are part of what Nietzsche might include in his aphorism on *New Struggles* concerning the shadows of religious figures after the eventful death of God:

*New struggles.* – After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a *cave* – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead;\* but given the way of men, there may still be *caves* for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too (*Gay Science*, 108; Emphasis mine)

The shadow is the figure that remains extant, whose existence lingers to the future as it plays with the past and the present, even posthumously. In reading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, one should first take note that it is a book that has connotations of a contextual time after the death of God when Zarathustra, during his first down-going from his cave, announced it to the uninformed hermit. So it plays on the ruminations of overcoming after such death and in the struggle to replace God by becoming gods and the superman. Burnham and Jesinghausen expose this jester as more like a prankster (*Possenreißer*) or a buffoon: “the jester here is symbolic of the necessary or intrinsic vulnerability of those who attempt the dangerous across to the overhuman.”<sup>7</sup> But throughout the text, it becomes clear how the overcoming that is tied to the jester acquires different meanings:

The image of the jester becomes more complex: not only an image of vulnerability now, the jester (one who plays pranks or jokes) is now a metaphor for contingency or meaninglessness. It is not only the greatest dangers and most noble adversaries (or the devil) that bring down a human as he

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Carlstroem, “Conclusion,” in *The Jester and the Sages: Mark Twain in Conversation with Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2011, 135-136.

<sup>4</sup> T.K. Seung, *Nietzsche’s Epic of the Soul, Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Oxford: Lexington Books), 34.

<sup>5</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Burnham and Martin Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 2010, 25.



crosses to the overhuman; in its aimlessness, human existence can be derailed even by a foolish joke, a random bit of bad luck, and nothing more.<sup>8</sup>

Further, when an appeal to reason is hurled against determining the exact societal pathology of this figure, the reverting answer is a further appeal to Sebastian Brandt's *Stultifera Navis*: "the image of the jester becomes more complicated: being foolish is now a disguise or a form of self-defense." Like the ship of fools, Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* contends that this *fictitious* image determined the course of social inclusion and exclusion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries so that the fool is not just a solitary figure.<sup>9</sup> Says Foucault,

Renaissance men developed a delightful, yet horrible way of dealing with their mad denizens: they were put on a ship and entrusted to mariners because folly, water, and sea, as everyone then 'knew', had an affinity for each other. Thus, 'Ship of Fools' crisscrossed the sea and canals of Europe with their comic and pathetic cargo of souls. Some of them found pleasure and even a cure in the changing surroundings, in the isolation of being cast off, while others withdrew further, became worse, or died alone and away from their families. The cities and villages which had thus rid themselves of their crazed and crazy, could now take pleasure in watching the exciting sideshow when a ship full of foreign lunatics would dock at their harbors.<sup>10</sup>

Hence, what it further represents is no longer just a particular individual but a collective: "the jester here stands for the reactive wrath of the townspeople, the embodiment of their will to preservation."<sup>11</sup> What this essay seeks to portray is that the existence of the jester explains the shifting ethos from tragedy to comedy. The jester in the societal context exhibits a determination on the figure of *fictionalism* that, like a shadow, redirects reality into a detour of comic interplays.

<sup>8</sup> Burnham and Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Zita Turi, "Border Liners". The Ship of Fools Tradition in Sixteenth-Century England," in *TRANS – Revue de littérature générale et comparée*, (2010): <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.421>

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Vintage, 1989), vi.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

As such, he embodies fictional overcoming from the modern backdrop. What follows are concepts taken from *Genealogy of Morals* to trace from modernity four principles that give rise to the birth not of tragedy but comedy.

## II. THE BIRTH OF COMEDY: FOUR PRINCIPLES FROM MODERNITY

Looking into the life of the jester means viewing his *sitz-im-leben*. One can then surmise the representation that the backdrop happened in a time of recluse, away from suffering, away from tragedy. Modern consciousness fits this scene when it is replete with discoveries that seek comforts but also of follies – or full of nihilisms. Nihilism here becomes an expression of the culture of fictional hopes in modernity. Alexander Koyré describes such as a misplacing of himself as he "lost his place in the world, or more recently perhaps, lost the very world in which he was living and about which he was thinking, and had to transform and replace not only his fundamental concepts and attributes, but even the very framework of his thought."<sup>12</sup> In the *Antichrist*, Nietzsche says, "This modernity made us ill – this indolent peace, this cowardly compromise, the whole virtuous filth of the modern yes or no. There was a storm in our air, the nature that we are grew dark – *because we had no path* (I. 1)." Descartes accentuated this further in his way of overcoming that promises "absolute epistemic objectivity and ultimate foundations for knowledge from an ever more critical distance, as ideals which have run their course."<sup>13</sup> What has left of him? The abyss of reason's pride,

the procession of dominating ideologies and

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957), 2.

Cf. Aldo Tassi, "Modernity as the Transformation of Truth into Meaning," *Readings in Philosophy of Man*, Ateneo de Manila University, 1986, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Bordo, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*, (Albany, State University of New York Press: 1987), 2.





modern amplification of the daydreaming slave mentalities swept through his consciousness as though man wants to ‘let the cup pass over him’, the agony not only in the garden but in the world (in his fantasized world more specifically). This abyss of nihilism, after satisfying (or dissatisfying?) man’s hatred towards life, grabs him into inactivity, into disillusionment, into shrinking fear, misleads his path in life, and offers him nothing but vapidty. The modern man with his ambitious resolves to find meaning has found that he cannot control even the very condition that he is in. The overcoming for absolute standing does not find realization in this world since it remains only as fiction.

It is relevant in this light that Socrates and his scientism in proposing an aesthetic of existence also gave the effect of reducing tragedy into a dialectic of sorts. The faith in knowledge offered the tragedy of tragedy a “naively optimistic reliance upon the powers of rational knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> To this definitive effect,

What for Sophocles and Aeschylus were the tragic concerns of the individual and his heroic accommodation to a world of strife beyond his control, a world that embraced the human and divine orders, now became diminished to the field of dialectical argumentation.<sup>15</sup>

‘Life meant that we will all arrive at death’<sup>16</sup> is the pre-occupation (or fearful anticipation?) of man’s seeing through his being, which conjures the then fraudulence of manufacturing anti-aging tactics, energy-boosting-life-prolonging medications and so on, branded by the trademarks of deception, vanity, and cheating, in life. Nevertheless, while others think they can

cheat it, some wish terribly as Silenus’ wisdom:

<sup>14</sup> David Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and On the Genealogy of Morals*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 59

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> TWP, 20. This is indeed the same nihilistic question, “for what?”

“Not to be born is best, the next best thing by far is to go back - back where we came from, quickly as we can.”<sup>17</sup> We have then, on the one hand, a blind optimism<sup>18</sup>, as seeing the necessary transport of life’s tragedy to comedy by fantasizing Descartes’ *cogito*, and on the other hand, a suicidal pessimism<sup>19</sup>, as seeing Schopenhauer’s *resignation*<sup>20</sup> of furthering life. In other words, man as the rope in between, as a necessary balance of dispositions, caught himself in this age of shadows: in between living life through fantasy formations in false optimism or succumbing to his nihilistic culture and thus to open his shrinkage to despair.

However, Nietzsche sees the creativity of man in moving on. In effect, the jester chooses blind optimism and conjectures an overcoming of himself to live – he has to fictionalize something. Thus, because man avoids the conditions of suffering in life, he tends to let the jester out of him and fictionalizes an overcoming that can both be realizable and has value but remains *unconditional* and *other-worldly*. There is then a difference between a conditional overcoming that is set within the frame of reality and an unconditional overcoming that sets its grounds elsewhere but the jester thinks of it as the “true reality.” Nietzsche’s Zarathustra speaks of the tone of horror and suffering<sup>21</sup>, but the jester as the collective does not listen and drives him away; the herd drives him away:

<sup>17</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, lines 1388-91 (1982, 358), cf. *BT*, trans. Fadiman, 8, “What is best of all is beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you, is quickly to die.” As referred by Dienstag, Joshua Foa, *Nietzsche’s Dionysian Pessimism*, the American Political Science Review, Vol. 95, No. 4 (Dec., 2001), 929, footnote 26.

<sup>18</sup> See *reckless optimism*, NCW, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. TI, X, 36. Cf. Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. II, trans. E.F.J. Payne, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), ch. XLVI; 573. Henceforth, WWR.

<sup>20</sup> Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, 171.

<sup>21</sup> See Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger’s Atheism*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 2002), 232.







A man sneaked up to him (Zarathustra) and whispered in his ear—and behold it was the jester from the tower. ‘Go away from this town, Zarathustra’ said he; “there are too many here who hate you. You are hated by the good and the just, and they call you their enemy and despiser; you are hated by the believers in the true faith, and they call you the danger of the multitude. (Z, prologue 8. Word in parenthesis mine.)

Here, the jester resorts to *fictionalism* that “consists in creating fictions and acting ‘as if’ they really do exist.”<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche warns that fiction masks are only created and “kept concealed for good reasons (GS, preface 4)”. Fictionalism creates a pseudo-challenge to one’s self within an idle situation, just so one’s life does not appear vapid. Therefore, man needed to conjure the jester out of himself (as its shadow) to make at the very least something out of him such as to let him arrive at something objective like the other end of the tower. But the jester wants it fast; it always goes for the most comfortable position: “Forward, lamefoot! Forward, lazybones, smuggler, pale-face, or I shall tickle you with my heel! (Z, prologue, 4).” Thus by creating fiction, the jester thinks he can surpass man who is shaking at the brink of the abyss: “Only a jester thinks: ‘Man can also be *skipped over*’ (Z, III, 4).” There are many ways of overcoming nihilism, but the jester’s way of overcoming is fictional or comical. This fictional mentality conjures an overcoming out of deceit. The jester then exaggerates the culture of the herd and the slaves, since he lived among them when he surprises out of his sleeve his fictions. This fast mentality as “one click away!” substantiates the description ‘all-too-modern.’ Modernity was all about comedy, all entertainment, all for the daydreams of the slaves – the “concretization of only slave morality.”<sup>23</sup> The jester in this case pioneered and

was responsible for the *birth of comedy*.<sup>24</sup> And Nietzsche echoes the jester’s admission:

Let us not doubt that we moderns, with our thickly padded humanity, which at all costs wants to avoid bumping into a stone, would have provided Cesare Borgia’s contemporaries with a *comedy* at which they could have laughed themselves to death. Indeed, we are unwittingly funny beyond all measure with our *modern* “virtues” (TI, X, 37. Emphasis mine.)

Moreover, within this comical identity, one must have spotted the joke of its existence. Machiavelli’s foxy life for example infers unseriousness towards structures, even to wit the king; and the jester’s cap is its license.

Indeed, the court fool’s special license is traditionally symbolized by the jester’s cap, whose jagged points figure an inverted crown. Machiavelli himself was noted among his friends as a jokester and raconteur, and his writings frequently display a mordant, satirical wit [...] He himself comments in a letter to a friend by quoting Petrarch: “If sometimes I laugh or sing, I do it because I have just this one way for expressing my anxious sorrow.”<sup>25</sup>

The life of the jester is a conjectural posture. In the culture of nihilism, underneath him is a thoroughgoing sorrow that only finds expression

<sup>24</sup> Comedy is a Greek play made to replace the absurdity of meaning in tragedy. Greek tragedy or the attic tragedy made use of the artistic impulses of the Apollonian and Dionysian. It realistically portrays life as it is, its joys and its necessary suffering. The Apollonian dream state forms the Dionysian ecstasy but one cannot form the tragic art without the other. The absurdity of their complementarity and their perpetual strife makes life real. Comedy however changed these impulses with Socratic concepts when it inverted tragedy, making the impulses secondary in prioritization. Socratic comedy made use of intelligibility between the two that splits them and therefore contains their characterization. Comedy therefore cancels the idea of suffering and its contents while celebrating entertainment. See BT.

In literature, tragedy is the movement from light to darkness, while comedy is from darkness to light. Dante’s *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* sequel are thus versions of comedy since it transitions from Hell to Heaven. The birth of comedy takes then the context of philology. Taken in this sense, refer to Jeffrey Rusten, ed. *The Birth of Comedy. Texts, Documents, and Art from Athenian Comic Competitions, 486–280*, trans. Jeffery Henderson, David Konstan, Ralph Rosen, Jeffrey Rusten, and Niall W. Slater, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.

The contention of this paper however derives it as it is. The birth of comedy simply means the fictionalization of life and its main man is the Jester. The birth of tragedy however is taken both as it is (as the starting of tragedy philologically) and the book of Nietzsche itself.

<sup>25</sup> Hannah Petkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 42.

<sup>22</sup> Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, 62.

<sup>23</sup> Tracy Strong, *Nietzsche and Politics*, in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Solomon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 283.



in comedy – “there is *ice* in his laughter.”<sup>26</sup> In the jester, one can visualize a comedian who stems his jokes from his miserable life. The conjectures that the culture of the jester makes are all born out from suffering. Zarathustra nauseates, “it was suffering and impotence – that created all afterworlds; and that brief madness of happiness that only the greatest sufferer experiences (Z, I, 3).” The age of the modern finds mundane satisfaction in scientific expressions. The same imagery goes with what Frank Sheed observes in modern times,

It’s incredible how long science has succeeded in keeping men’s minds off their fundamental unhappiness and its own very limited power to remedy their fundamental. The soul of man is crying for hope or purpose or meaning; and the scientist says, “Here is a telephone” or “Look! Television!” – exactly as one tries to distract a baby crying for its mother by offering it sugar-sticks and making funny faces.<sup>27</sup>

Suffering is vital in Nietzsche’s philosophy. In the birth of comedy brought about by the jester and the systematization of moral reasoning for the sake of another world or the Socratic interpretations of it, this suffering disperses because of mundane happiness. Given what he is against, Nietzsche targets “hedonism and utilitarianism, the Christian Ideal of another life free from suffering, and the ethics of Thus Spoke Zarathustra’s ‘last men’ in favor of the happiness of the greatest number.”<sup>28</sup> Nihilism appears here “at that point, not that the displeasure at existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any ‘meaning’ in suffering, indeed in existence.”<sup>29</sup> To assess its drive, we refer to “the particular attitude that motivates” the jester in hating life and its

conditional sufferings – “namely, *ressentiment*,”<sup>30</sup> and how it leads the way to three more principles for the eventual birth of comedy.

## RESSENTIMENT

*Ressentiment* is the response of the jester towards life, “expressed in the *reactive* manner of valuing.”<sup>31</sup> Primarily, it is the attitude that is hostile to life since life is the condition that makes the jester suffer. That is to say, the only motivational factor for one to survive life’s suffering is *ressentiment* itself. As Reginster claims, “the motivational resource to contain *ressentiment* is *ressentiment* itself, Nietzsche argues when it is redirected onto the agent who is filled with it.”<sup>32</sup> There should then be a preliminary feeling of hatred first that molds this *ressentiment*, and the hatred towards life and its nihilism best fuels it. Deleuze explicates this and spots its spirit: “Nietzsche calls the enterprise of denying life and depreciating existence *nihilism*, and the whole of nihilism and its forms he calls the *spirit of revenge*.”<sup>33</sup> The jester here, taking its form from a collective abhorrence, “preach of existence, but at the bottom line is their ‘mistrust,’ to ‘punish’ the strong (Z, II. 7), obviously resounding their *hatred* – yes, their existence is but a preservation of this instinct. They say that hatred is the instinct that “constitutes *the essence* of our species, our herd” and “it is *proven* that it has preserved” their “race so far (GS I, Italics as is).” In furthering this hatred, it becomes a drive stemming from its suffering and meaningless culture; it has malformed into what Nietzsche calls the reaction of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment*: “this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal... an aversion to life, a rebellion against

<sup>26</sup> Z, prologue, 5. Phrase changed to singular, “their” to “his”. Nietzsche refers to the last men that share the same characteristics with the Jester.

<sup>27</sup> Charles J. Chaput, “Religion and the Common Good”, *Communio* vol. 34 no. 1 (Spring 2007), 167.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, 169. Cf. BGE 225; Z, prologue, 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 161.

<sup>30</sup> Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on ‘Morality’*, 105. Cf. GM I, 10-11, 13-14; II, 11 and 17; III, 14-16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. italics mine.

<sup>32</sup> Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 34. My italics.



the most fundamental presuppositions of life (GM, III, 28).” Basing on this form, the culture of the herd and the slave have been contaminated with the poison of *revenge*, morphing themselves into envious *tarantulas*: “That the world may become full of the storms of our revenge, let precisely that be called justice by us’ – thus they talk together. They resemble inspired men: but it is not the heart that inspires them – it is revenge (Z, II, 7).” They lie in wait passively, living in “dark corners, secret paths and back-doors (GM I, 10).” Zarathustra thus shouted back at these hiding Jesters:

‘O you roguish fools, all of you, you jesters! Why do you dissemble and hide before me? How all your hearts wriggled with pleasure and malice that at last you had become again as little children, that is, pious; that at last you did again what children do, namely, prayed, folded your hands, and said, ‘Dear God!’ But now leave *this* nursery, my own cave, where all childishness is at home today! Cool your hot children’s prankishness and the noise of your hearts out there! (Z, IV, 18)

The “ice of laughter” in the hearts of the jesters made use of their *ressentiment* the force to create children fictions, which make reactive forces triumph.<sup>34</sup> This *ressentiment* under the contagion of revenge enhances the creativity of these slaves to mold the idea of ‘Evil.’<sup>35</sup>

#### GUILT AND BAD CONSCIENCE

This brings us to the next two-in-one principle that enforces the birth of comedy: the “linked concepts ‘guilt’ and ‘bad conscience’ – both taken in their extreme, ‘moral’, form.”<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche regards thus: “Bad conscience has . . . been the real womb of all ideal and imaginative events

<sup>34</sup> “The foundation of the paralogism of *ressentiment*: the fiction of a force separated from what it can do. It is thanks to this fiction that reactive forces triumph.” Ibid, 122.

<sup>35</sup> GM, introduction, xxi.

<sup>36</sup> Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on ‘Morality’*, 105. Cf. Ibid, 70-73; Cf. GM, II, 21-23; GM, III, 15.

(GM II 18).” This creative fiction nourishes its comedy in inverting principles, the same as when the jester’s cap inverts the crown of the king, making the master type meek. Here, the reactive movement of the tarantulas injects its poison to the masters as birds of prey, so that values become inverted – so that the masters will not harm them, the good lambs. Deleuze explicates well the slave’s reaction: “birds of prey are evil (that is, the birds of prey are all the evil ones, the evil ones are birds of prey); but I am the opposite of a bird of prey; therefore I am good.”<sup>37</sup> The term “bad” and “evil” become a clearest verbal attack to oppose the strong. As language represents the Trojan horse that brings havoc through meaning, the real intent of planting the word “bad” in the moral consciousness of the strong – their conscience – is to induce *guilt*. As Lampert observes, Zarathustra learned the phrase “the good and the just” from the jester to woo him to stay away from them because he is evil.<sup>38</sup>

Hence, the two-in-one force of guilt and bad conscience enables the strong to reduce its agency, oppresses its freedom, and obliges it with a duty to remain steadfast in not harming the precious little lambs of morality. Comedy is birthed at this instance precisely when the “imaginative event” of inverting power-play happens: the strong now becomes the weak and the weak becomes the strong, the last has become the first and the first has become the last, the poor becomes rich and the rich attends to the poor.

#### FREE WILL

Bad conscience interiorizes the concept of guilt, along with the next principle *free will*, that makes the masters more compassionate and

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 122.

<sup>38</sup> Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching*, 26.







benevolent to them. “This conspicuousness of guilt is expressed in Nietzsche’s image of pushing back of general guilt ‘into the conscience’ when it gets moralized.”<sup>39</sup> Thus, moralization is “the idea that one’s human nature is essentially and undischargably guilty and *hence defective*.”<sup>40</sup> The concept of *free will* is the main reason of the breakage between the doer and his deed (GM, I 13) since it becomes a fact that no matter what the doer does, he is still defective and a sinner. This metaphysical assumption of guiltiness doubles (Ibid.). Free will from bad conscience and guilt gives the jester the license to act and think freely as if freedom has no responsibility at all. Upon wandering in carefree living, he goes too far as to lose himself. The jester, therefore, is alien not only to his overcoming but also to his very self and thus cannot find the way for its deeds to fulfill it. What further makes this understanding of free will boorish and comedic is that it is not even intended to mean free at all: what is free here is not self-autonomy but freedom under the gaze of a moral code, that is, under the watch of one’s guilt and bad conscience. Christian morality, for instance, teaches that man is free albeit limited: but this limitation precisely stems from a conscience that tells one to be free *if and only if* one does what is good. Otherwise, there is a certain place where guilty conscience is punished as one would want to be punished if one has a bad conscience.

#### ASCETIC IDEAL

Nevertheless, the jester, in his desperate endeavor to find the most beautiful but unrealistic overcoming, conjectures the most ravishing of all conjectures that he helplessly falls in love with it to the point of engaging in the abyss, and thus whether or not he fulfills it, reality does

<sup>39</sup> Simon May, *Nietzsche’s Ethics and his War on ‘Morality’*, 70. Cf. GM, III, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 70 -71.

not matter. The overcoming of the jester takes the form of the last principle that is found in Nietzsche’s *Genealogy of Morals* – the *ascetic ideal*. It is this ideal that abandons all necessary tragedy of life and transports it totally to comedy, thereby completing what *ressentiment*, guilt and bad conscience, and free will started.

To understand the transport, one has to go to the very beginning of how *birth* happens. Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* thinks, “The illusions of art are acceptable provided they are *honest* or *conscious*.”<sup>41</sup> The Apollonian dream-state conjures its fantasies for the continuities of life that utters *dream on!* The Apollonian is the impulse of identity-formation follows the dream as correspondent to an ordered future, as when it orders the Dionysian frenzy, but is faithful to reality – the dream as an illusion or mirror of reality.<sup>42</sup> “In the birth of tragedy, the concept of appearance is not equivalent to that of false belief, or deception, but to that of illusion.”<sup>43</sup> By *honest* or *conscious*, one means that the jester must still *recognize* that his fictions are only make-believe and must not put a dogmatic statement out of them.<sup>44</sup> The jester, at any rate, put a metaphysical standing to his fictions that in turn demeans the value of this world and its suffering. He loses his honesty and consciousness on the matter when he believed totally that his fictions are true, like the romanticism of falling in love with sculpture and treating it as if it were real. Thus to emphasize graphically the transport of the *birth of tragedy* to the *birth of comedy*, one must do well as to look at the vast difference between the “world of dreams” and the “world of fiction”:

This *world of pure fiction* is vastly inferior to the *world of dreams* insofar as the latter *mirrors* reality, whereas the former falsifies, devalues, and negates reality.

<sup>41</sup> Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, 91. My italics.

<sup>42</sup> The Apollonian dream as the *appearance of appearances*. BT, 4

<sup>43</sup> Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on overcoming nihilism*, 94.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 95. Cf (Z, I 1).





Once the concept of “nature” had been invented as the opposite of “God,” “natural” had to become a synonym of “reprehensible”: this whole world of fiction is rooted in *hatred* of the natural (of reality!); it is the expression of a profound vexation at the sight of reality. (A 15)

An awareness of this fictionalism must still ground the consciousness of the jester. However, the temptation of his fictions and daydreams are too strong that he effectively believes it completely. He was warned but still succumbs to his folly. The spirit of gravity from the spirit of revenge succeeds in hurling the tightrope walker down to the abyss because the jester temptingly offers him an overcoming of meaning, a comical meaning. “The meaninglessness of suffering, not (just) suffering itself, was the curse which hitherto lay spread out over mankind – and *the ascetic ideal offered mankind meaning*.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, because of too much suffering in the world, seeing the world as meaningless, hatred achieved a more fascinating form in the course of history, and sugarcoats itself as ‘*the ascetic ideal*’:

that hatred against everything human, even more, against everything animal, everything material, this disgust with the senses, with reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this desire to get away from all semblance, change, becoming, death, wish, desire itself—the meaning of all this, should we dare to comprehend it, is a will to nothingness, a will running counter to life, a revolt against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; yet it is and remains a will! And, to repeat at the end what I said in the beginning: *rather than want nothing, man even wants nothingness*.<sup>46</sup>

The inversion of this world for the world of nothing and fiction realizes its actualization in the concept of the ascetic ideal. Here, the jester incenses his fictions that he puts it in the highest standing apart from reality. The jester and his culture “are thinking what is most indispensable

to *them*: freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, business, duties, worries; (in order for them to adore their) ‘most authentic and most natural conditions of their *optimum* existence, their *most beautiful* fruitfulness.’<sup>47</sup>

In beholding the ascetic ideal, the philosopher (the metaphysician after-worlds man) sees before him the optimum conditions for the highest and boldest spirituality, and smiles, in the process, he does *not* deny ‘existence’, but rather affirms his *own* existence and *nothing but* his own existence, and this perhaps to the extent that he is not far from the sinful wish: *pereat mundus, fiat philosophia, fiat philosophus, fiam!* (GM, III, 7. *Latin*: May the world perish, let there be philosophy, let there be the philosopher, let there be I!)

The jester with his infatuated and inseparable overcoming cares nothing about existence but only his fictions. He does not care about the world, life, or anything that matters apart from his over-celebrated overcoming. The ascetic ideal is the jester’s overcoming but only remains as statically as it is. The “jester’s words are a mockery of heroic effort by one who believes that mankind belongs in the tower, in stasis.”<sup>48</sup> It speaks of progress but only adds zero after zero: the same result that modernity had after conjuring the promise of the cogito and its eventful ending. The ascetic ideal swallowed the jester’s will that it is already indifferent to the world, hostile to life and its suffering – its tragic character. He does not care if his humanity falls into meaningless and nihilism in the abyss. The tightrope walker is left dead. All he wants is his mundane comedy – his most favorable fiction. The jester, therefore, embodies fictional overcoming from the modern backdrop. He signals the meaningless discontinuity of life, the forerunner of comical nihilism, but also because he came out of that very nihilism.

<sup>45</sup> GM in *the Portable Nietzsche*, 453. Word in parenthesis mine.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 454. Italics added for emphasis. Cf. GM, trans. Douglas Smith, 136, his translation is “man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will at all.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 87-88. Word in parenthesis mine.

<sup>48</sup> Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching*, 27-28.





### III. RECAPITULATION: CAVE SHADOWS OF JESTER “GODS”

Why the shadows? The lurking concepts of god that Nietzsche forewarned in *New Struggles* not only highlights the relevance of spotting jesters but also of vanquishing the shadows of new gods. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century towards the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, god emerged from the shadows to reveal its clandestine machinations. The social, rather than metaphysical, context of god’s death arises as a perfect hiding spot for its unperturbed force that runs the world. Landa describes this hidden cave of social masquerades as

the perplexing phenomenon, throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, God freely shifting alliances and crossing over to the side of the working class and of colonized “Third World” nations, against Western, secular, market-panteism, as shown by his support for such diverse movements as those inspired by liberation theology in Africa and Latin America, or by the (indeed quite disparate) theologies of what is generally known as “Islamic fundamentalism.” God nowadays—as borne out perhaps most tellingly by the events of September 11, 2001—fights on both sides of the “clash-of-civilizations” divide. It is a schizophrenic God, rising to “save America” from the terrorist attacks he himself had launched, surviving some 150 years of atheistic onslaught.<sup>49</sup>

What is interesting is the manner of using ‘god’ to advance one’s purpose is the deeply rooted cynicism of the one who uses it. There is something hidden in the petty moralizing of this move that it goes beyond morality itself. As such, Seung says that “the jester comes to light as the serviceable cynic described as a “jester” in *Beyond Good and Evil*.”<sup>50</sup> What lies in the inception of the jester is a further shadow: the shadow of the jester begets its own shadow when he fictionalizes more on his fiction. That

being said, the reinforcement of one fiction to another suggests a varied sense of comicality. The death of god may have taken into effect the demolition of the stronger force that religion has held for quite some time in the Middle Ages up to the height of the modern era and the moderns who absolutized its image even through the enlightenment. But with Nietzsche’s rhetorical claim in the madman – “Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it?” – shall it also be taken into consideration of how not only does the jester represent a collective, but this time of a plurality? That is to say, the call to become gods also warrants the call to become jesters, so that one cannot only think of a God or a Jester but many jesters. The precise place for this in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the marketplace.

The marketplace has become, as it was in the prologue, the place for the exchange of ideas. But in place of the one jester, there are now many jesters, for what counts in the new marketplace of ideas is showmanship. That marketplace is ruled by the “great men” who shape opinion, and these are served by “the flies of the marketplace,” popularizers and publicists, intellectuals who trade in these opinions.<sup>51</sup>

When Leo Strauss was read the TSZ passage “full of solemn jesters is the market place,” he explains that “in modern society, fame is only the proof of worthlessness.”<sup>52</sup> A semblance of this marketplace of ideas motivated by fame can also be found in postmodern society and especially in pluralistic and relativistic societies where power is prized through the popular opinions. Nothing resembled more of a shadow and its flickering and faint existence than the spotlighting of demagoguery or the shadows of collective in populist opinions. At this point, one should ask, what does the shadow do? To answer this, one

<sup>49</sup> Ishay Landa . “Aroma and Shadow: Marx vs Nietzsche on Religion,” in *Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 18, no. 4, (2005), 496.

<sup>50</sup> Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching*, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Lampert, *Nietzsche’s Teaching*, 56.

<sup>52</sup> Velkley, Richard (Ed.). *Leo Strauss On Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 2017, 54-55.





should go back not to the cave where Buddha or God dwelt, but of Plato's cave – a look at the original before the parody.

Plato's cave in Book VII of the *Republic* pictures the first stage of knowledge in flickering shadows displayed in walls. The shadows are born out of the subjects created by the light of the fire behind it. The fire emits the changing ember motions that make the shadows move and acquire their existence. The catch of this stage is that because these shadows are fickle, opinions too are the basest and therefore the most unreliable sources of knowledge. Even the insistence of populist or "expert" opinions from professionals can be attacked on the bases of a shaky uncertainty that grounds the nature of knowledge. That is to say, people can be swayed through distractions and media manipulations or expert advice can still be reinforced with other expert advice (e.g. doctor's second opinion, artistic commentary, editorial review, etc.). That being said, everyone has opinions, so that at the best, the subjectivity of knowledge enables one to secure a spot of certainty. The crucial turning point in the life of the jester and in birthing the comedy in this cave is not, however, the ever-changing conceptions of what we know but of the disposition to receive what we know as if they have a clear objective standing. Meaning to say, for opinions to be opinions, they have to remain as shadows, not the fire (which represents the second stage of belief) and especially not as silhouettes. This vital distinction allows us to distinguish between the tightrope-walker and the jester. Man as the rope-dancer is shaking, painfully aware of the tragedy of existence, bewildered but not resigned to disillusionment. The jester is the opposite: he believes in his fictions and thinks of them as reality, schizophrenic in a sense, to think that he is a *god*, so that many who think like *gods* are jesters only in their own right. Moreover, the distinction between the two is marked by

the difference between shadow and silhouette: while a shadow has a subject – it exists because light is placed against an object as its subject – a silhouette does not and is simply a dark outline that can be mistaken as having no privation. If a man thinks of shadows as silhouettes, which is the case of the chained men in Plato's cave, then they have already surrendered their reality into fiction. Which is why the man who escaped has not only the responsibility of bringing the knowledge of the good (the real light of the sun outside the cave) to his fellow prisoners but also free them of their ascetic tendencies of becoming jesters.

A way thus to understand the aphorism of caves and the shadows in them in *New Struggles* is through an original cave in Plato, its inversion. This is to claim that the nihilism of the times as seen in dark places of shadowy outlines can produce "monsters of the abyss" such as the jester. As Seung says, Zarathustra "has been shattered by the *monster from the abyss*, who has played the *jester*."<sup>53</sup> One should then confront the abyss with the courage to face its entertaining monster. But there is a more important appeal at this point that allows the jester to conceive his redemption. However, to do this, he should not overcome his fictions but his way of overcoming them. Meaning to say, there is no antidote to fictionalizing, but it does not dispel the possibility that it can be used as a social construct to shape character, even the shaping of the virtues of *Superman*.<sup>54</sup> Only in this sense can the jester suspend his being a shadow and stay away from the cave to be like Zarathustra and the Superman.

<sup>53</sup> Seung, 139

<sup>54</sup> See Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).







## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alfano, Mark, *Character as Moral Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Allison, David, *Reading the New Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, and On the Genealogy of Morals*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Arthur Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation*, vol. II, trans. E.F.J. Payne, (New York: Dover Publications. 1969.
- Bordo, Susan, *The Flight to Objectivity: Essays on Cartesianism and Culture*. Albany, State University of New York Press: 1987.
- Burnham, Douglas, and Martin Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 2010.
- Catherine Carlstrom, "Conclusion," in *The Jester and the Sages: Mark Twain in Conversation with Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx*. Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2011, 135-136.
- Chaput, Charles, "Religion and the Common Good," *Communio* vol. 34 no. 1 (Spring 2007).
- Deleuze, Gilles (1983): *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (H. Tomlinson, Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- Dienstag, Joshua Foa, *Nietzsche's Dionysian Pessimism*, the American Political Science Review, Vol. 95, No. 4 (Dec., 2001).
- Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Vintage, 1989.
- Hannah Petkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.
- Hemming, Laurence Paul, *Heidegger's Atheism*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 2002.
- Jung, Carl, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939*, vol. 1. Routledge, 2014.
- Koyré, Alexander, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957.
- Lampert, Laurence, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Landa, Ishay, "Aroma and Shadow: Marx vs Nietzsche on Religion," in *Nature, Society, and Thought*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2005). 461-499.
- May, Simon, *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on 'Morality'*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Niemeyer, Christian, "Nietzsche – Only a Jester? The language of Zarathustra and pedagogy. An Interim Assessment of 125 years of reception history," in *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* vol. 57, no. 1 (2011), pp. 55-69.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to the Philosophy of the Future* (H. Zimmern, Trans.). New York: Dover Publications, 1997. (Original work published 1886).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (J. Norman, Trans.) (A. Ridley, Ed.). Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (D. Smith, Trans.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. (Original work published 1887).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Anti-Christ: A Curse on Christianity* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). In *the Portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books, pp. 565-656, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Birth of Tragedy* (C. P. Fadiman, Trans.). New York: Modern Library, 1927. (Original work published 1872).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Gay Science* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books, 1974. (Original work published 1882).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Will to Power* (W. Kaufmann, & R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books, 1968. (Original work published 1901).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). New York: Penguin Books, 1969. (Original work published 1883-1891).
- Reginster, Bernard, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- Rusten, Jeffery (ed.), *The Birth of Comedy. Texts, Documents, and Art from Athenian Comic Competitions, 486-280*, trans. Jeffery Henderson, David Konstan, Ralph Rosen, Jeffery Rusten, and Niall W. Slater, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.
- Seung, T.K., *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005.
- Strong, Tracy, *Nietzsche and Politics*, in *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Solomon. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973.
- Tassi, Aldo, "Modernity as the Transformation of Truth into Meaning", *Readings in Philosophy of Man*, Ateneo de Manila University, 1986.
- Turi, Zita, "Border Liners". The Ship of Fools Tradition in Sixteenth-Century England," in *TRANS – Revue de littérature générale et comparée*, (2010): <https://doi.org/10.4000/trans.421>
- Velkley, Richard (Ed.). *Leo Strauss on Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

