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What Zarathustra Whispers

Abstract: In this essay I defend my interpretation of the unheard words that Zarathustra whispers into Life's ear in "The Other Dance Song" and that have long kept commentators puzzled. I argue that what Zarathustra whispers is that he knows that Life is pregnant with his child. Zarathustra's ability to make Life pregnant depends on his overcoming of Eternal Recurrence which threatens to strangle him with disgust of human beings and all of existence, thereby making him into a spiritual eunuch whose will has turned into not-willing. The insemination of Life is a transfiguring act that raises Life from her blind animality (or materiality) into the level of a spiritually fertile existence, which is the condition of human freedom. This act is performed with the help of our capacity for theoretical knowledge, which is why it requires love of Wisdom. However, love of Wisdom can make us infertile, and thus unfree, when pursued for its own sake (knowledge can choke). I conclude by considering who might be the child of Zarathustra and Life.

Keywords: Pregnancy, Freedom, Wisdom, the Eternal Recurrence, Life-affirmation.

Zusammenfassung: In diesem Aufsatz verteidige ich meine Interpretation der unhörbaren Wörter, die Zarathustra in „Das andere Tanzlied“ in das Ohr des Lebens flüstert und seit langem Kommentatoren ratlos machen. Was Zarathustra flüstert, ist, so meine These, dass er weiß, dass das Leben mit seinem Kind schwanger ist. Zarathustras Fähigkeit, das Leben zu schwängern, hängt von seiner Überwindung des Gedankens der ewigen Wiederkehr ab, der ihn durch den Überdruß am Menschen und an allem Dasein zu erwürgen bedroht und ihn dabei zu einem spirituellen Eunuchen macht, dessen Wollen zum Nicht-Wollen geworden ist. Die Befruchtung des Lebens ist eine umgestaltende Tat, die das Leben von seiner blinden Tiernatur (oder Stofflichkeit) auf die Ebene eines spirituell fruchtbaren Daseins erhebt, was die Voraussetzung menschlicher Freiheit ist. Dieser Akt wird mit Hilfe unserer Fähigkeit zu theoretischem Wissen ausgeführt, weshalb er Liebe zur Weisheit erfordert. Liebe zur Weisheit kann uns jedoch unfruchtbar und damit unfrei machen, wenn sie um ihrer selbst willen verfolgt wird (Wissen kann ersticken). Ich schliesse mit der Überlegung ab, wer Zarathustras und des Lebens Kind sein könnte.

Schlagwörter: Schwangerschaft, Freiheit, Weisheit, die ewige Wiederkehr, Lebens-Bejahung.

I Introduction

“The Other Dance Song” is the only chapter in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* whose title all but repeats the title of a previous chapter. Between the original Dance Song of Part II and this Other Dance Song of Part III is forged a link that is not shared by any other two chapters in all of the four books of Zarathustra’s saga. In the reader’s mind, this link immediately raises the question of why this repetition is necessary. Why does one Dance Song not suffice? And what is the significance of the recurrence of this song in a book whose fundamental conception, according to its own author, is the thought of Eternal Recurrence? (EH, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 1)¹

These questions become more inveigling when we consider that the second Dance Song follows in the heels of Zarathustra’s victorious encounter with the thought of Eternal Recurrence that almost succeeded in strangling him with disgust of man and all of existence.

Since the first Dance Song is a love song intended to mock Zarathustra’s arch-enemy, the Spirit of Gravity, who makes existence unbearable, by singing the praises of a woman called Life, the presence of a second Dance Song in the narrative would appear to signal the failure of the first in achieving what it meant to achieve. Indeed, this seems to be confirmed by the ending of the first Dance Song in which Zarathustra finds himself invaded by a feeling of sadness that torments him with plumbean questions about his continued existence, while the coolness of the evening coming from the woods blows upon him and something unknown looks on thoughtfully (Z II, The Dance Song, KSA 4.141).

The conclusion of the episode suggests that Zarathustra will not be able to really vanquish the Spirit of Gravity until he confronts what is perhaps the greatest heavy burden to come out of his arch-enemy’s cauldron: the thought of Eternal Recurrence. It is quite possible that the unnamed something that mysteriously descends upon him at the closing of the chapter and looks at him full of thought is this deepest, most abysmal thought of Eternal Recurrence, which at that point in the narrative is still unknown to him and is only now beginning to manifest its ominous presence. This is why in order to hear him sing the second Dance Song, we have to wait until Zarathustra finally summons this thought into the light, falls ill with disgust and nausea from the encounter, and is able to cure his soul thanks to his deepest, newly acquired wisdom.

But the narrative arch of this simple explanation for the presence of two Dance Songs in the story falls through an unexpected crack. This consists in the fact that the Other Dance Song does not really end on the triumphant and cheerful note one would have expected to hear if the story I just recounted were true. Instead, at the end

¹ The translations used in this paper are taken from the Cambridge edition of Nietzsche’s works. On those occasions when I have altered the translation in some way I have indicated it in parenthesis.

of the chapter, we find Zarathustra and Life forming what looks like an apparently hopeless and heartbroken couple, weeping together and mourning their imminent breakup (Z III, The Other Dance Song 2, KSA 4.285). And although Zarathustra claims that at that point Life was dearer to him than all of his Wisdom ever was, it would seem as if his newly acquired wisdom concerning Eternal Recurrence is what stands in the way of his love affair with Life, perhaps even what makes him have the thought that he wants to leave her; a thought that she herself reproaches him for having and that she singles out as the real cause of their breakup. Does Nietzsche, then, mean to suggest that there is no way to successfully love life and to affirm one's existence? Not even after one has victoriously confronted the most abysmal truth that a human being can confront and that had been hailed as apparently the real obstacle to any genuine life-affirmation?

The key to solving this apparent incongruity lies, I believe, in what is perhaps the most provocative aspect of "The Other Dance Song", and one that has long kept commentators puzzled, namely, the famous scene toward the end of the chapter in which Zarathustra whispers something into Life's ear that is kept secret from us, the readers, by an intriguing dash mark undoubtedly left there to keep us wondering about the peculiar nature of the love affair of these two characters.

In this essay, I will propose and defend a way to fill out the blank left by Zarathustra's unheard words that, as far as I know, has not been explored yet in the literature on this subject. In order to proceed with my reading of the whisper, let me begin by laying out some criteria that, I think, should guide our discussion of this episode.

II Criteria for Interpreting Zarathustra's Whisper

Here, then, are some questions and aspects of this case that I think a proper interpretation of Zarathustra's whisper should seek to adequately clarify:

1 Why is Zarathustra thinking that he wants to "leave Life"?

Since Zarathustra himself admits to Life's charge that he is thinking that he wants to leave her, we need to explain why he is thinking this. On the assumption that leaving Life would amount to some kind of dying, what we need to understand is why Zarathustra wants to die. This is especially puzzling because his stance throughout the book has been that of someone bent on life affirmation. He has gone as far as to present himself as possessed with the courage to slay even death (Z III, On the Vision and the Riddle 1, KSA 4.199). That he wants to die seems somewhat out of character. Notice that the problem persists even if we are inclined to interpret his desire in a less

standard way, as implying that he simply wishes to cut off ties with Life, say, because he wants to pursue a different woman (perhaps, Wisdom) or because he wants to remain celibate for the rest of his life. On this reading, “leaving Life” would have an even more elaborate metaphorical meaning than it already does, amounting to some kind of allegorical *dying to life*, even if all the while not literally dying. The implication would still be problematic and out of character because, on this reading, what Zarathustra wants is to engage in some extreme form of self-renunciation: he wants to remain alive and yet to sever ties with Life. Whatever other activity he is going to pursue, he will have to conduct it one step removed from life, and, hence, the new relationship would have to be a purely contemplative, passive, and almost will-less affair. Following this route, then, would seem to lead us again to a kind of life-negation that is out of sink with the Zarathustra we have come to know throughout the book.

2 Why does Zarathustra still love Life more dearly than he ever loved his Wisdom?

Connected to the point we just discussed is the issue of explaining how Zarathustra can consistently claim at the end of the encounter, and after he has shared his secret with Life and wept with her, that at that point Life was dearer to him than all his wisdom ever was (Z III, The Other Dance Song 2, KSA 4.285). This would seem to imply that he still loves Life, even though he has admitted that he wants to leave her. Does this mean, then, that *he does not really want to leave Life*? What is forcing his hand? Is this a case of weakness of will? But if so, how can that be consistent with a character that is supposed to be the best exemplar of a will that is strong and powerful, a hammer-will that is the smasher of tombs and of the old tables of good and evil?

3 Why is the content of the whisper something that nobody knows about?

Another important aspect of the story that needs explaining is Life’s surprise at finding out that Zarathustra knows something that he is not supposed to know, indeed, something that is allegedly a secret to everyone, since *no one* is supposed to know it. What can be this knowledge that is outside of the public eye? Why does Zarathustra alone have access to it? Even if we wanted to roll back our assumptions about the whole exchange and imagine that perhaps Zarathustra was only following a hunch and that he spoke without real knowledge, we still need to explain where he got the insight to guess correctly and what that insight was. Again, in the background lies the assumption that his special insight is probably related to his recent ordeal with the thought of Eternal Recurrence and the newly acquired wisdom he derived from it.

4 Why do both Zarathustra and Life weep after the whisper?

Finally, our interpretation of the whisper needs to account for the fact that what Zarathustra says seems to have the effect of making both him and Life gaze into each other's eyes and weep. Since what he says is preceded by the phrase "yes, but you also know –", the words that are spoken in secret must be intended to offer to Life some kind of explanation, consolation, or justification for the fact that Zarathustra will soon leave her. The conjunctive "but" suggests an unexpected contrast or exception to, perhaps even a negation of, what the first clause implies (that he wants to leave her). But if this is so, then why is the reaction to the revelation so defeatist, melancholic, and sad? Has what he utters fallen into deaf ears? Or is it perhaps a revelation that, instead of offering hope, nails the coffin of their love affair? On the other hand, even though it is the most likely reading, perhaps we do not have to see their weeping as sorrowful. Theirs could be tears of joy. In that case, what Zarathustra said has overwhelmed them both with positive emotion and has caused them to feel deep wonder and awe at something; or maybe what they feel is pride at some accomplishment that has come unexpectedly and after immense effort; or perhaps the tears signal their great relief and their gratitude for being released from some tension that had become unbearable.² Whatever the significance of the tears may be, we need to account for what sort of knowledge could cause the kind of moving reaction we think it caused.

These four puzzling aspects of the whole episode I consider to be the main issues that must be successfully addressed in any solution to the riddle of Zarathustra's unwritten and unheard words. But, beyond them, I think that a successful interpretation should also incorporate answers to these other questions and elements of the story:

5 Why is the Dance Song a ballad about a love triangle between Zarathustra, Life, and Wisdom?

Although both the first and the second Dance Songs portray an affair between Zarathustra and the woman called Life, the reality is that there is a second woman called Wisdom that figures in both songs and with whom Zarathustra also appears to have an erotic relation. Why does Zarathustra mention this other romantic relationship in his song in praise and in celebration of Life? Why is this a ballad about a love triangle? Does Zarathustra want to make Life jealous? Is that really a good way

² Although here I present this option as a viable way to read the weeping, in the end I actually do not think the textual evidence can support that assumption. I discuss my reasons for thinking this in section three below.

to affirm his love for her? Related to this issue is the problem of understanding Life's claim that she would quickly leave Zarathustra if his Wisdom ever ran away from him. The implication seems to be that Life loves Zarathustra *because* of the latter's love for Wisdom. The two love affairs are inextricably connected: so what exactly is the role of Wisdom in this erotic triad?

6 Why is a second Dance Song needed?

Lastly, going back to my introductory remarks, it would be good to know what is the relation between the two Dance Songs? Why is the second song needed? What does it accomplish that the first song could not? In a way, this is the same as asking what does Zarathustra's confrontation and victorious overcoming of the thought of Eternal Recurrence have to do with his ability to succeed at praising life and vanquishing the Spirit of Gravity in the second Dance Song? Provided, of course, he did succeed where the first song failed; that is, provided we are able to interpret the ending of the Other Dance Song positively and triumphantly, and not in the negative way that, as mentioned earlier, at first glance the ending of the whole episode appears to recommend.

III Most Favored Conjectures and their Shortcomings

But let us go back to the main four aspects of this encounter I outlined above. In my view, the hypotheses that have been offered thus far to fill in Zarathustra's unheard words fail to successfully harmonize all of these features of the scene.

By far the most favored solution is that what Zarathustra whispers is the new truth that he has learned after his ordeal with the thought of Eternal Recurrence, namely, that, even though he is about to leave Life, he will return again to his exact same life, and so will return to her, repeating eternally their love affair.³ As others have noted,

³ On top of the two readings I am about to discuss, other people who favor some version of this solution include: Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, New York 1982, p. 263; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Drama of Zarathustra*, in: Michael Allen Gillespie / Tracy B. Strong (eds.), *Nietzsche's New Seas*, Chicago 1988, pp. 220–231, p. 226; David Goicochea, *Zarathustra, Nihilism, and the Drama of Wisdom*, in: Tom Darby / Béla Egyed / Ben Jones (eds.), *Nietzsche and the Rhetoric of Nihilism: Essays on Interpretation, Language and Politics*, Ottawa 1989, pp. 183–191, p. 188; Gary Shapiro, *Nietzschean Narratives*, Bloomington 1989, p. 93; Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, *Inside/Outside Nietzsche: Psychoanalytic Explorations*, Ithaca 2000, p. 186; Frances Nesbitt Opper, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*, Charlottesville 2005, p. 177; and Douglas Burnham / Martin Jesinghausen, *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Bloomington 2010, p. 166. Alan White, *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth*, New York 1996, p. 97, also favors the hypothesis that the whispered words have to do with Zarathustra's knowledge of Eternal Recurrence. However, he then goes on to offer what one might call a kind of al-

however, this answer to the riddle faces some difficulties. For one thing, by the time Zarathustra whispers his words into Life's ear, the thought of Eternal Recurrence is no longer a secret, so it would seem bizarre for Zarathustra to try to keep it hidden from the public's (and specially from the reader's) ear. The solution does not offer a satisfactory account of issue 3 above. Moreover, if what Zarathustra says is that he will return, then the reaction that both him and Life have to this revelation seems discordant with it: why be saddened by the prospect of the renewal of their love affair? Why not rejoice and laugh together instead of weeping? Thus, this solution also appears to inadequately deal with aspect 4.

Of course, commentators who favor this approach have tried to accommodate their interpretation to handle some of these problems. The maneuvers they adopt, however, do not seem all together convincing. Laurence Lampert, for instance, indicates that the whispered words are a "holy open secret", by which he seems to mean that the truth of Eternal Recurrence is so sacred that one cannot simply utter it aloud but, in reverence, must communicate it through the almost inaudible words of a con-

legoric reading of the thought of Eternal Recurrence according to which what Zarathustra has learned is not that his identical earthly life will repeat eternally after he dies, but that his earthly life is eternally wedded to the present moment in the sense that, while he is alive, he will always stand in the point of intersection of his inescapable past and his unknowable future. What recurs eternally, then, according to White's reading, is one's own self and the structure of the moment between past and future in which one's life transpires, a recurrence that takes place wholly within one's lifespan and does not reach beyond it (pp. 100–1). I am very sympathetic to this kind of metaphorical reading of the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, although I disagree with some of the details of White's interpretation. Still, I think that even if we interpret Eternal Recurrence in this nonstandard way, it is unlikely that what Zarathustra whispers is his knowledge of Eternal Recurrence. Besides facing the difficulties having to do with the issues raised by 3 that I will mention in a moment, the main problem for White's reading would be accounting for problem 1: if Eternal Recurrence is just the thought that, while alive, we will always return to the moment of intersection between our past and future, then why would Zarathustra confess to life that he wants to leave her? To solve this problem White claims that Zarathustra's confession should be interpreted not as an expression of his death wish, but rather as an expression of his desire to forsake life for deep eternity, which on White's reading actually means his desire to reconcile or wed himself to life in the way in which his newly acquired knowledge of Eternal Recurrence allows, namely, by recognizing that the eternity he longs for is one he already has: the eternity of the ubiquitously present moment in which he is alive (pp. 98–100). Ingenious as it may be, it seems to me that this roundabout way of handling the problem undermines the effectiveness of White's account for dealing with 4. On the reading he is pushing, White's answer for what Zarathustra whispers into Life's ear must be something along the following lines: "Yes, but you also know that according to the knowledge of Eternal Recurrence, you and I are eternally wedded for as long as I live, so my love for you is eternal and continuously affirmed despite my own finitude." It is hard to see why weeping should follow this kind of confessional exchange (again, the difficulty is present only because of White's assumption that Zarathustra's confession is not an expression of his death wish, which undermines the rationale for the tears, namely, that Zarathustra is mortal and he now wants to end the affair by voluntarily dying).

fidential whisper.⁴ The problem with this solution is that prior to this point, neither Zarathustra nor his animals (not even the Dwarf who also speaks about it) had shown such reverence when speaking about Eternal Recurrence. They all talked about it openly and aloud. Nothing in the text prior to the second Dance Song seemed to indicate that Eternal Recurrence should be interpreted in the way Lampert wants. So the solution seems a bit ad hoc.

But even if it could account for why Zarathustra refrains from speaking the thought of Eternal Recurrence aloud, the proposed solution still would not really explain why what he says would be something that *no one* knows about. To accommodate this other point Lampert interprets Life's response to the secret in an unorthodox way as implying that what no one knows is not the actual content of the secret that was whispered, what was actually said, but rather whether the assertion that was made is really true; what Life claims is unknown to all is whether Zarathustra, or anyone for that matter, will indeed eternally return as he claims. In this way, and according to Lampert, Life's response is really a way to deflate the confident manner in which Zarathustra has tried to reassure her on the brink of their imminent breakup. The response makes knowledge of Eternal Recurrence problematic and shows that the teaching of Eternal Recurrence is really meant to liberate us from the unhealthy idea that there is an order to life and the world that is fully accessible to human reason.⁵ Eternal Recurrence is not something we can know through reason, it is a mystical disposition that springs from the heart of a lover of life: the disposition to will the eternal return of all living things so as to preserve and shelter their transient existence.⁶

In essence, this is also the interpretation Michael Platt favors, though his position with respect to the exact nature of Eternal Recurrence appears to oscillate between viewing it as merely a lover's conjecture (of his eventual return) meant to falsely (if lovingly) reassure Life in the face of the inevitable rupture wrought by his own mortality, and a more philosophical position expressed in the deep desire for the continuance of life itself past one's own physical demise. In the latter case, Eternal Recurrence is the hope and the faith that life itself will go on sempiternally after one dies, provided one is able first to say to it "once more" by perfecting oneself and willing a child.⁷ As we will see, in articulating this latter idea, Platt actually comes close to the solution I will give to the riddle of Zarathustra's whisper, but despite having the right intuitions concerning this case he never drives them all the way to what would be, in my opinion, a more satisfying answer to the problem he is attempting to solve.

⁴ Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, New Haven 1986, pp. 238–239.

⁵ Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, p. 259.

⁶ Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*, p. 260.

⁷ Michael Platt, What Does Zarathustra Whisper in Life's Ear?, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988), pp. 179–194, pp. 185–87.

Insofar as these interpreters diminish the epistemic status of the thought of Eternal Recurrence and, hence, of the words Zarathustra allegedly says to Life, their interpretation has the virtue of explaining why Life and Zarathustra would weep after the whispered words are uttered. Those words cannot guarantee Zarathustra's return, since no one can know with certainty that he will return, so the lovers are understandably sadden by the revelation that not even their love may be able to conquer death. But this solution comes at the cost of undermining the explanation of problem 1 above: why would Zarathustra be thinking that he wants to leave Life? If he has said that he will return in order to express his deep affection for Life in defiance even of his own mortality, and without real knowledge that he can indeed do as he says, then the more reasonable supposition is that he does not want to leave Life at all, that he wants to stay in this love relation until he is *forced to leave* by his eventual and inevitable demise. Yet Zarathustra confesses that he is indeed thinking that he wants to leave Life.

Even Platt's alternative reading that what Zarathustra wants is the eternal recurrence of life in general and, thus, *that he is ready to leave life* so as to guarantee the eternity of mortal life is not all that satisfying; although, again, in my view it hits closer to the mark.⁸ For on this reading, Zarathustra is simply *willing to die*; he is not clinging to life or whining about his own mortality, for those would be the attitudes of someone that is ill disposed toward life's finitude. But the attitude of *being willing to die* is different from the attitude of *wanting to die*. So there is still something missing from this explanation.

If the thought of Eternal Recurrence had a more robust epistemic status then it could accommodate better this aspect of the story. For then Zarathustra's desire to die might be explained by his certain knowledge that he will indeed return to his same self life, and by his desire to recommence the love affair with Life sooner rather than later. But this would bring us back to square one and to the problems we started with and that were mentioned already. In my view, this solution would also raise other difficulties having to do with the exact nature of Eternal Recurrence that I have not yet discussed.

Although there is much disagreement about the precise status of the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence, many commentators, especially those working within the Anglo-American tradition, presuppose that the doctrine must involve a belief in the exact repetition of one's life. The disagreement among these scholars really revolves around the precise epistemic status of this belief: is it meant to be literally true; or is it merely hypothetical; or should it be used as a selective principle of some kind?⁹ The content

⁸ Platt, *What Does Zarathustra*, p. 190.

⁹ For a good sample of interesting discussions on these matters and the different versions of Eternal Recurrence that can be encountered in the literature see, for instance: Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, New York 1965; Ivan Soll, *Reflections on Recurrence: A Reexamination of Nietzsche's*

of the belief itself is usually never called into question, for it is assumed that Eternal Recurrence must somehow involve the idea that our life will repeat itself eternally in the identical fashion in which we have lived it. I disagree with this assumption, but this is not the place to voice my disagreement or attempt to defend it. Here I simply want to point out that, if we interpret Eternal Recurrence in the traditional way and give it a robust reading, treating as a cosmological doctrine that postulates what the world actually is like, then imagining that Zarathustra whispers his newly acquired knowledge of this doctrine into Life's ear faces an added difficulty that besets all cosmological readings of Eternal Recurrence: that of explaining why and how this knowledge would matter.¹⁰ After all, if one will repeat life exactly as one has lived it, then one will have no idea one is repeating one's life until the moment one learns the truth about Eternal Recurrence. In the case of Zarathustra and Life, this knowledge comes at the end of their love affair. So even if their romance will repeat itself for all eternity, the two lovers will not know that their relationship is repeating itself until the very end, at which point, it seems, the consolation of knowing that they will relive their affair will come too late and will fail to be really comforting.

We must remember that Life has recriminated Zarathustra for wanting to end the relation by leaving her. Those who favor the conjecture that his response is to say that he will return to her are imagining that his words are meant to compensate somehow for the fact that he will indeed leave Life. But what kind of compensation is it for Life

Doctrine, *die Ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, in: Robert C. Solomon (ed.), *Nietzsche a Collection of Critical Essays*, Garden City 1973, pp. 322–342; Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton 1974; Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, Berkeley 1975; M. C. Sterling, *Recent Discussions of Eternal Recurrence: Some Critical Comments*, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 6 (1977), pp. 261–291; Karl Löwith, *Nietzsches Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkehr des Gleichen*, Hamburg 1978; Bernd Magnus, *Nietzsche's Existential Imperative*, Bloomington 1978, and also *Eternal Recurrence*, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* (1979), pp. 362–377; Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche*, London 1983; Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, Cambridge 1985; Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche: Ein Vortragszyklus*, Munich / Leipzig 1986; Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching*; Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Philadelphia 1987; Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy*, Cambridge 1990; Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, Stanford 2001; T. K. Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic of the Soul: Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, New York 2005; Lawrence J. Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*, New York / London 2005; Paul Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, Cambridge 2010. For an example of an interesting reading that does not follow the interpretative trend of implicating Eternal Recurrence with some kind of belief in the exact repetition of our lives see Werner Stegmaier, *Oh Mensch! Gieb Acht!* Kontextuelle Interpretation des Mitternachts-Lieds aus *Also sprach Zarathustra*, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 42 (2013), pp. 85–115. Stegmaier interprets Eternal Recurrence as an anti-doctrine that really involves the experience of Dionysian joy, and that, in the case of Z, is meant to liberate the teacher from having to teach doctrines at all.

¹⁰ For a clear and concise statement of this problem see Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche's Greatest Weight*, in: *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 14 (1997), pp. 19–25.

to know that her relationship to Zarathustra will repeat itself exactly as she has lived it *up to that point*? What she is complaining about is the fact that their love affair *will not continue into the future*: that there will be no more *new chapters* in their shared story. That the chapters that they have lived up to now will repeat themselves seems like a lame consolation in the face of her real lamentation. The adequate response to Zarathustra's whisper in that case should not be weeping, but anger at the fact that he wants to pass this paltry knowledge of Eternal Recurrence as an excuse to leave her *now*.

Dissatisfied with this approach, some commentators have sought a different route that does not require us to imagine that Zarathustra's whisper must be related to Eternal Recurrence. The alternatives that are offered tend to assume that what Zarathustra says must be instead directly related to the death wish he confesses having prior to his whisper.¹¹ T. K. Seung, for example, claims that what Zarathustra says to Life is that, although he is leaving her soon, she knows that he can and will rejoin her in the eternal mode, when through a kind of mystical release (produced by a stroke of fate and not by an act of will) he can abandon the temporal perspective of the world of action and conflict, and ascend to the world of mystery, where he will find the unity and harmony he has been seeking throughout the book.¹²

This answer has the virtue of explaining why Zarathustra would want to die, but it seems to me that the solution is less effective in dealing with problems 3 and 4. Take the latter first: why would the revelation that Zarathustra will rejoin Life again in the eternal mode once he leaves her in the temporal mode, make them both weep? Should they not rejoice instead and celebrate the happy resolution to their tempestuous love affair? Zarathustra has just revealed to Life that their love will continue (in fact be really realized for the first time) in a more harmonious and peaceful level where they will not need whips and cruel tricks to seduce each other. Their weeping would make sense only if there is something very dear that they are losing in this transcendental move. But, on the story that Seung is telling us, they have everything to gain and very little to lose. Thus, Seung would be forced to interpret the tears as being of joy. However, the main difficulty with going this route is that, after they weep together, Zarathustra ends the encounter by saying: "But at that moment I loved life more than I ever loved all my wisdom" (Z III, The Other Dance Song 2, KSA 4.285). This final phrase seems to signal a contrast to the tearful effect that the spoken words had on the two lovers: it seems to imply that even though the words had a negative impact of some kind and one that, ordinarily, should have diminished their love, in fact, Zarathustra's love survived the sorrowful revelation unscathed. If the tears are

¹¹ Besides Seung, whose position I discuss in what follows, other examples of this approach include Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth*, pp. 263–64; Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, pp. 265–67; and Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, pp. 78–79, 136.

¹² Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic*, pp. 219–24.

joyful, then this last sentence would seem out of place, for the words uttered must have been such as to have a positive impact and should have, thereby, *served to confirm* Zarathustra's love *not to cast doubt* on it.¹³

But supposing Seung was able to account for this apparent discordance between the last sentence and the prior "joyful weeping", it seems to me that his interpretation also faces the problem of explaining why nobody would know, at this point in the book, that a person like Zarathustra can rejoin Life in the eternal mode. After all, according to Seung, the book is constructed so as to take its protagonist through a spiritual (and epic) journey in which he will come to realize that, in order to achieve the redemption he seeks, he must completely disavow his autonomous will in the realization that it is only an illusion, that the real will is the cosmic will of thoroughly determined fate or necessity. In Seung's reading, the final rung in this existential dialectic is brought about by the encounter with the thought of Eternal Recurrence that happens right before the whispering scene. So, if Seung's interpretation is correct, then the knowledge Zarathustra has gained through this encounter, namely, that in the world of Life everything is governed by her cosmic necessity and that the autonomous will is a mere illusion, is now known to all of us.¹⁴ But, then, we should all be aware that the goal of loving and reconciling with our cosmic self can only be achieved by "dying to temporal life" in which conflict is inevitable because our autonomous will, being a practical necessity for all action, cannot fail to assert itself.¹⁵ Of course, Seung claims that what is particularly stunning and perhaps not known to anyone is that the plan of reuniting with one's cosmic self by dying to temporal life

13 Here I am in agreement with Clark, who interprets the ending in precisely this way focusing her argument mostly on the conjunctive "but" in the sentence. See Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth*, pp. 263–64. Werner Stegmaier tells me that to a native speaker of German, this reading of the conjunctive "but" sounds a bit too strong, and that the conjunction is here used in the way it often is in pathetic storytelling, without necessarily intending to signal some kind of objection to a prior clause. I think, therefore, that it is better to focus on the content of the sentence as a whole and not on the conjunctive "but". For it seems clear to me that the pathetic effect of the claim that Zarathustra loved Life more than he ever loved his Wisdom, is meant to stir us in the direction of a positive reaction to the otherwise negative effect of the whispered words. The pathetic claim signals that despite the fact that the whispered words would have ordinarily lessened Zarathustra's love, the love survived unscathed. Thus, it is the last phrase as a whole that would be out of place if the tears were really of joy, which is precisely as Clark has it (but without the need to focus on the conjunctive "but"). Clark's own answer to the riddle of Zarathustra's whisper is that what is said is that love of life requires the affirmation of death. This answer, as I have already indicated, has the problem of explaining why the attitude of being willing to die (of affirming the inevitability of death) would be equivalent to the attitude of wanting to die, which is the attitude that Zarathustra confesses having. This solution also seems to me to face the difficulty of explaining issue 3: why would no one know at this point in the book that love of life requires the affirmation of death?

14 Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic*, p. 168.

15 Seung, *Nietzsche's Epic*, p. 217.

can be accomplished *in life* rather than in literal death.¹⁶ However, I am not sure this is so surprising given the whole structure of the dialectic as Seung has presented it: the conclusion that the reconciliation has to happen in nature, and not beyond it, seems to be logically dictated by all the revelations that Seung claims have been made up to this point and by the significance that his interpretation gives them.

In my view, and depending on our reading of who is the Life that Zarathustra at the end claims to love dearly, Seung's interpretation of Zarathustra's death wish also raises another difficulty having to do with the problem raised by 2 above. If what Zarathustra wants is to "die to life" in the sense of wanting to renounce or ascend out of the temporal mode of existing in nature in order to access an eternal mode of existing in nature, then it seems bizarre that he would claim, at the end of the encounter, that Life was dearer to him than all his wisdom ever was. In order to cohere with Seung's reading, the Life Zarathustra is referring to must be Life in the eternal mode. But I submit that this is an implausible reading of the last sentence in the encounter. The two lovers have not yet reunited in the eternal mode, so the Life Zarathustra is speaking about must be temporal Life, the woman with whom he has been having a dialogue all along and with whom he has been engaged in a seductive game that has culminated in him whispering the reassuring words Seung claims he has said to her. Why would *that* Life be dearer to him than all his wisdom?

Not satisfied with the approaches favored by most commentators, others have tried to strike in a different direction altogether. Thus, for instance, David Kishik has argued that what Zarathustra says is that Life also knows that she is really Wisdom, the "other woman" for whom Zarathustra is allegedly leaving her.¹⁷ The secret revelation that Wisdom is really Life in disguise would indeed be something that no one knows about, and this very original conjecture offers thereby an extremely effective way to deal with question 3. Unfortunately, this ingenious solution simply exacerbates the difficulties of harmonizing the whispered words with issues 1, 2, and 4.

In order to make sense of 1, Kishik must interpret Zarathustra's confession that he desires to leave Life in a very unconventional way, as implying that he merely wishes to abandon Life for the other woman that has been mentioned in the two Dance Songs, namely, Wisdom. But nothing in the text really suggests that this is what Life has in mind when she accuses Zarathustra of wanting to leave her. Moreover, Life has indicated, not only that she is quite aware of Zarathustra's other affair with Wisdom, but even that she welcomes it as necessary for her own loving disposition toward Zarathustra, for, as she says, if his affair with Wisdom ever ended, then her own love for him would also quickly end (Z III, The Other Dance Song 2, KSA 4.285). It seems a bit out of character for her to now complain that Zarathustra wants to pursue that other love affair when she has encouraged it. Of course, on the reading Kishik is of-

¹⁶ Seung, Nietzsche's Epic, pp. 219–20.

¹⁷ David Kishik, Zarathustra's Whisper, in: *New Nietzsche Studies* 8.1–2 (2009), pp. 58–65, p. 63.

fering, the whole thing is really a lover's prank and a lighthearted flirtation. Life is seducing Zarathustra by posing as a different woman, and Zarathustra is pretending that he does not know this and that he will abandon Life for that other woman. But, again, this seems a bit of a stretch and somewhat ad hoc. And even if we granted this very peculiar reading of Zarathustra's desire to abandon Life, the interpretation makes nonsense of issues 2 and 4.

If Kishik is right, what meaning can be given to the last sentence in which Zarathustra claims that Life was dearer to him than all his Wisdom ever was? This phrase occurs *after* the alleged revelation, that Wisdom is the same woman as Life, has been made already. Once the secret is out Zarathustra is again pretending that the two are distinct and that he loves one woman more than the other? That seems somewhat absurd.¹⁸ Also, why would Zarathustra and Life weep after the sham has been uncovered? Given his answer to the riddle of Zarathustra's whisper, Kishik is forced to avoid interpreting the tears as sorrowful. In my discussion of Seung's interpretation, I have already indicated the difficulty of reading the tears as being of joy. But for Kishik this difficulty is even greater, because on his account the tears must be of uncontrollable laughter and not simply of joy. The reaction, after all, is supposed to be a response to the revelation of the mischievous role-playing of these two lovers. The only thing that seems fitting would be for both of them to guffaw in amusement at each other's facetious pretense. But nothing in the text indicates that this kind of laughter is what followed the uttered words.

I have picked my way gingerly throughout the literature on this subject. There are other writers who have interesting and elaborate hypotheses concerning Zarathustra's whisper. Most have tried to give modified versions of the ones I have discussed. My aim in delving into some of these interpretations has been to show the complexity of the problem and how difficult it is to find a solution that effectively harmonizes all the different points that need harmonizing. In the end, I think that the conjectures that have been offered thus far fall short of a fully satisfactory account of the episode. Let me now turn to the solution I will favor and that I hope will do a better job on this score.

¹⁸ Of course, one could argue that the secret is not really out for the reader but only for the two lovers, so there is no reason to think that Zarathustra, for consistency's sake, must refrain from treating Wisdom and Life in public (in the reader's presence) as two distinct women after the whispered words have been uttered. Still, if we go this route then we must conclude that Zarathustra's claim that he loves Life more than he ever loved Wisdom is meant to throw the reader off the scent of the revelation that the two women are the same person. But then we need to explain why this misdirection is needed. Why must the reader be kept from learning the truth about this lighthearted flirtation between Zarathustra and Life? If the reader needs to be misled about the revelation, then perhaps the whole thing is more serious than Kishik would have us believe; perhaps there is some deep important truth that the whole exchange is meant to hide from the many and that is reserved only for the select few. But what could that truth be?

IV Woman and Pregnancy: the Procreative Relation between Human Beings, Wisdom, and Life

What, then, does Zarathustra whisper into Life's ear? I believe that, after Life accuses him of wanting to leave her soon, Zarathustra utters to her in secret and hesitantly the following phrase, or some variation of it: "yes, but you also know *that you carry my child, you are pregnant*".¹⁹

Why do I think this is the correct answer to the riddle? Two sets of considerations recommend this reading in my view. One has to do with the history of the trope of woman in Nietzsche's philosophy. The other concerns the internal evidence afforded by the text itself and by the ease with which this answer harmonizes all the different elements of the story that we have been discussing.²⁰

¹⁹ Notice that in the text Zarathustra hesitantly (*zögernd*) confirms Life's suspicion that he wants to leave her (Z III, The Other Dance Song 2, KSA 4.285). On my reading, the reason for the hesitation is that Zarathustra is unsure about the future of the child he has engendered with Life. He hopes that the child will be born, but he cannot know that for certain since he is leaving Life before she has had a chance to give birth to their child. The hesitation is then an expression of a kind of fear or apprehension about what the future may hold for his yet unborn child. Later, when I discuss who the child may be, we will see that this hesitation is also Nietzsche's, and expresses his apprehension about what the future generation of philosophers who will read his works may turn out to be, and whether the influence he hopes to exert on them will be as he hopes it to be.

²⁰ As is known, there is much dispute in the literature concerning what to make of Nietzsche's addition of a fourth book to the Zarathustrean saga. Interpreters that approach the text in a straightforward fashion tend to agree that the story concludes with book three and with what appears to be Zarathustra's metaphoric or literal death, but then they are puzzled as to Nietzsche's intent in adding a fourth book to the story in which the character reappears in a clearly satirical caricature of his previous self. Those who favor an ironic reading of the text see the fourth addition as the real conclusion of the saga and read it as offering a parody intended to undermine the three books that preceded it. I view my answer to the riddle of Zarathustra's whisper as compatible with any position in this dispute one wishes to take. At this point, I have not made up my mind as to what to make of book four, though I confess being favorably drawn towards Loeb's very insightful interpretation that the fourth book should be read as an analeptic satyr play that relates events that chronologically precede the ending of book three (see chapter 4 in Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*). Still, in connection to the argument I am advancing here, it is worth mentioning that, at one point in book four, Zarathustra tells his guests that his children are on their way to him (Z IV, The Welcome, KSA 4.351), and that the book ends when Zarathustra receives the sign of the lion with the flock of doves that he had been expecting, and that he interprets as indicating to him that his children are near (Z IV, The Sign, KSA 4.406). Again, if one thinks that the saga culminates with book four, then Zarathustra's statement that his children are near would be compatible with the reading I am defending here, and in fact would add support to it (though, one would still have to explain why Zarathustra does not really die in book three and why the parodic series of events narrated in the fourth addition are needed for the successful arrival of Zarathustra's children, which presumably was thwarted at the end of the third book); and, on Loeb's reading of the relation of the texts, my case would be even stronger, for then the arrival of the sign that signals the Zarathustra's children are near is intended to precede and introduce the opening

Let us begin with the history of this metaphor. Among the earliest appearances of woman as a trope in the published works is the one found in the *Second Untimely Meditation: On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*. In this work, Nietzsche sustains an extended polemic against modern historians and their understanding of history. He accuses them of being weak individuals who have transformed the study of the past into a positivistic science that is merely concerned with the accumulation of facts and with uncovering the hidden laws that govern all human and social affairs. In a telling moment in the course of the argument, he concisely paints these historians with the following lapidary phrase: “this is a race of eunuchs, and to a eunuch one woman is like another, simply a woman, woman in herself” (UM II, HL 5, KSA 1.284).

The implication of this incisive sentence seems clear. As is well known, eunuchs were the male slaves of royal and wealthy households that had been castrated, among other things, in order to prevent an illegitimate birth that could taint the royal line or threaten the patriarch’s dominance in any way. Thus, the point of Nietzsche’s indictment is that modern historians behave like emasculated slaves in their approach to history: all their study of the past is completely *sterile and vain*; it turns the past into a creative wasteland out of which the present can find no stimulus to *engender* a great future. The proper relation to history and to historical truth is one that treats history as a woman; which, importantly, in this context does not simply mean, treating the truths of the past as a reservoir of arousing insights, stimulating new facts, and spectacular events that can excite the musings of living individuals. Nietzsche’s complaint is not principally that historians are *dispassionate* in their study of the past, but that they are *barren*: that their search for knowledge of the past exhausts itself in an idle exercise of learning for the sake of learning, a search of truth for its own sake. If truth (historical or otherwise) is a woman, her principal sexual interest is not to have pursuers with whom to conduct an erotic game of flirtations and lewd exchanges; instead, what this woman wants is someone with whom she can engage in a sexual activity whose principal aim is *reproductive*.²¹

of the “Convalescent” chapter at the end of book three, where Zarathustra finally confronts his abysmal thought of Eternal Recurrence and is thus, on my reading, able to inseminate Life ensuring the eventual arrival of his children. (Thanks to Lawrence Hatab for pressing me on this point.)

²¹ Although in the space of this essay I cannot really discuss the misogynistic implications of Nietzsche’s use of this metaphor, it is perhaps worth pointing out that, if my interpretation of the centrality of pregnancy is correct, it may provide a somewhat more charitable way to read Nietzsche’s pronouncements about women (at least as concerns *Zarathustra*) than those that tend to be found in the secondary literature. A prevalent reading, for instance, is that Nietzsche’s use of the trope of woman and pregnancy shows that he suffered from a kind of “womb envy” that led him to usurp the birthing power of women in order to advance a “phallic motherhood” position, according to which an autonomous man is someone who can create himself by “giving birth to himself”. For different examples of this kind of reading, not all of which use the language I have deployed here, see Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, New York 1991; Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Woman and Political Theory*, in: Paul Patton (ed.), *Nietzsche, Feminism, and Political Theory*, New York 1993, pp. 27–48; Kelly

What we find in the origins of this metaphor, then, is Nietzsche's preoccupation

Oliver, *A Dagger Through the Heart: The Ethics of Reading Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals*, in: *International Studies in Philosophy* 25 (1995), pp. 13–28; Sheridan Hough, *Nietzsche's Noontide Friend*, Pennsylvania 1997; Caroline Joan S. Picart, *Resentment and the 'Feminine' in Nietzsche's Politico-Aesthetics*, Pennsylvania 1999. Now, I do not deny that Nietzsche did appropriate pregnancy and birthing as tropes with which to characterize the activities of truly creative individuals, whom he mostly described under the umbrella of typical machismo as virile, manly, courageous, hard, warlike, and so on. But it seems to me that the conclusion that Nietzsche thereby contributed to the silencing of the feminine other (and the feminine mother) by appropriating the powers of women for himself and for men, selectively ignores Nietzsche's use of the trope of pregnancy *in conjunction* with that of woman (i.e. his use of the trope of the fertile, childrearing and childbearing woman) in order to affirmatively refer to many positively-laden value concepts in his philosophy such as life, wisdom, nature, art, eternity and so on. In particular, as I hope to show in what follows, this omission blinds us to the way in which, for Nietzsche, the project of self-creation or "self-birthing" always goes hand in hand with the project of "other-birthing", the project of ensuring the continuance and ennoblement of the human community as such and of life as a whole. This latter project is also partly advanced by way of the metaphor of the woman mother, but not in a manner that usurps that power from the feminine other; instead, Nietzsche fully recognizes that power as belonging to women and treats it as fundamental for the possibility of raising humanity to ever new heights. As will be shown below, Zarathustra needs the woman Life's potential for motherhood in order to engender his children. In Nietzsche's philosophy, men and women need each other, but, importantly, *not merely* for the purely selfish, egoistic, and self-involved goals of their own natures, not for the satisfaction of their own needs (sexual or otherwise); instead, they need each other *for the sake of another*, namely, *the child* that can be born from their union. In saying all this I do not mean to suggest that the Nietzschean trope is altogether benign or that we can exonerate Nietzsche from the charge of misogyny. For one thing, the trope perhaps overly emphasizes the reproductive and maternal capacities of women that have been traditionally used to oppress them. Also, in the specific case of *Zarathustra*, the trope links women to existence or nature in a way that may seem problematic, given the overall Nietzschean construal of nature as animalistic, predatory, cruel, violent, indifferent, and so on. Thus, the metaphor may betray a masculine fear of women's sexuality and a resentful portrayal of women as cruel sexual predators. Still, perhaps some of these worries could be assuaged. For instance, the last exchange between Zarathustra and Life shows him as lovingly accepting the wildness of Life instead of fearing her, which could be read as indicating that fear of women's sexuality can be overcome if men learn to be real human beings themselves (i.e. autonomous creators) (see Z III, The Other Dance Song 1, KSA 4.282). For an interesting reading that attempts to defend Nietzsche against the charge of misogyny, see Oppel, *Nietzsche on Gender*. I find Oppel's interpretation of the complexities behind Nietzsche's use of the concepts and metaphors of "man" and "woman" very insightful, though in the end I remain somewhat skeptical of her overall conclusion that Nietzsche's overt misogyny is really part of a rhetorical strategy that is aimed at subverting, undercutting, and eliminating all together gender differences and the oppressive prejudices that are concealed behind the exploitation of gender roles. For other examples of interesting readings that attempt to problematize Nietzsche's apparent misogyny and to read his remarks on woman in a more positive light see Werner Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Befreiung der Philosophie. Kontextuelle Interpretation des V. Buch des Fröhlichen Wissenschaft*, Berlin / Boston 2012, pp. 421–430; Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Birth*, in: Robin May Schott (ed.), *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment*, Bloomington 2010, pp. 157–185, and also *The Natal Self*, in: Robin May Schott (ed.), *Birth, Death, and Femininity: Philosophies of Embodiment*, Bloomington 2010, pp. 186–208. (Thanks to Sarah Tyson for urging me to address some of these issues.)

with ensuring that science, philosophy, and wisdom in general, be restored to their proper function as the fertile soil out of which the living generation can garner the energies to project itself effectively into the future, i.e., to engage in the kind of *procreative action* in the world that can serve to carry the torch of life to ever new heights in the generations that will succeed us tomorrow.

It is somewhat surprising that commentators have not really emphasized sufficiently the centrality of the theme of pregnancy in this much discussed Nietzschean metaphor.²² The debates tend to focus instead on the alleged import the metaphor is said to have for questions of metaphysics and epistemology.²³ But, in fact, as we

²² I believe that this omission might be partly to blame for the persistent view of Nietzsche as a staunch individualist who was only concerned with promoting a purely egoistic view of nobility as a self-aggrandizing project of personal perfection and greatness (see previous note). The metaphor shows that Nietzsche's deeper concern was always with promoting the greatness of the human community as such, or the perfection of freedom and autonomy for all, and not simply for oneself. In this way, I believe that the Nietzschean project in the later writings is really continuous with the sort of aim that the young Nietzsche had articulated both in BT and in UM: the suprapersonal goal of promoting and preserving a human culture in which greatness or genius could be realized in oneself *and in all* (see, for example, UM III, SE 5, KSA 1.382; UM III, SE 6, KSA 1.402–3). In her essay on Nietzsche's philosophy of birth, Thorgeirsdottir also emphasizes the fact that Nietzsche's conception of birth functions as an arena for the encounter with otherness, and that, therefore, the aim is not solipsistic self-creation of the same. Her analysis, however, tends to revolve around the notion of birth as an intersubjective exchange that generates difference and unpredictability, an experience that is primarily about mutual empowerment and not so much about other aspects of birth, like the succession of generations (see Thorgeirsdottir, *Philosophy of Birth*, pp. 163–164). On my view, the link to progeny and the succession of generations is equally important, albeit in a metaphoric (spiritual) sense: the point for Nietzsche is to contribute to the *humanly* continuance of life in the form of the spiritualization of the natural (i.e. by furthering human freedom and autonomy). I believe that had Thorgeirsdottir devoted more attention to this aspect of the metaphor of birth she might have realized that the immanent sense of eternity Nietzsche was after was not so much the continuation of life as a natural phenomenon, but its continuation as a distinctively human phenomenon (pp. 177–178). In this connection, see also notes 28, 38 and 39.

²³ For some examples see, Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles / Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*, Barbara Harlow (trans.), Chicago 1979; Lawrence Hatab, *Nietzsche on Woman*, in: *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19 (1981), pp. 333–345; David Booth, *Nietzsche's 'Woman' Rhetoric: How Nietzsche's Misogyny Curtails the Implicit Feminism of his Critique of Metaphysics*, in: *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 8 (1991), pp. 311–325; Irigaray, *Marine Lover; Oliver, A Dagger Through the Heart*; Babette E. Babich, *The Metaphor of Woman as Truth in Nietzsche: The Dogmatist's Reverse Logic or Rückschluß*, in: *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 12 (1996), pp. 27–39; Robert Pippin, *Morality as Psychology, Psychology as Morality: Nietzsche, Eros, and Clumsy Lovers*, in: Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 79–99. To be sure, not all commentators fail to emphasize the connection to pregnancy in Nietzsche's use of the metaphor. However, even as they do so, they fail to see it as the real lynchpin upon which the symbolism turns, and they tend to shift their analysis away from the theme of pregnancy and the will, and toward the metaphysical and epistemological issues they think Nietzsche is addressing through his use of this trope. Also, in the case of those commentators who do link preg-

can see in this early appearance of the trope, for Nietzsche those metaphysical and epistemological aspects, whatever their significance, are really peripheral to the more central issue of *procreation* and its connection to *action and the will*, that is to say, in my view, to the problem of the preservation and continuance of human freedom and autonomy.²⁴

nancy to issues of creativity and autonomy, the emphasis is usually on a negative understanding of Nietzsche's usage. Take, for instance, Irigaray's reading in which Nietzsche is seen as reducing "woman" to a maternal metaphor that is tied to his philosophical self-creations, but in a way that represses the maternal to the point of matricide; an act that for her constitutes the killing of difference for the sake of the reproduction of the same (Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, pp. 26–27, 34–5, 187–188). As Thorgeirsdottir has shown, however, this reading is a bit too simplistic with regard to Nietzsche's philosophy of birth, since it omits the aspect of it that connects to the longing for children, which constitutes a longing for something that is other (Thorgeirsdottir, *Philosophy of Birth*, p. 165; also *Die Philosophie Nietzsches im Spiegel von Philosophinnen im 20. Jahrhundert*. Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray und Judith Butler, in: Renate Reschke / Marco Brusotti (Hg. im Auftrag der Nietzsche-Gesellschaft e. V.), "Einige werden posthum geboren". *Friedrich Nietzsches Wirkungen* (Nietzsche Heute, Bd. 4), Berlin / Boston 2012, pp. 97–115, pp. 106–107).

24 My claim that Nietzsche's book and his use of the trope of woman in particular are principally centered around his concern to advance the cause of human freedom and autonomy may seem controversial, given what has become perhaps – at least in the English speaking literature on the subject – a very popular reading of Nietzsche as someone who engages in a radical critique of the concept of autonomy, and who sought to debunk the idea that human beings are or can be free, in the way in which we typically take ourselves to be. To be sure, not all commentators who accept this picture want to go as far as to deny any sense of freedom in Nietzsche's philosophy. Most think that there is some concept of freedom that survives the critique and that Nietzsche sought to advance. But even as they do so, their position assumes that such a Nietzschean conception of freedom has to be radically removed from standard views of agency insofar as it must deny to human beings any real control over their own actions; it must, that is, present us with a picture in which our actions, and the motives and principles that guide them, are not really up to us, or in any way products of our will and our choices. I disagree with this general interpretative trend. Although I cannot defend my position here, I believe that Nietzsche did not mean to completely renege on the belief that our actions are up to us in some non-trivial sense, even if he also thought that the metaphysical status of such a belief was at best spurious. My hope is that the interpretation I will defend in what follows will be compelling enough to at least garner some support for the view that Nietzsche was very much interested in furthering the cause of human freedom and autonomy, even if that means that, for now, we should let those concepts be understood very loosely and broadly. However, it is worth remarking that, throughout the book, Zarathustra freely and liberally makes use of the notion of the human will as a real and efficacious faculty of some kind, and that he speaks of it in ways that seem intended to recall traditional notions of "autonomy", even if he never really uses that word. For instance, Zarathustra speaks of the child and the creator as a first movement and a wheel that moves for itself, and he also claims that the will wants to command itself and give itself its own laws, or its own good and evil (see Z I, On The Three Metamorphoses; Z I, On the Way of the Creator; Z I, On Child and Marriage; Z I, On the Bestowing Virtue 1; Z II, On Self-Overcoming; Z II, The stillest Hour; Z III, On Old and New Tables 4 and 25; Z IV, The Welcome). In all these claims one can very well read references to the ideas of self-determination, self-mastery, and self-legislation that are part and parcel of traditional notions of autonomy, especially those found in the German Idealist school of philosophy.

If pregnancy is the real linchpin on which the Nietzschean metaphor of woman turns, then we should expect that Zarathustra's erotic relationship with the woman Life should bear fruit in the end, that she should become pregnant. Provided, of course, that Zarathustra has been successful in affirming life by defeating the Spirit of Gravity that threatens to strangle him with disgust of man and all of existence, thereby turning him into a spiritually infertile, castrated human being. But the narrative structure supports this hypothesis since the final encounter with Life in "The Other Dance Song" occurs *after* Zarathustra's convalescence and recovery from his victorious encounter with the abysmal thought of Eternal Recurrence that, according to his own report, threatened him in precisely that way (Z III, The Convalescent 2, KSA 4.274).

The history of Nietzsche's use of the metaphor supports, then, the hypothesis that what Zarathustra whispers is his newly acquired knowledge that he has managed to impregnate Life by overcoming the disgust with humanity and existence that would otherwise have made him, and therefore their relation, infertile. But this reading is supported further by considerations internal to the book itself.²⁵

In order to broach this part of the argument let us briefly consider the way in which the answer I have given to the riddle of Zarathustra's whisper may illuminate the issues raised by 5 and 6 above. These issues have to do with the general setting and the relation between the two songs. Let me begin with 6.

As I have indicated, my answer fits nicely with the narrative arch of the saga and allows us to preserve the simple explanation that is suggested by the spatial ordering Nietzsche gives to the two songs, placing them in between Zarathustra's encounter with the thought of Eternal Recurrence. This simple explanation is that the Other Dance Song is needed because in the first Dance Song Zarathustra fails to accomplish what he set out to do, namely, to sing a dancing and mocking song against the Spirit of Gravity and in praise of Life (Z II, The Dance Song, KSA 4.140). The reason for his failure is that Zarathustra has not yet confronted the heaviest burden that the Spirit of Gravity can impose on him, so his singing cannot ring true until he has successfully overcome this last challenge, assimilating and thinking through the wisdom of Eternal Recurrence. Once Zarathustra cures himself from the disgust with existence that resulted from his confrontation with Eternal Recurrence, he is now able to sing the song in praise of life that he had intended to sing before, but this time in a manner that passes muster and is thus fully convincing.

²⁵ As commentators have noticed, the book abounds with the use of pregnancy as a metaphor. For example: Z I, On a Thousand and One Goals, On Little Women Old and Young, and On Child and Marriage; Z II, On the Virtuous, and On Immaculate Perception; Z III, The Wanderer, On Unwilling Bliss, On Old and New Tables 30, and The Seven Seals 1; Z IV, On the Higher Man 11. It is worth also noticing that in many passages Zarathustra links the purpose of romantic engagement between the sexes as being marriage and children; for instance, in Z I, On Little Women Old and Young, and On Child and Marriage.

Recall that standing in the way of this simple explanation was the apparent defeatist ending of “The Other Dance Song”. My interpretation of the whisper allows us to deflate the seeming hopelessness of the ending and to give a resolution to the encounter that is continuous with the explanation that I just outlined. The love affair between Zarathustra and Life will indeed end; he is only mortal, after all. But this is not the end of the story because he has managed to impregnate Life with his child. So there is an extension and a continuation, in a different way, of their love affair: there is a projection of their love that will survive the breakup, and that will serve as a reminder of what was best in their relation.²⁶

Of course, as was suggested, in order to successfully impregnate Life Zarathustra *first needs to liberate his soul by strangling the strangler called sin*, which he will do by confronting the thought of Eternal Recurrence.²⁷ Although here I cannot really delve

²⁶ Although investigating fully the sexual symbolism surrounding both songs would take me too far afield, in connection to the issues raised in 6 above I do want to highlight some important aspects of it in the first Dance Song. It is very telling that this song is not only the first moment in the whole book where Zarathustra finds himself in a sexually charged encounter with members of the opposite sex, in the form of the beautiful maidens that he and his disciples stumble upon one evening while looking for a well, but also one in which we encounter the presence of Zarathustra’s own personal Cupid-god (in mythology the god of love *and procreation*) whom we are told has fallen asleep because he has chased too much after butterflies (Z II, The Dance Song). This latter is a clear reference to the myth of Eros and Psyche, and one that, in my mind, is meant to establish a connection to the first chapter of the saga entitled “On the Three Metamorphoses” that outlines the three stages in the transformation of the spirit, from camel to lion, and then to child. Again, though I cannot fully explore these symbolisms, I do want to indicate what I take to be the main lessons we should draw from them: the first, is that contrary to what we might have expected given the opening chapter, Zarathustra’s main project is not really the solipsistic one of giving birth to his own child-soul. The (pro)creative action he is after concerns other-birthing for which he requires a third party, a woman with whom to reproduce and give birth to the child-soul of another. But – and this is the second lesson –, importantly this other-birthing does not really consist in biological reproduction. That is why Nietzsche intentionally makes Zarathustra fail to conquer the affections of the young maidens he has encountered in the forest, after priming him for such a conquest by placing him in a context in which everything seems set for it. Zarathustra’s failure to sing the praises of life in the first Dance Song is thus framed against the backdrop of his failure to realize a real sexual encounter with actual women that could potentially end in biological reproduction. In this way, Nietzsche signals that his character’s initial failure in life-affirmation is not only due to his not yet having confronted the heaviest burden that can be imposed on him (the thought of Eternal Recurrence), but also to the fact that, in this instance, his efforts at life-affirmation are misplaced: those efforts should consist in more than mere biological or animal reproduction, for they should be exerted toward spiritual reproduction; the other-birthing that Zarathustra must bring about is not that of a human animal self, but that of an spiritually autonomous self. To be sure, this spiritual liberation of others (their being reborn into their own autonomous selves) also hangs on Zarathustra’s overcoming of the thought of Eternal Recurrence (see the discussion below).

²⁷ In the chapter “On Great Longing” that immediately precedes “The Other Dance Song” Zarathustra tells his soul that he liberated her from the strangler called sin (KSA 4.278). In the book, the image of strangulation and choking is linked to Eternal Recurrence. As we will see shortly, the symbol of the snake connects knowledge, sin, and Eternal Recurrence.

into my interpretation of this momentous encounter, let me say some things about its importance for the metaphor of impregnating Life that I have been discussing in connection to Zarathustra's whisper.

In the chapter "On Redemption" Zarathustra spells out the problem that his eventual confrontation with Eternal Recurrence will supposedly address and help overcome. What he says there is that the human will cannot really perform the redemptive role that he had previously assigned to it in the chapter "On the Blessed Isles" because it is a prisoner of the past or of the "it was" (Z II, On Redemption, KSA 4.179–80). Without entering into too much detail about the precise nature of this dilemma, we can say that in Zarathustra's estimation, the main problem of the human will is that it often finds itself afflicted by its past actions and experiences, and, for obvious reasons, it is unable to deal effectively with this affliction since it cannot really change the past by willing backwards. According to Zarathustra, our impotence with respect to the past consumes us to the point of making us so resentful that we end up extracting vengeance in an insane and sickly manner: we reinterpret existence and our particular mode of being *in moral terms* as a form of punishment. In essence what this means is that we come to regard the human will itself, and existence in general, as inherently corrupt and evil; that is, as the source of all misery and of everything that is questionable in life. This is, of course, the interpretation of life as *sinful* that is found in almost all ascetic religions; in this chapter, Zarathustra calls the view a fable of madness. Since under this interpretation, the source of the problem is our mode of existing and, in particular, our autonomous, free-willing, self-originating mode of operating in the world, the solution that is recommended by this insane moral view is to turn against the human will itself and to transform it into a *not-willing* (KSA 4.181).

This irrational solution is an expression of the nihilistic attitude that was described in a chapter that immediately preceded "On Redemption" and that is entitled "The Soothsayer". In the soothsayer's divination the earth is described as cursed with infertility and decay, and human beings are said to have become too weary even to die, so that they still walk and live on in tombs. According to the soothsayer's prediction, even the best human beings will end up subscribing to this sorry state of infecundity by embracing a fatalistic doctrine that he sums up in the thought that "everything is empty, everything is the same, everything was" (Z II, The Soothsayer, KSA 4.174). In essence this doctrine negates the power of the human will to produce anything worthwhile and so appears to recommend the renunciation of the will and of all human initiative and innovation. When Zarathustra later explains to his animals the nature of the sickness that assailed him, after summoning his abysmal thought of Eternal Recurrence, he will say that what had crawled down his throat threatening to suffocate him was the great disgust with man *and also what the soothsayer had said* (Z III, The Convalescent 2, KSA 4.274).

In Zarathustra's account of his ordeal, the soothsayer's fatalistic doctrine is reformulated as the belief that "all is the same, nothing is worth it, knowledge chokes" (Z III, The Convalescent 2, KSA 4.274). This reformulation is important because with

it Zarathustra connects the sinful interpretation of the world, and the fatalistic, anti-willing, anti-freedom doctrine that springs from it, with the topic of human wisdom or knowledge, thereby opening a door that leads us to the problems raised in 5 and to the bizarre love triangle that appears to reign over Zarathustra's relation with Life.

If knowledge is the suffocating element that, transformed into the strangler called sin, chokes us with the moral interpretation of existence and recommends a frontal attack against the human will in order to turn it into a not-willing, then human wisdom turns out to be the real stumbling block in our love of life and the proximal cause of our possible infertility. And yet, in "The Other Dance Song", Life herself tells Zarathustra that if he ever abandoned his Wisdom, she too would quickly abandon him. Why is this so? And what is signified by the symbolism of Wisdom and Life as women entrapped in a jealous confrontation with each other and with man?

In the background of the rivalry between these two women, as depicted in the two Dance Songs, lies in my view the Greek myth of Medusa and Athena. The reference to the myth in the songs is subtle but clearly audible. Importantly, the resonances are really found in "The Other Dance Song", where Life is described in ways intended to recall the figure of Medusa. For instance, at the beginning of the song, Zarathustra looks into Life's eyes just as he had done in the first Dance Song. But this time he claims that confronted with the voluptuousness of her gaze his heart stopped or stood still (Z III, The Other Dance Song 1, KSA 4.282). In my estimation, this brings to mind the killer gaze of Medusa that can turn a person into stone, effectively making him stand still like a statue. The link becomes progressively firmer: Zarathustra tells us that Life stirred twice her rattle, thus alerting us to her ability to make snake-like sounds. Shortly after, we are told that the tongue of Life's fleeing and fleeting hairs licks Zarathustra. The verb Nietzsche uses to describe the action of the tongue, and that is translated as licking, is really *züngeln*, which in this context refers to the rapid movement of a snake's tongue. The suggestion then is that the hairs of Life behave like a snake, which should obviously call to mind the snake hairs of Medusa. This allusion then becomes an explicit reference in the sentence that immediately follows the hair's description, when Zarathustra says: "Away from you I leaped, *and from your serpents*" (Z III, The Other Dance Song 1, KSA 4.282; translation modified and emphasis added).

If Life's hairs are the serpent-hairs of Medusa, and if Nietzsche is here therefore clearly gesturing toward the Greek myth, then it is not too much of a stretch to conclude that, in the Zarathustrean saga, Wisdom is the woman that has turned Life into a terrifying Gorgon of paralyzing gaze and viperous hair. After all, in the Greek myth, it is Athena, the goddess of wisdom, who transforms the beautiful maiden, Medusa, into the killer monster that turns people into stone. Let me briefly outline the way I see at play, in the Zarathustrean story, this women's rivalry and Wisdom's transfiguration of Life into a terrifying creature.

During the first exchange between her and Zarathustra in the first Dance Song, Life complains that men tend to idealize women too much and always paint them with virtues and qualities that they have really taken from their own selves. In her

particular case, Life complains that men call her profound, faithful, eternal, and mysterious, when in fact she is only fickle and wild, and a woman in every way (Z II, The Dance Song, KSA 4.140). The German word *Weib* that translators tend to render as “woman” has a pejorative connotation in this context: Life is saying that she is a broad, a *promiscuous woman*, who is, as she herself says next, not at all virtuous. This is, of course, in line with the analysis of the metaphor I have defended here: the point, I take it, is that our love affair with Life should not be overly romanticized lest we lose sight of its real purpose which is to ensure and guarantee the future. Life is not interested in pure dreamers or platonic observers who will idolize her and put her on a high pedestal for their own sexual or voyeuristic pleasure. Instead, she is a thoroughly sexual predator who wants to find whole men with whom she can carry out her reproductive purpose; whether it be this man or that is, of course, at bottom a matter of complete indifference to her, if only she can be sure of dealing with a genuine and whole human being. Life will use the living generation to help her engender the next generation, but she does not care whom among the living end up participating in this procreative exercise. In the end, like the preying Mantis that she is (at least in her metaphoric role as proxy for existence, the world, or nature), she will kill and devour all her lovers whether they managed to impregnate her or not. The individual human being should not lose sight of the fact that Life is in essence a voracious beast that always loves us for her own ulterior motives and never really for ourselves.

But unlike Life herself, we, her human lovers, cannot behave in a purely animalistic manner toward her. This is partly because we are special animals with capacities that distinguish us from other creatures. Chief among them is the cognitive faculty of searching for truth, of engaging in theoretical thinking and knowledge. Our relation to the world, and hence to life, is thoroughly mediated by our theoretical reason. Indeed, our theoretical and our practical reason are in a constant two-way process of mutual influence and communication that affects our actions in the world, and allows us to enjoy a special type of freedom unknown to other animals; it is also the bedrock upon which our moral faculties rest. Thus, our “love affair” with wisdom radically transforms and affects the peculiar relation our species has to life in general.²⁸

²⁸ As I will argue in a moment, it also modifies Life’s relation to us. Her interest becomes not simply that of animalistic procreation, but that of *spiritual procreation*: spiritual pregnancy becomes her goal when relating to the human animal. This is also part of the answer to Daniel Conway’s charge that life does not really need Nietzsche or Zarathustra to be her advocates since she will be able to overcome herself regardless; see Daniel Conway, *Life and Self-Overcoming*, in: Keith Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *A Companion to Nietzsche*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 532–547. Life as flat nature, as purely animalistic, indifferent and prodigal in self-overcoming, certainly does not require human suitors to successfully move onward: she can carry on the process with or without us. But spiritual Life, the interesting animalistic life, requires human advocates and redeemers. If Life wants to give birth to a child that can grow *spiritually* to ever-new heights, then she requires whole, authentic, free human beings with whom to procreate. Thus, Life’s warning to Zarathustra, that if his wisdom ever left him, she too

The principal way it does so is by appearing to raise us above nature and the purely animalistic existence that characterizes it (to say nothing of the blind, merely mechanical and material mode of being exhibited by inanimate objects, and one that represents an even lower level of existence than the one enjoyed by animals).²⁹ The human being's capacity to raise himself from the mere animal or the automata also appears to transform Life herself. This is why in "The Other Dance Song" Life says to Zarathustra that if his Wisdom ever left him, her love for him too would be quickly gone (Z III, The Other Dance Song 2, KSA 4.285). Without our capacity for theoretical reason, our relation to existence would be no different from the relation other animals have to it: an endless, almost changeless, ahistorical, and undifferentiated repetition of the behaviors of the species, where the individual specimen is inconsequential and one animal can be easily replaced by another in order to carry on the process into the future. In this purely animalistic relation, Life has the upper hand and completely controls the reproductive process, but she also appears to suffer a loss, since, while remaining at that level, she cannot aspire to reproduce into a more spiritually elevated

would quickly leave: here, obviously, the wisdom that Zarathustra requires is life affirming wisdom, or gay science, not the dry, infertile wisdom of the so called men of knowledge that he criticizes elsewhere in the book (see especially Z II, On Immaculate Perception, but also, for example, Z II, On the Famous Wise Men, Z II On Scholars, and Z III, On the Three Evils 2).

29 My remarks may seem in tension with other things Nietzsche says elsewhere that appear to deny the distinctions with which I am trafficking here. I seem to be attributing to Nietzsche the view that human beings have capacities that fundamentally distinguish them from other animals and that give them a special type of freedom, and I even seem to be imbuing these notions with a distinctively Kantian flavor. But not only was Nietzsche highly critical of Kant and German Idealism in general, he also appears to reject any fundamental distinction between humans and animals, and to demote thinking and reasoning to the level of operations that are governed by purely blind and mechanistic processes (e.g. GS 333, 354, BGE 17, 36). As I have already indicated, these issues are too complex to deal with in the space of this essay (see note 24). Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that my characterization here springs from an attempt to provide a coherent interpretation of the metaphorical elements in the passages and the scenes that I have been discussing, like the fact that the protagonist is engaged in a love triangle with two women called Life and Wisdom, that these women seem to level particular accusations against Zarathustra and each other, and so on. My interpretation seeks to provide an explanation of what all this metaphoric talk stands for. The fact that the interpretation I offer is in tension with other aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy may speak in favor of finding a different interpretation that can account for the metaphors without introducing said tension. However, we should not be too quick to attempt to ease this tension, for it could be pointing to a real conflict within Nietzsche's philosophy. Accepting the tension would, of course, set up a puzzle for us: the puzzle of why Nietzsche would want to develop philosophical outlooks that push in opposite directions and whether such outlooks can be reconciled. In my mind there can be satisfactory answers to these questions that preserve the tension, but that is a topic for a different essay. Elsewhere I have defended the view that, at least in the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche recommends and defends an ideal of autonomy and sovereignty understood very much along traditional Kantian lines; see Gabriel Zamosc, *The Relationship between Sovereignty and Guilt in Nietzsche's Genealogy*, in: *European Journal of Philosophy* 20 S1 (2012), pp. 107–142. (Thanks to Matthew Meyer for pressing me on this point.)

and ennobled mode of existence. So it is in her interest and vanity to want animals that will, in some sense, *war with her* and her tendency to govern all reproductive concerns and love affairs at the purely naturalistic and mechanical level.

Since we have special cognitive powers, we can conduct that kind of spiritual warfare and *attempt* to force Life to love us differently, and in the process, attempt also to lift Life herself out of her own superficial, dumb, spiritually flat mode of existence. In the end, however, we are really condemned to fail: as was mentioned earlier, Life as nature is at bottom a preying beast that does not care about any particular individual (hence, her promiscuity), whether it be material, animalistic, or human in form, and she will indifferently send us all off into oblivion, continuing on unconcerned for our plight. We should not forget that. But it is also true that we cannot help but idealize Life, to see her and experience her differently from the way she is seen and experienced by the rest of nature (and, thus, from the way Life herself experiences herself). Hence Zarathustra's rejoinder to Life in the first song, after she has reminded him of her fundamentally immoral character: he says that he never believes her when she speaks ill of herself (Z II, The Dance Song, KSA 4.140). In this way, he lets on his deep desire to see Life in a better light, to praise her and not to see her as the indifferent, cruel and murderous wench she has candidly confessed to being.³⁰

Praising Life, however, is very difficult. What stands in the way of our doing so is our wisdom, the same wisdom that is responsible for our wanting to love and to be loved differently from the rest of nature. Thus, when Zarathustra talks in confidence with his Wisdom she is angered by his affection for Life and his willingness to so quickly overlook her unmerciful and unscrupulous nature, and she reminds him that

³⁰ As readers can surmise, in both Dance Songs, Zarathustra describes his relation with these women, but especially with Life, in terms of love and hatred in a way that may seem puzzling. Indeed, he even goes as far as to suggest that he loves Life most when he hates her (Z II, The Dance Song, KSA 4.140). I think that reflecting on some of the issues I have been discussing in this section may help clarify somewhat this feature of the story. As I have been insisting, for Nietzsche the source of our conflicted duality with respect to existence (of the fact that, unlike other animals, when it comes to Life, ours seems to be a love-hate relationship), resides precisely in that special kind of awareness and capacity for knowledge that we possess and that is lacking in other creatures: a feature that I am arguing is captured by the metaphor of Zarathustra's love relationship with Wisdom. How this capacity for knowledge problematizes our relation to existence is attested, for instance, by the unique way in which we experience and know the past: namely, as something we often *hate* and wish we could erase; as was emphasized in our discussion of Zarathustra's characterization of the problem that Eternal Recurrence is meant to address. Yet, this very same capacity for experiencing time diachronically and knowing the past can give rise to the obverse sentiment: it can be the source of our *love* for the past which manifests itself in the form of our knowledge of inspiring historical events that may excite us, or fond personal memories we might lovingly revisit, or the like. Every human being knows from experience that his awareness of himself and of his peculiar mode of existing is such that he will often find himself lamenting the fact that he was born at all; and yet he also knows that on other occasions (and sometimes on the very same ones he decries) he will rejoice at the fact of his being alive here and now. (Thanks to Herman Siemens for prompting me to address this issue.)

the only reason he praises Life is that he wills, he wants, and he loves. I take it that part of what Wisdom is getting at is that Zarathustra wills, wants, and loves in the *humanly way*; but *that* way of willing, wanting, and loving results from our relation to Wisdom, from our capacity for knowledge. Wisdom is, thus, jealously complaining to Zarathustra that he loves Life only because he loved her first; the implication being, I take it, that perhaps he should refocus his affections back on her and not so much on Life.

Zarathustra in turn gets somewhat exasperated with Wisdom and almost offends her by telling her the truth behind her acerbic accusations. We are never told what this truth is, but I think it is not too hard to guess. Wisdom is in effect urging Zarathustra to love only her and to stop loving Life, who is a very cruel broad that will only bring him death in the end. But Zarathustra knows that love of truth merely for the sake of truth is just another form of death, and a worst form at that, since it turns the living person into a kind of zombiesque walking corpse. So Wisdom is not really offering the truly fulfilling love affair she pretends to be offering; she is just as much of a killer as Life is, and perhaps an even more terrifying one since she can make us dead *while alive*.³¹

If he is going to find fulfillment with these women, Zarathustra will need to play an active role in this love triad, one that, without turning him into an infertile walking tomb, allows him to love Wisdom enough so as to shape, by means of knowledge, his own affections in a humanly way, and to love Life and be loved back by her in more than a merely animalistic manner, while continuing, at the same time, to see her for the feral creature that, at bottom, she truly is. In other words, Zarathustra has to learn to love Life as an autonomous human being and not as a passive animal or an automata; and he can learn to love that way only by overcoming the disgust with Life and with man (hence, with himself) that his most abysmal wisdom, the truth of Eternal Recurrence, generates in him. As mentioned previously, all this happens right before “The Other Dance Song”.

It is interesting to note that Zarathustra overcomes his sickness by following the advice he had foreseen in the chapter “On the Vision and the Riddle”: that of biting off the head of the snake of disgust that had crawled down his throat and bit itself

³¹ On my reading, part of what it means to be made dead while alive is to revert into a purely animalistic or mechanical mode of existence. Thus, when I claim that what stands in the way of our praising Life is our Wisdom, part of what I mean is that, for Nietzsche, the pursuit of science, when it is not governed by the concerns of life (by our love of Life) but is rather done for its own sake (as an unconditional love of Wisdom or truth), ends up driving us in nihilistic directions: among other things, because we begin displacing the artistic (false) view of the world that allowed us to aspire to become more than what we are – partly by letting us imagine that we have special capacities that give us control over our lives –, and progressively replace it with a scientific (true) view of the world in which we have been belittled and demoted to the level of mere automata, and we let our lives be governed by the belief that we are not in control of our selves and our actions: we thus become in our own eyes, the zombiesque living tombs Zarathustra complains about.

fast to it (Z III, On the Vision and the Riddle 2, KSA 4.201). Notice that, in the context of our discussion, the decapitation of the snake recalls the beheading of Medusa, an event that turns the Gorgon into an apotropaic creature that can serve as protector and redeemer of humankind.³² In the same way, Zarathustra's decapitation of the snake of disgust makes existence bearable again, redeeming the human will from the fable of madness that reinterpreted all life as sin and that wanted to turn the will into not-willing.

But while Zarathustra's act of redemption allows him to love Life (perhaps authentically for the first time), it does not prevent him from seeing her for the feral creature that she is; just as in the Greek myth Medusa's head is not transformed back into the head of a beautiful maiden, for then the head could not perform the protective role it goes on to perform for the Greeks.³³ Thus, in his post-redemption dance song, we find Zarathustra describing all the feline and Medusa-like features of Life, yet in a way that also makes clear that his situation with respect to her has changed from what it was in the first Dance Song. Whereas in the first song Life had to rescue him from drowning with her golden fishing rod, this time Zarathustra's song describes his attempt to domesticate Life herself by making her yell and dance to the rhythm of his whip (Z II, The Dance Song; Z III, The Other Dance Song 1). His role is that of an active, autonomous participant in the love affair, one who recognizes Life as a murderous

³² In this connection, it is worth remarking that, in his unpublished notes, Nietzsche metaphorically refers to the thought of Eternal Recurrence as representing or being represented by Medusa's head (see Nachlass 1884/85, 29[31], KSA 11.344, and 31[4], KSA 11.360). The figure of Medusa also makes a brief appearance in the *Birth of Tragedy*, where Nietzsche tells us that the Greeks made use of their Apollinian cultural powers to guard themselves against the unbridled influence (specially the cruel, sexual licentious influence) of the Dionysian festivals. As he puts it: "the figure of Apollo rising full of pride, held out the Gorgon's head [*Medusenhaupt*] to this grotesquely uncouth Dionysian power" (BT 2, KSA 4.32). There is, thus, a strong continuity between the early Nietzsche's thoughts on the way the Apollinian culture of the Greeks sought repeatedly to cope with the fundamentally pessimistic, indifferent, and unmerciful Dionysian character of nature and the world (of life in general), and the late Nietzsche's own attempt to find a symbolic, artistic, quasi-religious philosophical construct that could do the same in the figure of Zarathustra and his ordeal with the thought of Eternal Recurrence. It is also interesting to note that in one of the preparatory writings for *Birth of Tragedy* entitled "The Dionysian Worldview", Nietzsche metaphorically refers to existence as Medusa, in a way that anticipates the link he establishes in *Zarathustra* and which we have been discussing, and claims that the Greeks needed to see the reflection of this Medusa-like existence in the transfiguring mirror of their Olympian gods (i.e. the mirror of their Apollinian/Homeric culture) in order to be able to live at all (KSA 1.560).

³³ In this sense I think that the metaphor connects back to *Birth of Tragedy* and to Nietzsche's attempt in that book to articulate a life-affirming pessimism, a pessimism of strength (see also previous note). The point is not to beautify life so as to blind oneself in romantic and idealistic fashion (in purely Apollinian fashion) to the Dionysian fact that life is at bottom terrible, indifferent, absurd, without meaning, without goal, and so on. Instead the point is to see life in all her Dionysian glory and in the light of full Dionysian knowledge, and yet *at the same time to love life* as it is revealed in that pessimistic wisdom: that is, as indifferent, absurd, overflowing, mocking, and the like.

beast, and yet one in which, because of his active role, she has lost some of her terrifying nature and become more loving and tender – also more spiritual, more human. Thus, for instance, we read that Life lovingly or sweetly bares her little white teeth at him; that she is a sweet wildcat; that although her gaze has made his heart stand still, when she glances again at his foot, it makes him dance, for hers is also a melting and rocking glance (Z III, The Other Dance Song 1, KSA 4.282).

The transformation of Life from a purely murderous creature into a more lovingly cruel one is due, again, to Zarathustra's special type of wisdom, that unlike the wisdom of the so-called wise men that makes Life spiritually sterile and dry, has the capacity to turn Life into a fertile womb into which the living generation can sow the seeds of the future. And here, again, we can perceive in my view faint echoes to the Greek myth, for just as Athena intervenes to allow Medusa to give birth to her children in the moment of her decapitation, so too does Zarathustra's newly acquired wisdom of Eternal Recurrence allow him, if not directly to induce Life to give birth, then at least to impregnate her with his child, and then to whisper in confidence into her ears his knowledge of her pregnancy.

V Meeting and Harmonizing the Criteria for Interpreting the Whisper

Having dealt with the issues raised by 5 and 6 let me return now to the way my answer to the riddle of Zarathustra's whisper harmonizes those expressed in 1–4. Take 3 first. If what Zarathustra says to Life is that he knows that she is pregnant, this would explain why she replies that no one knows that. Pregnancy is a condition that, in its first stages at least, can be inconspicuous. It is, thus, something that a woman could keep secret for a while. Life can, therefore, quite naturally express surprise at the fact that someone like Zarathustra could guess correctly her condition when she still does not show any outward signs of being in it.³⁴

Now think of issues 2 and 4. As was mentioned earlier, the tears that Zarathustra and Life shed after the whisper cannot be really of joy because that would make the final phrase, where Zarathustra tells us that Life was still dearer to him than all his

³⁴ Zarathustra's accurate guess of Life's condition might also seem specially surprising to us, the readers, given all the evidence that the book has been accumulating up to this point. Zarathustra's various speeches have shown that human life is, in some deep sense, in precipitous decline. How could Life be pregnant when she must be having a very hard time finding suitable human mates with which to reproduce spiritually? As the book has argued, we are all heading in the direction opposite to that of the *Übermensch*: we are all turning into the spiritually barren Last Men of the prologue; beings who are spiritually flat, and who represent blinking automata that are only barely animated (i.e. beings who have no will of their own); see Z I, Prologue 5.

Wisdom ever was, seem out of place. This final phrase signals that the whispered words had a negative impact of some kind. However, the whispered words are also prefixed by the words “but you also know –”. This formulation implies, in contradistinction to the final phrase, that the whispered words are meant to have some kind of positive effect. As was said earlier, the words are intended to console or compensate Life somehow for the fact that Zarathustra will indeed leave her soon, as she has rightly guessed.

This duality of the whisper, its being framed between two phrases that seem to push in opposite directions, is, I submit, what has given so much trouble to commentators attempting to unravel the mystery of Zarathustra’s secret words. For the framing of the whisper between those phrases would seem to require it to have at the same time both a positive *and* a negative significance, and it would seem as if nothing that Zarathustra could say could really perform that dual role. My answer to the problem, however, does allow us to understand the whispered words as being simultaneously positive and negative. Both Life and Zarathustra can weep in sadness at the tragic end of their love affair, and yet at the same time there is a positive final note to their inevitable rupture: she will bear their child in the not so distant future, so there will be a prolongation of their love affair that will survive his physical demise. This is why Zarathustra expresses a deep affection for Life even as he is about to leave her. Knowing that she will go on carrying something precious of his, fills him with love for her and makes her dearer to him than anything or anyone else ever could.

It might be thought that my account of Zarathustra’s whisper does not really harmonize well with the problem raised by 1. If Zarathustra has managed to impregnate Life why would he now want to leave her? Instead of voluntarily dying, should he not want to linger on for as long as he can and see the birth of his own child? Although it is contrary to parental love, as we understand it, I think that Zarathustra’s desire to leave Life just as he has managed to impregnate her is actually quite in line with the metaphorical significance that the concept of the child carries within the Zarathustrean universe. In the chapter “On immaculate Perception”, Zarathustra berates some people he calls sentimental hypocrites and pure perceivers, saying that they show a sterile love for the earth, one that is ashamed of itself and would like, in effect, to desire life without desire. He then continues:

Your desire lacks innocence, and now therefore you slander all desiring!
Indeed, you do not love the earth as creators, *procreators* [*Zeugende*], and enjoyers of becoming!
Where is innocence? *Where there is a will to procreate*. And whoever wants to create over and beyond himself, he has the purest will.
Where is beauty? Where I *must will* with my entire will; where I want to love and perish so that an image does not remain merely an image.
Loving and perishing: these have gone together for eternities. Will to Love: that means being willing also for death (Z II, On Immaculate Perception, KSA 4.157; emphasis added and translation slightly altered).

According to Zarathustra, then, being disposed to die is the attitude that is required from anyone who wants to father a child, and *one must want to love and perish* if one is going to manage to create something over and beyond oneself.³⁵

This fundamental attitude of wanting to die for the sake of one's child is also present in the chapter "On Free Death". There, Zarathustra says: "My death I praise to you, the free death that comes to me because *I* want. And when will I want it? – *Whoever has a goal and an heir wants death at the right time for his goal and heir.*" (ZI, On Free Death, KSA 4.94; emphasis added). The implication of Zarathustra's words is that the living person will want to die precisely at the time he realizes that his death is necessary to ensure the existence of his heir, or his heir's well being. In an instant, when we consider who Zarathustra's child might be, we will see that his desire to die at precisely the moment he has managed to impregnate Life makes sense. For now, let us simply note that within the orbit of Zarathustra's symbolic universe there is a coherent logic to his desire to leave Life: the living generation must perish so that room is made for the next generation that will carry the torch of life forward, ensuring that life keeps changing and growing and does not remain static or cease to be altogether. Death is the price you pay for the immortality of life that will be realized in the generations that will follow you tomorrow. So if you truly love life, and you would like to see existence and the world succeed onwards you must not be simply willing to die (to pay the price, so to speak), you must actually *want* to do so *for the sake of those who will come after* (for the sake of life itself).³⁶

³⁵ I have said to "father a child", but this is only because of the specific metaphoric structure that Nietzsche has been deploying in describing the relation between Zarathustra and Life. Life, or existence, or nature, is the "woman", and so the "mother and the womb" in this allegorical configuration, so in relation to her and the procreative act, the human being (of which Zarathustra is here the representative) has to act as the metaphoric "father". But, in my mind (though it is unclear whether also in Nietzsche's mind), this is not necessarily to suggest that real women are excluded from the whole affair (that real human beings can only father children not mother them): the human being that is a woman can also metaphorically "father" a child in her relation to her own life, provided she is able to live authentically and autonomously (and not slavishly). I grant that the whole metaphoric structure has the unwelcomed misogynistic effect of suggesting that autonomous women must be masculine or adopt masculine features, and so that a true woman is not autonomous until she "acts like a man". But it is worth stressing that "acting like a man" is also a figurative expression. It is meant to stand for "acting with a will of one's own", something that a real human being who is a woman can certainly do. Once we have understood the deeper philosophical point, we need not follow Nietzsche in describing the free and autonomous human being in the language of the romantic 19th century as virile, manly, and so on. (Thanks to Sarah Tyson for pressing me on this point.)

³⁶ In this way, the suggestion seems to be that the real seal of life-affirmation is the desire to leave life (at the right moment, of course) and not simply the willingness to do so; the latter being an attitude one could hold begrudgingly. The life that is thus affirmed is not one's own life – in this scenario one is, after all, desirous to die – but life itself, or life in general. This Zarathustrean desire to leave life contrasts, then, with the slavish desire to die out of exhaustion with life or disgust with it. Similarly, it also contrasts with a mere heroic desire to die for glory, or honor, or any other such prices (what one

Against my interpretation of Zarathustra's whisper it could be objected that in the chapter that immediately follows "The Other Dance Song", Zarathustra himself claims that the woman with whom he wants to have children is called Eternity and not, as I would have it, Life (Z III, The Seven Seals). The answer to the objection is already articulated in some of the things I have just said. Zarathustra's love affair is with a temporally specific and spatially circumscribed Life: the Life he can relate to (love or hate, affirm or deny) *while he himself remains in existence*. In this way, Life is for Zarathustra a finite woman, with whom his relation can end at any time. But when Zarathustra, the human being, aided by his redemptive wisdom of Eternal Recurrence, manages to impregnate this finite woman called Life, she becomes eternal; an immortal Life who will go on living (in the next generation) after he has died and their finite relation has ended.³⁷ Thus, in the book, Eternity is the name Life acquires once she has been made immortal and her continuance in the form of Zarathustra's heirs has been assured: this is why the woman with whom Zarathustra wants to have his children is Eternity, or pregnant Life, Life *made eternal* by the finite human being who has lived authentically and autonomously.³⁸

could, speaking loosely, perhaps call the ancient Greek model). In Zarathustra's case, the desire for death is supraheroic and suprapersonal (perhaps also *superhuman*), since it is a desire that expresses one's own selfless renunciation of life *for the sake of the other generations of great human beings that will follow or succeed one*.

37 In a certain sense, his love becomes eternal: it no longer is love for the finite woman Life with whom he can relate while he is alive (though it is certainly that as well), but now is also a transcendent love of life in general (of all of existence: his own, those of others, past existences and future ones); it becomes a love of life as a whole (*amor fati*). This does not mean that someone who loves life this way must love all manifestations of life taken in isolation and individually, that he must love say, Hitler's life and his particular actions. Instead, what he loves is existence itself *in essence*; a love that means that one accepts and reconciles oneself to the fact that there may be, and in all likelihood will be, particular aspects or episodes of existence that one will not (or does not) in fact like or love, but which do not thereby soil the whole spectacle for oneself: a love that may require a person to accept and want everything as it has been, and so not wish it to be different (even while not loving it in each and everyone of its isolated instances). *As a whole* life is lovable even if *in all*, in each and every one of its particulars, it is not.

38 My account is thus opposed to Nickolas Pappas's assertion that Nietzsche is obsessed with eternity but at the same time severs its connection to reproduction, a connection that Aristotle had defended in *De Anima* (see Nickolas Pappas, *The Eternal Serpentine*, in: Christa Davis Acampora / Ralph R. Acampora (eds.), *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, New York 2004, pp. 71–82, p. 81). On the contrary, for Nietzsche the connection to reproduction is crucial: the only eternity of the human being is to eternalize life by making her pregnant with the future. This pregnancy is a *spiritual pregnancy*: the human being can make life pregnant by ensuring that the future humans who will be born in the animalistic fashion (biologically out of man and woman) can be reborn into their own autonomous being through the spiritual influence of autonomous human beings like (the fictional) Zarathustra – human beings who can, of course, also be real fathers or mothers, but who need not be, since they can live and die without having reproduced biologically (and in fact, as was just mentioned, can be themselves totally fictional like Nietzsche's Zarathustra).

Once more, it is interesting to note the resonances here to the Medusa myth. Medusa is the only one of the Gorgons who is subject to mortality, which is why Perseus is able to slay her and reclaim her head as a weapon for defending the Greeks. In Zarathustra's world, Life too is a god-like woman with murderous tendencies who is subject to a kind of poetic finitude: the living can experience her only in a precariously finite mode. But if the living human being is able to reclaim and redeem his will from the life-negating forces that would seek to turn his will into not-willing, then he will not live in terror of this voracious creature, but instead will make his interaction with her fruitful by actively willing the continuance of an ennobled human life past his own death. Then his mortal life will be over, but immortal life will press on.³⁹

VI Conclusion: The Child of Zarathustra and Life

One final question and we are done: who is the child of Zarathustra and Life? There are two answers that may immediately suggest themselves to us but which, I think, are mistaken.⁴⁰ One is that the child is Zarathustra's own soul, which he has been trying to transform throughout the book from camel to lion, and then to child. I do not find this answer satisfying because I think that Zarathustra's spiritual transformation into a child has to happen *before* or *immediately after* Zarathustra overcomes the thought of Eternal Recurrence, which restores a second innocence to existence by cleansing it

³⁹ To be sure, in a certain sense, life will go on regardless, since the universe will not cease to be if human beings stopped participating in the process. But here we must remember that the life we are interested in seeing push onward is human life, the life that is conscious of itself, and that can be either spiritually debased or ennobled by the actions of the individual human being. When Zarathustra impregnates Life he contributes to Life's spiritual eternity; he helps eternalize the spiritualization of life in the form of life's humanly continuance (see also note 28).

⁴⁰ I do not mean to suggest that these are the only alternatives that are available nor do I intend to present my answer concerning the identity of the child of Zarathustra and Life as an argument by elimination. Someone who accepts my reading of the whisper might still find some other answer more to his liking. I do believe, however, that the answer I will provide is among the more elegant solutions that are in the offing, and that it may accommodate many of the alternatives others might want to consider. Thus, for instance, among the possibilities I do not discuss is the idea that the child could be Life herself. Since, by my own account, there is a lot of mythologizing involved in *Zarathustra*, one could draw on the dominant pagan myth of life as cycle of death and birth to answer the question of the possible identity of the couple's child. Life herself will be reborn from the union of Zarathustra and Life, but without numerical identity since, along with Zarathustra, she too would have died in the breakup. My own favored solution can accommodate this alternative reading, since the person that I will claim shortly is the child of Zarathustra and Life, is an actually living person and can be considered a unique or numerically distinct instantiation of Life herself. (Thanks to Mark Bauer for pressing me on this issue.)

from the interpretation of it as sinful that the ascetic ideal has made ubiquitous. His child soul is a precondition for his successful insemination of Life. Also, Zarathustra is about to die and he has partly justified his departure from Life by leaving her with child. But if this child is his own soul then it too will disappear once he is dead, and that hardly seems any consolation for Life. To save this line of argument, it seems to me, we would need to interpret the whole thing in a very unnietzschean way as suggesting that the human soul can survive in a kind of transcendent afterlife past one's own physical demise.⁴¹

Another, more plausible, candidate is that the child is the *Übermensch* that in the first book was presented as the meaning of the earth and the ideal that human beings should strive for. While this answer seems better, I still do not find it completely satisfying. I believe that Nietzsche meant the *Übermensch* to be an ideal that we could never realize but which we must perpetually pursue in order to ennoble life and ourselves, continuously guaranteeing thereby the continuation of human independence and autonomy. I cannot defend my view here, but I will say that part of what Zarathustra's encounter with Eternal Recurrence is meant to do is rescue this ideal from the clutches of a potentially world denying wisdom that threatens to sour the ideal for us. In my view, one manifestation of this wisdom is the knowledge of Eternal Recurrence, which principally teaches us that the greatest human being we could ever become will always be found wanting, and human all too human. Zarathustra cannot prevent the eternal recurrence of the small man because no matter how successful we are in overcoming ourselves and in becoming something greater than we are, we will always find ourselves to be spiritually too small and capable of climbing to even higher heights. Provided we have a noble disposition and not a slavish one, while we remain in existence we will always be condemned to return to the moment of our own spiritual self-overcoming. Thus, on my reading, part of what Eternal Recurrence

⁴¹ The book itself denies this, as witnessed by Zarathustra's own address to the dying tightrope walker in the Prologue, that the soul dies sooner than the body; a sentiment that is then ratified by Zarathustra's own animals in their imagined death speech, where they claim that at the fatal hour Zarathustra would say to himself that "souls are as mortal as bodies" (see, Z I, Prologue 6, KSA 4.22; Z III, The Convalescent 2, KSA 4.276). I should say, however, that the problem I am raising for this line of argument depends on our reading Zarathustra's death wish as implying that he desires to literally leave life (i.e. to actually and physically die). If one interprets the desire figuratively, say, as his wanting to "die spiritually" presumably in order to be reborn again while alive as a "new" soul, then the problem I am highlighting will not arise, since Zarathustra's departure from Life would not really mark a real cessation of his relation to her but a transformation into a new or renewed relationship. In that case one can accept my solution to the riddle of the whisper and argue that the child is Zarathustra's own soul. I still favor my own approach because I believe that Nietzsche intended for us to imagine that Zarathustra was meant to literally die at the end of book three, and that the overall evidence speaks in favor of that reading. For a great and insightful discussion of the evidence see Loeb, *The Death of Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, especially chapters 2, 3, and 5. (Thanks to Matthew Meyer for pushing me on this issue.)

reveals is that the ideal of the *Übermensch* is, in principle, unrealizable for us or perhaps, at the very least, not *fully* realizable (imperfectly realizable).

But, setting that aside, even if we granted that the *Übermensch* is realizable and could become an actual, completed human being, I still find it unlikely that he would be Zarathustra's child. For, in my estimation, this would make the book a bit too self-involved – and while this is indeed a book for none, it is also a book for all. Zarathustra has descended down his mountain to tell us that, after the death of God, the *Übermensch* should be the meaning of the earth and that we should be bridges to this ideal person. As we know from the Prologue, nobody seems to heed or even understand Zarathustra's words because we are all still prisoners of the ascetic ideal, and we need to liberate our will from its impotence with respect to the past and the sinful interpretation of existence that springs from it. Zarathustra spends the next speeches articulating the problem and finding its solution, which finally comes to him in his confrontation with his most abysmal thought. Zarathustra's goal has not been to realize the ideal of the *Übermensch* alone, by himself, in exasperation at our own despondency, but to find a way to liberate the human will so that we can *all together* pursue the goal that can give a new meaning to the earth. Thus, it seems more reasonable to suppose that, if the *Übermensch* is going to become a reality, then engendering him will require *our assistance* and not simply be the result of the exertions of a lonely human being like Zarathustra.

Who else is left then? Who is Life pregnant with? I submit that it is the reader. As was mentioned earlier, Eternal Recurrence is the fundamental conception of the whole book. The saga is built around Zarathustra's attempt to liberate the human will from the sinful interpretation of the world that holds it captive, and that, after the death of God, threatens to turn us all into the Last Men: creatures without a will of their own who have become blinking automata that, in the best case, simply want to live a comfortable but debased animal life (Z I, Prologue 5, KSA 4.19–20). Zarathustra's victorious encounter with the abysmal thought of Eternal Recurrence is supposed to show us the way to effectively achieve this liberation. But if his success is to become a reality, then his ordeal must transform us, the readers, in a way that will set us on the right course toward the liberation of our own will.⁴² Only then, will we have become

⁴² In my view, this might also partly explain the peculiar poetic structure of the book and Zarathustra's use of songs instead of speeches to express what appear to be his most important ideas (like that of Eternal Recurrence). In his very insightful essay, Stegmaier argues that songs function as anti-doctrines through which Zarathustra frees himself from the need to teach his fundamental ideas, and in particular, from the teachability of the thought of Eternal Recurrence which, because of its very nature (because of what, according to Stegmaier, it is truly about, namely, the experience of Dionysian joy), really cannot and should not be apprehended through intellectual means (see Stegmaier, *Oh Mensch! Gieb Acht!*, pp. 88, 107, 113–114). I partly agree with Stegmaier's interpretation of the significance of the songs, but I do not fully share his view that they are principally meant to make paradoxical Zarathustra's doctrines (p. 113). In my view, the problem is not so much that the doctrines

the heirs of his momentous, world-changing achievement. Zarathustra's child is the reader who has gone through the pages of this book following its protagonist's saga, and who has learned and appropriated the life-affirming lessons that are contained in the story that is being told.

In an intriguing passage in *Ecce homo*, that is undoubtedly intended to be both comic and earnest, Nietzsche says that Julius Caesar could be his father (EH, Why Am I So Wise 3, KSA 6.269). In the same way, Zarathustra could be mine – or yours, dear reader. It depends on whether we allow his words and his philosophy to transform us in the life-affirming way that he wanted them to do so; if we do, we can carry on his legacy and build upon the foundations that he lay down. In the meantime, Zarathustra has to die (as well as his author), and from eternity await the moment when thanks to his influence, we, his children, may be newly born into this earth.⁴³

cannot or should not be intellectually apprehended, but rather that by merely doing so they cannot really have the transformative effect in the reader that they are meant to have. The teachings need to be appropriated or *incorporated* by the student in a way that transforms his own will, something that can be done more effectively by rendering them into songs (and, moreover, ones that should be *danced*, that is, should be literally appropriated with one's body and activity). In my view, the singing and dancing qualities discussed by Stegmaier are placed in the book in order to make the teachings, especially that of Eternal Recurrence, the object of a subjective and active willing on the part of the reader, as opposed to a mere passive exercise of detached spectatorship. In this way, the songs liberate, not so much the teacher, as the student, and in particular, they liberate his will, by forcing him – or perhaps better, as Stegmaier might put it, by *challenging* him (p. 115) – to learn with his body and his soul, and not simply with his intellect.

⁴³ I would like to thank Lawrence Hatab, Matthew Meyer, Herman Siemens, Sarah Tyson, and Mark Bauer for their very helpful and insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper. I am also grateful to Werner Stegmaier and the anonymous referees for their very valuable observations and editorial advice. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 20th International Conference of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society at the University of Birmingham, UK. I thank attendants at the event for their questions and feedback.