

WRITING WITH BLOOD: LANGUAGE AND NIETZSCHE'S HERMENEUTIC PHILOSOPHY

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"I am a railing by the torrent: let those who can, grasp me! Your crutch, however, I am not. Thus spoke Zarathustra."

Friedrich Nietzsche
Thus Spoke Zarathustra
First Part - "On the Pale Criminal"

1. Introduction: The Hermeneutical Opening

Reading Nietzsche, one is immediately struck by the exceptional quality of his language. It is frequently exorbitant and sometimes outrageous. It lends itself to musical comparison. Occasional prolixity is offset by many passages which might best be described as *poetic*. What is intended by the employment of this somewhat nebulous term "poetic" will be discussed in more detail below (indeed it is one of the central concerns of this reflection) in concert with the development of Nietzsche's philosophical/linguistic project. Suffice it to say at this point that the theoretical orientation of the methodological problems raised in this interrogation of the poetic as poetic is the ground of its own self-understanding. The poetic is thus an ontological "structure," as it is revealed in the later writings of Martin Heidegger where it takes on the awesome proportions of the ambivalent *es gibt* and the paradoxical *Ereignis*: that by which Being and Nothingness are sent. It is a process of dialectical and speculative negation: the non-Being of Being Becoming Being and Nothingness and back again; in short, the origin and history of consciousness but not consciousness itself (as Justice, the same problem Socrates wrestles within the *Republic*). Therefore, poetry is also the most authentic form of human dwelling (as *Da-sein*), it is the measure of all measuring, it is the ground which is itself grounded in the ungrounded. From more of an epistemological perspective, as Merleau-Ponty says, poetry can be defined as that

which "must completely awaken and recall our sheer power of expressing beyond things already said or seen."¹ It is thus not merely speaking the unsaid in the said or of allowing it to emerge, but of speaking the unspeakable itself. According to Heidegger, when you fall into the abyss (*Abgrund*) of this, you "fall upward."

It is the contention of this paper that the poetic development of Nietzsche's language was, first of all, an outgrowth of his unflinching commitment to a radical way of life which demanded a new way of thinking and speaking and, secondly, an attempt to create at the scene of his writing a place where others might be drawn into the philosophical way of life he had chosen. Nietzsche's writing thus suggests a new way of reading which might be called a kind of "therapeutic" grammar that involves the reader in a process of self-transformation and growth. Far from being merely an Aristotelian methodology for textual analysis, this hermeneutic of self-appropriation must be understood ontologically as a way of being in the world ("world" understood fundamentally as a languaging process, Gadamer's "linguisticity"). Although we are already involved in that process which we hope to illuminate, we will begin by attempting to define a "method" of approach to the originary style of Nietzsche's writing which will shed some light on its origin, purpose and uniqueness. Paul Ricoeur offers such an approach by way of his hermeneutical theory.²

Combining the techniques of structural analysis and phenomenology -- especially the hermeneutical phenomenology of Hans-Georg Gadamer -- Ricoeur suggests that we approach the written text as an atemporal entity which has distanced itself from its author and from the context in which it was written. Every text is thus always available for new interpretations. It is not a matter of "divining" the mind of the author -- which is a questionable task even for the author himself -- nor is it a matter of figuring out the original or "correct" meaning of the text. What can be done is to determine a structure within the text, or "behind" the text, that opens the way to a meaningful explanation of the subject matter. This linguistic structure will reveal a possible "world" opened up "in

¹ Merleau-Ponty, M. *Signs*. Trans. Richard C. McCleary. Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1978, p.52; orig. *Signes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

² Ricoeur, P. *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. C.E. Reagan and D. Stewart. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 213.

front of" the text and will confront the reader with a critique of the world in which the reader now lives. According to this hermeneutical theory, it is possible for the open or, as I would prefer to say, the therapeutically disposed reader to incorporate this new world revealed by the text through a process that Ricoeur describes as "appropriation" (*Aneignung*), a process of self-transformation or self-knowledge.³ I will attempt to establish that Nietzsche was very much aware of the appropriative, therapeutic value of this hermeneutical relationship of reader to text, and that the development of his increasingly poetic style, under the influence of "monumental" pre-Socratic poet-philosophers such as Heraclitus, within a framework of concern for *Lebenswelt Philosophie*, was an attempt to positively exploit this relationship.

The philosophical poetic texts of Nietzsche, and his aphoristic style, present problems for the interpreter similar to the kind of problems presented by parables, to which the aphorism is closely related. Again, Ricoeur is helpful in understanding these problems through his hermeneutical investigations of the language of religion and faith. In his analysis of the parables and paradoxical epigrams of Jesus, Ricoeur shows that their first task is to break down or break through our normal, rational expectations: like the Eastern *koan* parables are intended to disorient before reorienting. Once our rational strategies of everyday consciousness have been shattered, we are able to "let their [parables] poetic power display itself within us." Ricoeur understands this "poetic power" as a creative event which must happen "in the heart of our imagination ... before we may convert our heart and tighten our will."⁴ Nietzsche was aware of this paradoxical and poetic nature of the aphorism. In his later works the aphorism became his predominant style, along with the parable and the poem -- especially, for instance, in *Ecce Homo*, *Zarathustra* and his posthumously published collection of ruminations, *The Will to Power*. Indeed, it is in the first part of *Zarathustra* that Nietzsche suggests that a clue to whether or not one is on the bridge to the *Ubermensch* can be determined by

³ Ricoeur, P. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, trans. John B. Thompson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 185.

⁴ Ricoeur, P. *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 245.

virtue of one's relationship to the parable: "Watch for every hour, my brothers, in which your spirit wants to speak in parables: there lies the origin of your virtues."⁵

Nietzsche was well aware, however, of the special difficulties of interpreting this genre of writing. "Scientific" explanation is insufficient here. What it requires is a conversion of the whole person, a change of heart. "A whole science of hermeneutics" is needed, Nietzsche said. We have lost the art of reading. What we need to learn is how to "ruminate"--like cows.⁶ Now "to ruminate" is to chew something until it becomes thoroughly digestible, to masticate meditatively and, in a certain sense, mindlessly. It is only when thinking is allowed to become rumination that a kind of wonderment (a term used by Heidegger in his reflection on Heraclitus to describe the essential feature of philosophy) can be born--as though we almost need to forget that we are thinking so that the poetic power of words can give birth to the true event of thinking.

Nietzsche's words are not meant to inform or explain but to transform. Indeed, as Heidegger allowed himself a certain "academic" license in his employment of etymology as a lead in discourse, Nietzsche takes many historical and factual liberties in his writing, to the extent that some of his early and more sober "philological" work borders on fiction ... useful fiction, of course. Certainly, information and explanation may lead a person to change his way of thinking on a particular subject. But Nietzsche disdained cognitive gymnastics and the coercion of non-contradictory argument because it does not get to the heart of the matter. It is the *whole person* that must change and not merely one's opinion on this matter or that, although pursuit of the latter may, Parmenides seems to allow, lead to the former. In the same way that Nietzsche believed that authentic language was best suited to the expression of great passion (which is a gift, the doubling of Pandora) so also language must evoke a passionate response on the part of the reader. Nietzsche's language is attuned to a deeper level of communication than what Plato calls "verbal dispute" in the *Sophist*. Rather, it is in attunement ("*Stimmung*" is the term Heidegger uses) with the living language of the poetic.

⁵ Nietzsche, F. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Viking Press, 1954, p. 187.

⁶ Nietzsche, F. *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing. New York: Doubleday, 1956, p. 157.

Poetry is the originary style of language--a primordial facticity of absence. But the style or form of Nietzsche's writing, as was already suggested, cannot be separated from its content without reducing Nietzsche's dynamic fire to a cold-hearted analysis on the nature of combustion. Upon entering into Nietzsche's style, upon being gripped by it, what one finds is that it is "philosophical" to the extent that it is aware of its obliqueness and generativity, its absurd predicament of moving forward by bending back upon itself and leaping intuitively like a grasshopper. The content of Nietzsche's style--if we must continue to use such abstract terms--is the style itself. Its "becoming" is motivated by and grounded in a reflective "concern" for its own becoming. Nietzsche's style is pre-eminently a way of life and the ontogenesis of that "way" is the living word, the creative, poetic word. If we find words resounding in Nietzsche's life it is because we find life resounding in Nietzsche's words. Consequently, there will be no attempt at presenting a systematic or exhaustive account of Nietzsche's philosophical work here, since no such account could ever hope to reveal anything of the radical world disclosed by his language. As Nietzsche himself says, "I mistrust all systematizers and I avoid them. The will to a system is a lack of integrity."⁷ Neither will there be any pretension to final answers about anything. That also would be contrary to the Nietzschean spirit. What I want to do is to describe one possible approach to Nietzsche, one possible "world" created by the fusion of my horizon with the horizon of his philosophical-poetic texts. It may be helpful to recall in this connection the last of Heidegger's "three dangers" that threaten genuine thinking: "The bad and thus muddled danger is philosophizing."⁸

2. Philosophy as Living Truth

Nietzsche's philosophy presents endless difficulties to the analytic scholar who needs to put concepts and ideas into neat and tidy categories before they can make sense. Throughout his writing, Nietzsche uses words in such a way that they gradually or suddenly shift in meaning. He squeezes the polysemous juices out of them so as not to waste a drop of their often contrary and seemingly contradictory meanings. From the

⁷ Nietzsche, F. *Twilight of the Idols*, in *Portable Nietzsche*, p. 470]

⁸ Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p. 8.]

word "punishment," for instance, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche extracts *eleven* separate meanings "from the relatively small and random body of material" at his disposal, "to give the reader some idea of how uncertain, secondary, and accidental the 'meaning' of punishment really is...."⁹ Yet it is exactly from this uncertain, secondary, and accidental fluid that Nietzsche distills the vintage wine of his philosophy. Or, to take another example, look at his convoluted dance with the word "suffering." At one point, suffering is praised as a necessary and inevitable aspect of life--the *genuine* life of the warrior-poet. At another point, however, it is seen as wholly abhorrent, the result of self-inflicted lacerations born of "*ressentiment*."¹⁰ The "ascetic-ideal" presents another such instance. Nietzsche both praises it and condemns it. It is no wonder that he chooses the serpent, the symbol of ambiguity, to be Zarathustra's companion. This ambiguity which Nietzsche locates preeminently in words, results in a "perspectivalism" which goes to the very heart of his peculiar hermeneutic.

Having been trained in philology, Nietzsche was certainly aware of the problems of interpretation, not only regarding the translation and clarification of ancient texts, but also as these linguistic and stylistic problems pertained to understanding the meaning of life as well. The ambiguity and polysemy found in the meaning of words seems to be a reflection in Nietzsche of a similar ambiguity and contradictoriness that he finds in the meaning of life, or in life itself. There is no *absolute* meaning of life. There is no final answer which can be carved in granite as *the* truth, once and for all. Life shifts and slides, returns to itself endlessly in a dance of eternal self-reflectivity, it reveals itself as it conceals itself, indeed it can be most present exactly in the conspicuousness of its absence. Consequently, no direct apodictic statement can capture or grasp it. The task of the authentic philosopher can thus be viewed as an impossible task: to speak the unspeakable. The extreme difficulty at the human level of living with the absurdity of this impossible task is perhaps why Nietzsche says that "no one dares fulfill the law of philosophy in himself; no one lives philosophically...."¹¹ Although the task of the philosopher is an impossible task, it also can be understood as a possible task, indeed,

⁹ Nietzsche, *F. Genealogy of Morals*, p. 257.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, pp. 179-180.

¹¹[Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, trans. Adrian Collins. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1949; revised 1981, p. 31.

must be taken as such within a context of necessity. If it is thus a kind of "madness" or death to choose to live the philosophical/poetic life, it is certainly a worse kind of madness to live otherwise.

Given this paradoxical nature of the genuine philosophical project for Nietzsche, we find ourselves confronted in his work with a Heraclitean epistemology of becoming which seeks to know that which we cannot know. Nietzsche, of course, regarded Heraclitus as one of those "monumental" philosophical-poetic thinkers ("giants") for whom, as Heidegger demonstrated in his little essay *What Is Philosophy?*, wisdom had not yet become an object of inquiry abstracted from the immediate, living process of wonderment or being in harmony (productive tension) with the mytho-logos. For Heraclitus there could never be a complete comprehension, an intellectual grasp of life's incomprehensibility. Obviously, it is absurd to say that we can or should be able to comprehend the incomprehensible. Yet, as with most words, the term "comprehend" here can be understood in at least two ways. It can mean "to know" in the sense that a subject has a grasp of or can create a mental representation of the in-itself-ness, the essence of some object, over and against which the "reality" of the object can be compared and evaluated, as in the scientific knowing Hegel describes as "*Verstand*." Nietzsche thought that this kind of representational comprehension was anti-life and thus untenable. But "to comprehend" can also mean to have a more dialectical and speculative, i.e., *holistic* relation to the "object," (*Vernunft*), to recognize the immediate, pre-reflective oneness with the world which already exists, as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty understood in the notion of "being-in-the-world." This type of comprehension involves a coming to dwell in the manifestness of the object and to endure or suffer this manifestness. We can call this second interpretation of the word "comprehension" a kind of living, "hands-on" knowledge: the foundation of *phronesis* and the origin of a practical judgement liberated from the absolutism of the categorical imperative. It is within this latter definition of "to comprehend" that Nietzsche's *thinking* can be understood as a way of being or *living*. True thinking for Nietzsche is grounded in life, and authentic life is grounded in thinking. And for Nietzsche, as also for Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, thinking is inextricably bound to the "speaking" word. Logical, conceptual, dualistic, thematic, second-order reflection creates an abstract barrier

between the thinker and life. It tries to reduce life to a manageable concept which at the same time destroys the Zarathustrian vitality of life and imprisons it in a categorical graveness: that "spirit of seriousness" which Nietzsche so abhorred. Intellectual dwarves, shamthinkers, those who need to prove to themselves and others how proper and correct they are, show their true colors in the violence by which they try to conquer life and control the cosmic Heraclitean fire that drives it. What these thinking machines, these "incarnate compendia" (as Nietzsche tagged them) forget is that they are also a *part* of life and of "nature" themselves. What they fear the most is to see themselves as they really are. The true philosopher, on the other hand, walks headlong into these fears--only to find himself speaking ambiguously, with a forked tongue. On the one hand, we find Nietzsche condemning those who violate life's sacredness out of *ressentiment* and fear and who thus close themselves off to life; while on the other hand, we find him committing himself to erecting a "monument" that will point to a better way: a compassionate act despite Nietzsche's frequent cold-hearted description of the indifference and detachment of the genuine philosopher.¹² The ambiguity of the poetic is both the glory and the scandal of the authentic philosophical life.

3. Life and Language

If Nietzsche's first difficult task involved his own radical commitment to the philosophical life, a commitment which was a lifelong process rather than a single decision, his second most difficult task, inescapably bound to the first, was to communicate the peculiar and "unseasonable" knowledge of this way of life he was at once creating and living. The extreme difficulty of this expressive task—which is a necessary aspect of Nietzsche's conception of true philosophy--did not arise out of any lack of literary talent on Nietzsche's part. Like Plato, as Walter Kaufmann points out, Nietzsche "wrote so dramatically that we shall never know for sure what precisely he himself thought about any number of questions."¹³ The difficulty of trying to communicate genuine philosophical knowledge for Nietzsche can be expressed, as we stated above, by saying that it involved the impossible task of trying to speak the unspeakable. This

¹² Nietzsche, F. *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*. Trans. Marianne Cowan. Chicago: Gateway, 1962, p. 67.

¹³ Kaufmann, W. *Portable Nietzsche*, p.1.

becomes clear in Nietzsche's" insight that there is always something unspoken which is concealed or masked "behind" what is spoken. Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy," Nietzsche proclaimed, "every opinion is also a hiding place, every word also a mask."¹⁴ Despite this realization, or, perhaps more correctly, because of it, Nietzsche pushed language to its limit, trying to bring his unlimited vision of a better way of life into the limited vision of the world.

Nietzsche's vision is not a vision, however, which is not easily expressed by ordinary language, that is, language which attempts to say exactly what it says and nothing more. Language does not *express* life. Rather, language *is* life or it is not language at all but dead language, non-language, a simulacrum, a mere confabulation of sedimented signs. Language is something more than an on-going freeplay of "marks" as Jacques Derrida suggests--although it contains that aspect too. But it is not a freeplay of signs that is separate from life, standing over and against life and pointing to it like a highway marker. Yet, neither is language so identified with itself that it points to nothing beyond itself. Language both conceals and reveals. The said of language is hinged on the unsaid; the speakable on the unspeakable. Language, no less than any originary speech act, is a living organism and thus is futural.¹⁵ As Heidegger says, "what is spoken is never, and in no language what is said."¹⁶ That is why the task of the authentic philosopher remains always undone. At best, using Merleau-Ponty to expand on an aphorism which Kierkegaard once used, language can be a railing but not a staircase by the raging water of "*Etre sauvage*." What true language reveals in its revealing is that which is unrevealable. It is in this way that language can be said to be one with life while simultaneously signifying life. Language is life pointing toward itself. Nietzsche's writing reflects this hermeneutical circularity and paradoxicality of life. He is trying to express what cannot be expressed, except for the way the unspeakable is always "expressed" in the speakable. To discern what Nietzsche is trying to say, we need to read between the lines of his writing. What this means is that we must enter

¹⁴ Nietzsche, F. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin, 1973, p.197.

¹⁵ See my paper, "An Organism of Words: Ruminations on the Philosophical Poetics of Merleau-Ponty," in *Kinesis* 14, Fall, 1984.

¹⁶ Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. p.11.

into the liveliness of Nietzsche's language the way his language tells us to enter into life. Whenever we think we finally understand Nietzsche, we have missed him altogether.

4. An Overture and a Going Under

Nietzsche lived his philosophy the way an artist creates a work of art, the way a poet must *live* or *endure* his poetry into existence if it is to be a dissemination of his own living substance invested with his life. Derrida puts this notion forward dramatically in *Spurs* when he says that Nietzsche is a thinker pregnant with thought ("*...c'est le penseur de la grossesse*").¹⁷ It is because Nietzsche was willing to make this kind of investment, testing the potency of his philosophy on himself, that his writing continues to be lively today. Gadamer has shown that the work of art is a place where truth is made manifest--not truth which stands as an object over and against a subject who can aesthetically scrutinize and "grasp" it from the perspective of Kant's Transcendental Ego, but truth manifested as a new *world* in which we may come to stand and through which we may come to appropriate a truer self.¹⁸ This hermeneutical openness to the world of the work of art is consistent with the kind of openness that Nietzsche thought was necessary in order to live a truly philosophical life. Life itself is the greatest work of art. The task of the genius, of the true philosopher, is to open himself to the mysterious, dark paradoxicality of life and to live in this openness. That is why Nietzsche can say that the author of a genuine work is unimportant compared to the work itself. The greatest work of all is the actual living of the philosophical life. For the author himself, what he says is always subordinate to his commitment to life--although being and saying cannot be adequately understood separately in Nietzsche. Authentic saying, what Nietzsche calls writing with blood, is also authentic being-in-the-world: "Write with blood, and you will experience that blood is spirit."¹⁹

Nietzsche took the measure of human beings by how willing they were to invest themselves with the impossible task of achieving the unachievable, of participating in the boundless pouring out of the plenitude of life into the plenitude of life, of dwelling in

¹⁷ Derrida, J. *Spurs*. Trans. Barbara Harlow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 64.

¹⁸ Gadamer, H-G. *Truth and Method*. Trans. G. Borden and J. Cumming. New York: Crossroad, 1982, especially Part I.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, F. *Zarathustra*, p.152.

the paradoxical conjunction of non-Being becoming Being becoming non-Being-- forever. This is the challenge of the Eternal Return: that in the face of our mortality everywhere closing in upon us we should live our lives with such passion and vitality that we would eagerly live each moment, over and over again. It is this willingness of Nietzsche to suffer the "antipodes" of life *in himself* that produced the electrical charge in his writing ... and continues to produce it.

5. Philosophical Poetics and the Ontological Structure of Laughter

It is this all-too-human suffering consciously entered into that drove Nietzsche to a language that is best described as philosophical-poetics. It is far from the language of pure logic, of identity and non-contradiction. It is a kind of language whose meaning is ultimately unspeakable, indeterminate, infinite. Its aphoristic form is almost primitive in its directness and yet it is never finished saying what it has to say. Nietzsche's words give way to a Dionysian "music" that swirls under and around his words like some unearthly smoke. Images appear and disappear. The unmistakable sense of something primordial, something beyond space and time, yet encompassing these, pervades the whole of his work as something that is always more than the sum of its poetic parts-- more Heraclitean Fire than the Being of Parmenides. This poetic horizon draws the reader (who would dare go, for there is "air thin and pure danger near") into another world, a new landscape or mindscape opened up in front of the poetic text. Here the unspeakable speaks, Dionysius dances with Apollo, the incomprehensible is comprehended in an incomprehensible way. In the world that is revealed by Nietzsche's philosophical poetic language, God is dead and, thus, we are on our own; metaphysics will no longer give consolation amidst a transvaluation of all values that is perpetually taking place. The great game of life rages on here with passionate indifference. It can never be a matter of trying to make absolute and final sense out of this world, but of learning how to open ourselves to it, enter into it correctly and endure it if we are to do genuine philosophy at all.

This philosophical poetic process is what comprises Nietzsche's "tragic world view," a process which is more suffered, "danced" and "sung" than understood. This is why Rose Pfeffer, in her otherwise intriguing study, is on the wrong track when she

says: "Using the tragic view as a basis for interpretation, I intend to show why no conflicts exist in this Nietzschean teaching."²⁰ Fortunately for her and for a clear/unclear "understanding" of Nietzsche's work, Pfeffer fails at her stated task—and thus succeeds in opening up the paradoxical tragic vision which is uniquely Nietzschean. In the very last paragraph of her book, quoting Karl Jaspers, she concludes by saying that "'the tragic vision, as presented by Nietzsche, offers no facile solutions, hunts us out of every retreat and forbids us all concealment.' But within tragedy, absurdity, and struggle, Nietzsche finds the 'exit and hole' out of negation and despair."²¹ This "going out" that is also a "going in" is certainly a "conflict" in Nietzsche's thought. But it is a necessary conflict which must be lived and not ironed out or argued away. Nietzsche is not defeated in this paradox. He celebrates it joyously, which is perhaps the only adequate response: "What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture *and* a going under."²² Philosophy is a dwelling in the inexplicable paradoxicalness of life without trying to find a solution for that paradoxicalness as if it was a mathematical *problem* that had to be *solved* or re-solved for life to be bearable.

For Nietzsche's philosophy there is no solution. There is no final answer in the laughter of Zarathustra. This does not represent a failure of philosophy but rather its true success. If non-contradictory, absolutist metaphysics as an attempt to grasp, apprehend or conquer Being came to an end with Nietzsche, the possibility of authentic philosophy began. This "end" and "beginning" should be understood as a single ontological structure--a unified and unifying eternal return at the heart of philosophy itself--and not as a merely temporal process. If the god of metaphysics has been assassinated it is so that man may have more life. But if we come looking for *solutions*, we have already failed to enter the hermeneutical circularity at the core of Nietzsche's philosophy. We are then only half living. For life itself, like Nietzsche's language, is not a puzzle that needs to be figured out. It is not something for which we are awaiting a final, true, absolute analysis. It is something which must be lived if it is to be known.

²⁰ Rose Pfeffer, *Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysius*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972, p.19.

²¹ Pfeffer, P. op. cit.

²² Nietzsche, F. *Zarathustra*, p. 127.

Philosophers thus should not be looking to speak the @U(final) word on the nature of life, they should always be looking to speak the "first" word. In one of his experimental "oral messages" which has the tone and rhythm of dithyrambic poetry--the poetry of Dionysiac ritual-- Lawrence Ferlinghetti says that we must be "awaiting perpetually and forever a renaissance of wonder."²³ Genuine philosophy, the philosophical poetics of Nietzsche, can be best "understood" as a game or a dance. When we enter into a game, we do not try to play the *perfect* game so that we will never need to play the game again. And who would be so foolish as to seek the dance that ended all dancing? Certainly not Nietzsche: "Laughter I have pronounced holy," Zarathustra says, "you higher men *learn* to laugh."²⁴ And even in this "final" laughter there is a reflective chuckling at its own "finality." It is all but a game, the laughter seems to say. It is all just a child playing draughts.

6. Conclusion: The Risk of Growth

Whenever we truly encounter another person or a text (literary, philosophical or cultural), that is, whenever we open ourselves or expose ourselves to the "world" of that person or text, we engage in a risky and dangerous process of self-transformation. The risk is that we will see the illusions that prop up our world for what they are. Our emotional or intellectual world, where we once felt safe and secure, will be thrown into doubt. This will cause an increase in anxiety which will demand a creative effort to overcome it. If all goes well the creative effort will lead to a reformulation of our world, a new synthesis at a higher level of integration. The horizon of our world will have expanded. As Ricoeur says, hopefully our encounter will give "a *self* to the *ego*."²⁵ Or, to use Nietzsche's language, we will become an "overture" to our own "going under."²⁶ This process of disintegration/reintegration is the dynamic center of Nietzsche's philosophy. Kaufmann says that Nietzsche "challenges the reader not so much to agree or disagree as to grow." That is true because--and to the extent that--Nietzsche himself pushed on to the limits of *his* growth

²³ Ferlinghetti, F. *A Coney Island of the Mind*. New York: New American Library, 1974, pp. 49-53.

²⁴ Nietzsche, F. *Zarathustra*, p. 127.

²⁵ Ricoeur, P. *Hermeneutics and Human Sciences*, p. 193.

²⁶ Nietzsche, F. *Zarathustra*, p. 127.

In this connection, utilizing the theoretical framework developed by psychotherapist, R. D. Laing concerning the nature of madness (a theory, the origin of which can be traced back through Jung and his reaction to Freud and, beyond that, to Plato, Heraclitus, Hesiod and Homer), it may be that Nietzsche's insanity was simply a continuation of his radical, spiritual self-education, despite its origin, by some speculative accounts, in a physiological condition.²⁷ In all new intellectual and spiritual growth, even in the most timid steps forward, one will always experience the shadow of madness. Yet Nietzsche's philosophy stands as a monumental challenge to begin taking those first frightening steps.

Philosophy is either a way of life or it is not philosophy. Either you do philosophy the way you breathe, or you are doing something else. As the poet A.R. Ammons puts it, "...you have identity when you find out not what you can keep your mind on but what you can't keep your mind off."²⁸ The philosophical life is not for everyone. Nietzsche knew this. It is the source of both great joy and lamentation in his writing. The philosopher is gripped by the truth and that is all that matters. To follow truth wherever it leads; to live in truth; to sing and dance with truth--that is truly a life for all and none. It may be impossible not to feel pity for the genuine philosopher. His life will always be a life out of season. Perhaps that is why Zarathustra throws "the rose-wreath crown" to the philosophical poet and says: you "higher men ... learn to laugh at yourselves as one must laugh!"²⁹

²⁷ Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience*. New York: Ballantine, 1967; especially chaps. 5 and 6.

²⁸ Ammons, A.R. *Sphere: the Form of a Motion*. New York: Norton, 1974, p.58.

²⁹ Nietzsche, F. *Zarathustra*, p. 404}