



**Derrida's Nietzsche: L'Operation Feminine and the Question of "Seriousness"**  
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- ¶1. In "Structure, Sign and Play" (1966) Derrida speaks of a free-play which is both "opened and closed off by the center"—a center which must then be "simultaneously inside and outside the structure," so that what is at stake is the very "structurality of structure"<sup>[1]</sup>—and in his "classical" writings from the late 60's on deconstruction, he takes the open-ended field (or open-and-closed economy) of "arche-writing" as a sort of matrix which will come to be, not only associated with the French feminists' "semiotic khora of language"<sup>[2]</sup> but more directly tied (as by Cixous) to their "woman's body." But if this all implies, in very general terms, a trope of "woman" as (centered or decentered, yet somehow still concentric) unlimited field that contains the male/phallogocentric as rational "limit"—so that it is perhaps this male limit (or "Logos," "One Being," "Western Metaphysics") that is the (decentered) center—in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* we get another and perhaps equally encompassing or generalizing "woman"-trope, though one which at first may appear to be quite differently "formed." Here, commenting on the Nietzschean figure of "truth as a woman" too subtle and elusive for dogmatic (male) philosophers to "catch"—Derrida gives us the "operation feminine":

- ¶2. The divergence within truth elevates itself. It is elevated in quotation marks (the screeching machinations of a hooker, or crane [grue], its flight and clapping claws). Nietzsche's writing is compelled to suspend truth within the tenterhooks of quotation marks—and suspended there with truth is—all the rest. Nietzsche's writing is an inscription of the truth. And such an inscription, even if we do not venture so far as to call it the feminine itself, is indeed the feminine "operation." Because woman is (her own) writing, style [stylus, knife, phallus] must return to her. In other words, it could be said that if style were a man...then writing would be a woman.[\[3\]](#)
- ¶3. Derrida's main point in Eperons is that Nietzsche's styles/women are multiple (his woman-as-style is multiple), so that while the book's subject is announced at the outset as "woman" it will turn out in the end that "woman will not have been my subject"[\[4\]](#)—one interpretation of this multiplicity is that woman as the Other of/to man is also the Other to/of herself. Yet here, risking what may seem a dangerous reduction to simplicity in the face of a text whose main purpose seems to be an expansion into multiplicity, I want to raise the question as to whether the central figure in Eperons of woman (or of the feminine operation) as ironic self- distancing of truth ("putting all the truth in quotation marks") is indeed something quite different from the figure of woman-as-matrix (womb, concentric field ) trope sketched above. And if so, what has become of the latter figure in the discourse of Derrida's Nietzsche interpretation here? One could argue that the image of "suspending the truth within quotation marks"—the male truth perhaps between the female grues, those deceptive and deceitful "hookers"—is still a "concentric" image, figure, model. But we will more likely picture the "self-distancing of truth" as a linear series of displacements, of gaps or spaces, a horizontal, metonymic series of "truths" (Nietzschean women, Nietzschean "styles"), each ironically distanced from that which precedes and follows it, with no more question of center and circularity. Is this not after all "woman as action at a distance," the key Nietzschean text (from The Gay Science) with which Derrida opens Eperons?
- ¶4. Perhaps it is a question of whether we see Nietzsche's woman (that is, his woman/man difference) or truth-as-woman as the difference between the dogmatic masculine/relativistic feminine truth or the difference within a decentered system that can be read ambivalently as masculine/feminine. And these are in effect two ways of viewing Derrida's (potentially) infinite regress of "citationality" or "quotability" in "Signature Event Context."[\[5\]](#) If within the system or structure of language there is (contra Searle's and Austin's notion of performatives) no "original quotation" or "original text," then can we still see this whole indefinitely-extended "linguistic system" of quoted-true-statements- within-quoted- true-statements, this apparently "concentric" system, as a totality? Apparently not, inasmuch as it must itself be put in quotation marks, must veil itself, leaving "between-ness" rather than "within-ness" as the ultimate trope, and yet it also seemed (at least at first) to be constructed like a

concentric structure or system. The woman-as-infinite-or-indefinite-matrix and woman-as-series-of- gaps might then both be the same (self-veiled, self-different) woman, the woman- as-paradox, as self-contradiction, the totalized system which can never be totalized. And if the whole text were thus "ironized"—but does not irony mean the linear series of gaps without even the illusion of totalized system?—then we may seem to be left with the problem of its ultimate "seriousness": perhaps we come back here to Nietzsche's cosmos in the late version of the eternal return (notes for Will to Power): cosmos as aion-time, the "child" or "self- repeating wheel" of Zarathustra's "Three Metamorphoses," as indefinitely extended, self- quoting, self- repeating, self-distancing "text" or "game," world-text as game, as free-play of textuality with no absolutely determinate boundary and thus no ground of meaning "inside" it (as center) or "outside" it (as circumference).

- ¶5. But my problem with Derrida in Eperons is that he never seems to quite "take seriously" that other, more essentially "organic" than "linguistic," French feminist trope of "concentricity," the trope of generative mother, mother-giving- birth, mythic progenitor (via her own reading of Plato's *Timaeus*) of Kristeva's semiotic matrix, khora, womb. In Eperons Derrida gives us (Nietzsche's styles as woman-figures as) the castrated woman, castrating woman and (beyond the "truth and lie" duality of these two, that is, no longer taking "man"'s perspective) the affirmative woman, but never quite (it would seem) the childbearing woman, either as actual fleshly creature or as mythopoetic (and Nietzschean) earth- mother. This may seem to still leave open the question, which I would like to pursue further here, of the (possible) connections, or patterns of interplay or identity-and-difference of/between this circular-concentric-metaphorical earth- mother-matrix figure and the horizontal-metonymic figure of woman-as- ironic- self-distancing. I already suggested above that the self-distancing figure, read as "truth within quotation marks," might also be seen as the matrix figure, and so also vice versa.<sup>[6]</sup> But my point here is that Derrida in Eperons does not want to openly "display" (or see things in terms of) the matrix-figure, even if this may be somehow implicit. Thus while a key notion in Eperons is that there is "no sex in Heidegger" (in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche), one could say there is no "real" sex (no "serious" sex<sup>[7]</sup>) in Derrida; while Irigaray<sup>[8]</sup> chides Nietzsche for remaining in the high abstraction of mountain peaks, fearing to come down into the sea of "amniotic fluids," in his cosmogonic-mythopoetic mode, to which the operation feminine would seem to give short shrift, Nietzsche (ironically enough) comes closer to doing so than Derrida. Thus in "The Convalescent" of Zarathustra III the speaker wants to throw out (throw Up) from within his own body into the outer light that *abgruendlichsten Gedanken*, "most abysmal thought" which is that of the eternal return: "I summon you, my most abysmal thought!...You are coming, I hear you. My abyss speaks (*Mein Ab- gruend redet*)<sup>[9]</sup>, I have turned my ultimate depth inside out into the light (*meine letzte Tiefe habe ich an's Licht gestuelpt!*)"<sup>[10]</sup> One might read this as a sort of self-inversion (or extroversion) which is not unlike (as Kristeva et al are well aware) the giving-birth of a child out of the mother's womb: that is, in giving birth the mother is in effect "extroverting" (or "abjecting") her own body; the baby is a part of her own body turned "inside out." (Where is the center here, and where the

circumference?) For while childbirth becomes now a trope for the expression (announcing of his new idea), or perhaps more properly for the new conception (thinking of the thought) of a creative thinker, so that (given our bias throughout the "history of Western metaphysics" as well as the ostensibly male speaker) we might tend to see Nietzsche's thinker here as a man, in fact this is (like Socrates' trope in the Meno of teacher as mid-wife who helps the student give birth to her/his idea), in literal (that is, organic and biological) terms, an essentially feminine trope, process or operation.

- ¶6. There is of course a certain self-reflexivity at play here in this scene of "giving birth" to the thought of the eternal return of all things/bodies as deepest (most inward bodily) thought. On the most "literal" level we could take this as a cosmogonic creation-myth, where the (female) "offspring" is herself "time" (as repetition, return): the mother gives birth to a daughter, who in turn gives birth to a wider, more encompassing daughter (the greater abstraction of the cosmogonic "return"), who in turn gives birth to a still vaster daughter or encompassing "world-body" (cosmic-body), that is, body-as-cosmic-return (cosmic cycle, spiral, gyre). Central here is the notion (trope) of rhythm—important also in Kristeva's discussion of the semiotic khora in relation to poetic language—or more properly of the (repeated) rhythmic pulsations of labor-and-childbirth.<sup>[11]</sup> It is then on another level that we are also invited to see/think of the child as being (not the return itself but) the thought of eternal return—which in the immediate context "nauseates" Nietzsche/ Zarathustra as it seems to him to be the "heaviest burden"<sup>[12]</sup>—so that it is the generation or conception of this thought which we now read as the "pulsation" of a "giving-birth." The metaphysical "insight" bursts out of our deepest body (is an extroversion of our inner body) in the creative pulsation of childbirth, and yet this insight, this Gedanken or "thought" is itself that of "pulsation"—that is, of (itself as the thought of) temporality-as-pulsation, extended now through the ongoing and infinitely regressive (self-) repetitions of this pulsation, to the furthest-out expanses of the "cosmos."<sup>[13]</sup> That is, we might see the rhythm of the pulsation here as "encompassing" (like a womb, and also like "primitive" mythopoetic-cosmogonic discourse) both the thought (of eternal return) and the return itself—so that these two could no longer be distinguished.

- ¶7. This operation becomes even more essentially “feminine,” and in Derrida’s own explicit sense of the operation feminine, when we think of this pulsating “most abysmal thought of eternal return” as that which encompasses and repeats (repeats and en-compasses) itself in a sort of infinite regress, a postmodern- metafictional *mise-en-abyme*, a pattern of self-distancing and thus ironic self-parody. Which brings us back to the central question raised above, that of the puzzling relationship between the (never explicitly Derridean, at least in *Eperons*) trope/operation of woman as creative mother and the (explicitly Derridean) one of woman as ironic self-distancing. But this figure in “The Convalescent” of a painful conception of a thought that cannot quite be thought (the eternal return), can also be read as a figure of self-questioning, of answering (or failing to answer) one’s own question, and indeed I will argue here that we can most easily see a congruence between the two woman-tropes if we look (which Derrida never does) at the dynamics of questioning (or questioning- and-answering) in the explicitly male-female dialogues of *Zarathustra*. For in other key passages of the book we see that the (thought of) eternal return is tied to a woman speaker who is also a questioner: the return is presented to Zarathustra (the man) as a question/puzzle/paradox but also as the force of the woman-as-questioner and thus of the question itself. To foreground the rhetorical (or even “empirical”) dynamics of questioning in this way might be almost to do a “de-constructive reading” of *Eperons*, which after all begins as a reflection on “the question of style...that is, of woman,” by “laying bare” what it both presupposes and “represses”: Derrida is interested primarily in the Heideggerian *Seinsfrage* which “opens into Being,” and of placing “before” it, that is, before Heidegger’s whole ontotheological (and asexual) problematics, that more “proper” yet somehow still “abstracted” (question of) sexual difference, that is, of “woman.”<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Ironic and Speculative Questioning**

- ¶8. Nietzsche does give us actual man-woman “dialogues.”<sup>[15]</sup> Thus near the end of *Zarathustra* III “life” (a woman-figure who may herself be the eternal return) says to Zarathustra: “...you think...I know it, of how you want to leave me soon.” Zarathustra answers: “‘Yes...but you also know—’ and I whispered something into her ear... ‘You know that, O Zarathustra? Nobody knows that.’”<sup>[16]</sup> What he knows is generally assumed to be some variation on that “most abysmal thought,” whose very unknowable depths (abysses) the mysterious woman-figure also represents. But on a more strictly “rhetorical” (and ironic) reading the missing “topic” here (the “that”) could also suggest that “the question is its own answer” (or “the answer repeats the question”), a sort of rhetorical “reduction” of “You are me” or “We are both the same thing, which is eternal return(ing).” The male speaker’s leaving her—presumably through the death that comes with speaking his “teaching” (speaking “her”)—could then (also) imply that the answer can no longer “answer” (return to) its question (thus “leaves” its question), perhaps since once spoken it “bursts open;” what he whispers in her ear might then be: “I cannot really leave you as you already answer yourself,” and/or “in bursting open I am merely consumed by you” (“reabsorbed into you”).

- ¶9. And in the dialogue between Zarathustra and another woman-figure, "The stillest Hour," at the end of Z II, the oneness of the couple is reflected in the rhetorical or self-echoing form of question-and-response. Here the woman's voice, perhaps a Sphinx-voice, while embodying the "question(er)" of the dialogue is itself "voiceless":
- ¶10. Yesterday, toward evening, there spoke to me my stillest hour [stillste Stunde]: that is the name of my awesome mistress [furchtbaren Her rin]....Yesterday, in the stillest hour, the ground gave under me, the dream began. The hand moved, the clock of my life drew a breath...Then it spoke to me without voice [ohne Stimme]: "You know it, Zarathustra [Du weisst es, Zarathustra]?... You know it, Zarathustra, but you do not say it [Du weisst es, Zarathustra aber du redest es nicht!]"[\[17\]](#)And at last I answered defiantly: "Yes, I know it, but I do not want to say it!"... Then it spoke to me again without voice: "What do you matter, Zarathustra? [Was liegt an dir, Zarathustra!] Speak your word and break [Sprich dein Wort und zerbrich!]"[\[18\]](#)
- ¶11. Again it is assumed that the mysterious "it" (es) which Zarathustra knows but does not wish to "express" or "speak"—the childbirth image might also imply completely "conceiving" (of) this unthinkable thought, though actually speaking it is the more immediate—is the thought of the return, which once again the woman-figure ("The stillest Hour") may herself symbolize. Here then this woman (Zarathustra's own silent "inner voice" perhaps) is encouraging him to go ahead and speak (express, "push out") what he must—his teaching, his prophesy of the overman/return. The necessity for Zarathustra to "explode" once he does so—"Speak your word and break!"[\[19\]](#)—is thus often read in relation to other "prophet"- passages where he must (like John the Baptist) as prophet die once he announces his "prophecy," or (like Socrates or Christ) as "teacher" die once (and because) he "gives" us his "teaching":
- ¶12. "I love all those who are as heavy drops, falling one by one out of the dark cloud that hangs over men: they herald the advent of lightning, and, as heralds, they perish. Behold, I am a herald of the lightning and a heavy drop from the cloud; but this lightning is called overman."[\[20\]](#)"The figs are falling from the trees...and, as they fall, their red skin bursts. Thus, like figs, these teachings fall to you, my friends; now consume their juice and their sweet meat."[\[21\]](#)"I come back eternally...to teach again the eternal recurrence of all things...to proclaim the overman again to men. I spoke my word, I break of my word; thus my eternal lot wants it; as a proclaimer I perish."[\[22\]](#)

- ¶13. But on a closer and perhaps more “rhetorical” reading of the dialogue above we would need to focus on the “form” of the question-and-answer inter- play. With the reference of “it” left uncertain we feel the eerie force of the question itself—“You know it?” We feel the question opening into the space of the unknown/unthought (perhaps the future), filling it, engulfing all possible answers. And the syntax (or rather punctuation) is also crucial here,[\[23\]](#) the question “You know it?” could be the statement “You know it.” (or “You know it!”) with merely the punctuation mark changed. Answers may then be simply a repetition (with difference) of questions, the “other side” or “reverse image” of questions within the encompassing language-system—which again is a way to see the question as consuming the answer, the questioner consuming the person questioned. Then we might also read the necessity for Zarathustra to burst open as he speaks his “teaching” or “prophesy” as the necessity of the responder to burst open in the moment of answering, and perhaps burst open “into” the question(er). The questioner here does after all herself embody, on the standard reading, the “doctrine” (eternal return) itself; or is it not (also) the question that embodies it, the “voiceless voice” of the question? But if the response/ responder is consumed by the question(er) this is merely the completion of a circle (or “return”), for initially the question, “You know it, Zarathustra?” has itself emerged or opened out of silence (perhaps even violently) into its own (un)spoken answer.[\[24\]](#)
- ¶14. At the end of “The Stillest Hour” the voiceless voice (of the question) “Spoke to me for the last time: “O Zarathustra, your fruit is ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruit. Thus you must return to your solitude again; for you must yet become mellow.” Before the teacher/prophet can die “speaking” it, not only must his doctrine itself be ripe; he himself must also be ripe enough to speak it— perhaps to “burst through” it. But again, the doctrine as “answer” is itself the “question” (question of the unthinkable, the deepest riddle, the eternal return); to “become ripe enough for this fruit” may mean to become, in silence and solitude, the question[\[25\]](#)— to merge (in oneself) answer with question. In the following lines, when his Stillest Hour has left and Zarathustra addresses his “friends,” this “rhetorical” context becomes more explicit: “Now you have heard all...Nothing have I kept from you...But this too you have heard from me, who is still the most taciturn of all men—and wants to be. Alas, my friends, I still could tell you something, I still could give you something. Why do I not give it? Am I stingy?”[\[26\]](#) One reading of the anomalous “But this too” takes the preceding “Nothing” as a positive term: “But even this Nothing you have heard from me.” The foregrounding of “Nothing” (as a kind of self-reflexive “nonsense”) also fits the seeming redundancy (or senselessness) of the two final questions, rhetorical in the sense that they are un- answerable (the first question) and/or (the second one) answer themselves: “Why do I not give it? Am I stingy?” For on one reading these “meaningless” questions are themselves the very gift which the speaker now proceeds to give his friends. There is also a “stinginess” in giving them these Nothing- questions: he is giving them “himself” as the (question or problem of the) eternal return’s) own tautology or redundancy.[\[27\]](#)

- ¶15. The potential violence of questioning and/or answering is more explicit in “Daughters of the Desert,” one of the prose-poems of Dithyrambs of Dionysus, which Nietzsche also places toward the end of *Zarathustra* IV. Here the Sphinx-girl-cats are also “birds of prey” (and Sphinx-like “insects”) who fly about sniffing at the “trapped” male speaker:
- ¶16. There I sit now, / In this smallest oasis, / Just like a date,...lusting / For the round mouth of a girl [Maedchenmunde], / But even more for girlish... cutting / Incisors.../ I lie here, sniffed at / And played about (Umtaenzelt und umspielt) / By little winged bugs—/ Enveloped [Umlagert] by you, / Silent and foreboding / Girl cats [Maedchen-Katzen], /...– ensphinxed [— umsphinx], to crowd many / Feelings into one word (May God forgive me / This linguistic sin [Sprach-Suende]!)— / I lie here sniffing the best air, / Verily, paradise air, /...As good air as ever / Fell down from the moon— / Whether by chance [aus Zufall] / Or did it happen from prankishness? [Uebermuthe][\[28\]](#)
- ¶17. The “psychoanalytic” implications of this passage—the seeming wish of the male to be violently eaten by young women, to be annihilated or castrated by their Beisszaehnen, “biting teeth”[\[29\]](#)—would need to be read in relation to those tonal and stylistic ones with which they are so curiously juxtaposed: the would-be victim’s air of merriment, Uebermuthe (“over-spirit”), comic excess, of “not taking seriously,” expressed through a mythopoetic (prankish, excessive) play that would bring us into the archetypal domain and thus back again to the psychoanalytic one.[\[30\]](#) Thus the speaker’s engulfment by the Sphinx-cats, which is also his being consumed by their riddle-question—rather than (or by way of) answering it he is consumed by it, becomes it—cannot be taken too seriously as a violent or even erotic event. Indeed, in his prelude to this poem its speaker/ narrator, Zarathustra’s “shadow,” pictures the sphinx-cats as “riddles that let themselves be guessed [Raethsel, die sich rathen lassen],” strongly suggesting the “rhetorical” and ultimately non-serious (playful, ironic, “empty”) nature of this “ensphinxing.” Whether the Sphinx-riddles “let themselves be guessed” by consuming the speaker, transforming him (as answer) into their “question,” or whether he is (like the Raubvoegeln speaker in Dithyrambs of Dionysus) the question-mark which is then “resolved” by the preying (and perhaps praying) Sphinx-cats through total “absorption” (rather than torn by them to pieces)—a question absorbed into its answer is also a self-answering question, and after all “Who is Oedipus here and who the Sphinx?” (opening of *Beyond Good and Evil*)—we would need to foreground, with this passage, the picture of self-answering riddle as (ironically or nonsensically) “blank surface.”

- ¶19. But the Stillest Hour woman is not a Sphinx who would directly destroy a man (philosopher) who fails to answer/answers incorrectly her riddle. Rather, she commands Zarathustra to "Speak and break!" ["Sprich und verbrich!"]: it is precisely when he speaks his/their "teaching" as (not answer but) question that he must "break." We may nonetheless think (remembering that "Sphinx" originally means "choke," that the male speaker who is umsphinxed by the lady- Sphinx-cats is among other things "choked" by them) that Zarathustra, in his "stammering" conversation with this demanding lady, in his hesitation to speak it is "choking" on his (her, their) "Word"—a variation, perhaps inversion, of the image of an overripe grape that explodes—and thus cannot speak it or (a projected variant ending) chokes to death in the act of speaking it. This fits with the image of the shepherd choking on the snake (uroboros) of eternal return emerging from his mouth in "A Vision and a Riddle."
- ¶20. In fact there may be in Zarathustra a tension between two senses of that "most abysmal thought" which burrows deep inside us as our own (as man- woman, woman- man) innermost riddle-question, problem, puzzle: it repeats Upon itself and is ultimately unsolvable precisely because it is inescapably textual/rhetorical/ ironic; and/or by trying to "think the unthinkable" it actually breaks through textuality/ rhetoricity, thinks or creates "beyond itself." This is one manifestation, perhaps, of that broader tension in the text of Zarathustra discussed by Gooding-Williams—a manifestation of Nietzsche's own tension as a thinker who "thinks against himself," who "never ceases to question his skepticism and to think speculatively beyond it," who "views the rehabilitation of persuasion as part of a speculative project that acknowledges the implications of his own skeptical (deconstructive) insights without treating them as conclusive."[\[31\]](#)
- ¶21. That Gooding-Williams' duality of skeptical (ironic, deconstructivist) and speculative (positive, creative) philosophical "perspectives" can be interpreted in terms of a duality between two kinds of "questions" or "modes of questioning" is already clear in Kierkegaard's distinction between "ironic" and "speculative" questions. In his doctoral dissertation, "The Concept of Irony: With Continual Reference to Socrates" (1841), Kierkegaard contrasts the mode of "interrogation," which is neither totally contingent (lacking a projected unity of the topos) nor absolutely necessary (in which case the answer simply repeats the question), with the Socratic, purely "ironic" mode:

- ¶22. [T]hen it is manifest that the intention in asking questions can be twofold. That is, one can ask with the intention of receiving an answer containing the desired fullness, and hence the more one asks, the deeper and more significant becomes the answer; or one can ask without any interest in the answer except to suck out the apparent content by means of the question and thereby to leave an emptiness behind. The first method presupposes, of course, that there is a plenitude, the second that there is an emptiness. The first is the speculative method; the second the ironic. Socrates in particular practiced the second method. When the Sophists...had befogged themselves in their own eloquence, it was Socrates' joy to introduce....a slight draft that in a short time expelled all these poetic vapors....[J]ust as Socrates' philosophy began with the presupposition that he knew nothing, so it ended with the presupposition that human beings know nothing at all....Socrates....circumnavigated the whole empire of intelligence and found the whole domain to be bounded by an Oceanus of illusory knowledge.[\[32\]](#)
- ¶23. We see Socrates' "contingent logic of questioning" (or rather of "dialogue") most clearly in Plato's later dialogues like the Sophist. Here the unpredictable leaps in the Eleatic Stranger's question-logic—that is, the unpredictable mode or format of interrogation (influenced less, in this case, by young Theatetus' responses than by his persona) through which the "subject" (topos) is itself "defined"—embody or mimic the same sophistic method that Plato's Socrates (as opposed, Kierkegaard thinks, to the original one) presumably wants to reject. But—this is the force of "irony"—we could not distinguish between "mimicking" and "embodying" such a style of discourse. On this reading Socrates is himself the supreme Sophist, supreme master of tricky logic ("Socrates' existence was ironic"): in laying bare through his questioning the lack of a clear logical ground for the Sophist's deceptive discourse (and thus laying bare the Sophist's ignorance) he also reveals the lack of a ground for any possible philosophical discourse, reveals the ultimate (ironic) "emptiness."
- ¶24. In Kierkegaard's description here, then, to ask questions in the ironic mode is not really a "dialogue" at all for it is, "without any interest in the answer...to suck out the apparent content by means of the question and thereby to leave an emptiness behind." If we picture this as a "consuming" of all possible answers by the encompassing question then we might have one reading of Nietzsche's "Umsphinx"—where the male speaker, "like a date, /...For the round mouth of a girl," is choked/squeezed/consumed by the lady-sphinxes—or of the shepherd's choking on the snake (his own most abysmal thought) that (recursively, in an eternal return) bites its own tail/ chokes on its own "abyss." That is, we might interpret Nietzsche's ironic- rhetorical strategy of riddle-dialogues in which the speaker becomes "ensphinx" as a kind of Socratic technique by which Socrates'/Zarathustra's "interrogator" traps, thwarts, "chokes" his/her interlocutor in/on the inevitable emptiness of the "question" that lies behind and encompasses all the latter's answers/definitions. If we see this underlying emptiness

as the "blank surface" of a "riddle that guesses itself" then we have, after all, a radically skeptical/ironic view of the question/problem/"definition" at stake in Plato ("What is 'virtue'?"), a view which assumes no definition is possible, if only because none was "necessary" in the first place.

- ¶25. But even Kierkegaard admits that in Plato we also have the speculative mode of questioning, in which one seeks "an answer containing the desired fullness, and hence the more one asks, the deeper and more significant becomes the answer." Now the answer no longer gets totally consumed by the question but is already sufficiently "full" ("ripe") that—rather than "bursting"—it can draw out ever newer and deeper questions, which in return receive deeper answers. Here there is not so much an underlying emptiness as a space in which new questions- answers-questions can emerge.(!) But if the new answers-questions appear not as a series of increasingly expanded concentric circles but rather in an encompassing space that is itself "circular" or "recursive"— that bends back Upon itself like a snake biting its tail— then are we not back to the ironic standpoint? This would seem to be the crux for interpreting Nietzsche. Deleuze in Difference and Repetition (1968)[33] may be trying to break down the "difference" here. While like Kierkegaard he sees questioning as an ironic mode, Deleuze seems not to make such a clear distinction between "ironic" and "speculative" questions. That is, while philosophical questioning is inevitably ironic because it seeks to "put in question" the most fundamental principles and thus in effect "lay bare their emptiness," the emptiness appears within a kind of speculative space that keeps pushing or expanding toward new possibilities (possible answers). On the one hand then, for Deleuze, the "sophist" of Plato's Sophist will be an ironically self-negating figure because he represents only "simulacra" and not the "truth": "If the true claimant (the first grounded ...) has rivals...all participating in his claim in various capacities, he also has simulacra or counterfeits who would be exposed by the test. Such, according to Plato, is the 'sophist,' the buffoon, centaur or satyr who lays claim to everything, and who, in laying such claims to everything, is never grounded but contradicts everything, including himself..."[34] On the other hand, Socrates will be (as for Kierkegaard) ultimately a sophist himself, since (for Deleuze) we cannot distinguish finally between "true beliefs" and "false ones" (simulacra); that is, the "grounding test" that true philosophers like Plato (if not also Socrates) pursue itself opens into a field of contingency, pure possibility—for this is the "ironic" function of philosophical questioning:

- ¶26. However, in what, exactly, does the grounding test consist? Myth tells us that it always involves a further task to be performed, an enigma to be re- solved. The oracle is questioned, but the oracle's response is itself a problem. The dialectic is ironic, but irony is the art of problems and questions. Irony consists in treating things and beings as so many responses to hidden questions, so many cases for problems yet to be resolved...The Eleatic Stranger gives a definition of the sophist such that he can no longer be distinguished from Socrates himself: the ironic imitator who proceeds by brief arguments (questions and problems). Each moment of difference must then find its true figure: selection, repetition, ungrounding, the question-response complex.[\[35\]](#)
- ¶27. "Irony consists in treating things and beings as so many responses to hidden questions, so many cases for problems yet to be resolved": there is no longer a distinction here between ironic and speculative modes of questioning; irony is itself a force that opens each "answer" into a deeper question back behind it. In Deleuze's model the answer need not be consumed (as in Nietzsche's umsphinx) by the larger background question, disappearing into it (Kierkegaardian-Socratic irony); rather, the answer itself opens the potential question behind it, opens the field of possibility of the question. And yet this "opening" occurs in a "moment of difference" which "must then find its true figure:...repetition, ungrounding." This ungrounding of the answer by opening its background question, now itself an answer to be again ungrounded/ opened, inevitably proceeds through an in- definite series of repetitions; this figure of (self-) repetition suggests a move that begins from a kind of Heideggerian perspective —"the discovery of the question and the problematic as a transcendental horizon, as the transcendental element which belongs 'essentially' to beings, things and events"[\[36\]](#)—yet moves beyond this perspective:
- ¶28. Hence that form of writing which is nothing but the question "what is writing?" or that sensibility which is nothing but the question "what is it to sense?" or that thought which asks "what does it mean to think?". These give rise...to the most powerful "repetitions," the most prodigious inventions in the para-sense when the Idea emerges in all its violence....far from being...destined to disappear in the response once a response is given, the question silences all empirical responses which purport to suppress it, in order to force the one response which always continues and maintains it...whence the power of the question to put in play the questioner as much as that which is questioned, and to put itself in question: Oedipus and his manner of never being finished with the Sphinx...[\[37\]](#)

- ¶29. This Sphinx-like putting of itself/oneself in question is very much what is at stake in Zarathustra's self-marking as a question-mark open to the birds of prey in Raubvoegel (Dithyrambs of Dionysus), his self-destructive dialogues with the lady-as-question (or question-as-lady). For there is here at work/play, as Deleuze notes, a violent "forcing of the one response which continues and maintains" the question—a violence which can be read both as ironic self-repetition (the question alone survives, engulfing all possible responses) and as speculative self-opening (new answers-questions-answers will be continually, if "forcefully," generated). And the violent force of an unanswerable rhetorical question which presupposes (virtually demands) an affirmative answer is, I would suggest, quite close to the force of repetition (dynamic spinning) of a self-reflexive, indefinitely recursive riddle-question like "What does it mean to ask a question?"—or "What does it mean to ask 'What does it mean to ask...?'" For Deleuze metaphysics (pure and open speculation) as a mode of questioning is driven, that is, by the imperative force of questioning itself—"Questions are imperatives—or rather, questions express the relation between problems and the imperatives from which they proceed" (Deleuze's emphasis)—and I am suggesting that we reflect on the (perhaps even "grounding") nature of riddle-questions posed rhetorically (posed as rhetorical questions to which an affirmative response is "demanded") in precisely this context. But for Deleuze this imperative driving force of the (self-) opening question(s) of speculative metaphysics is closely tied to the creative event of asking, the purely contingent and aleatory event of the question itself, seen now as a kind of human-divine fiat (arbitrary command):
- ¶30. Problems or Ideas emanate from imperatives of adventure or from events which appear in the form of questions. This is why problems are inseparable from a power of decision, a fiat which, when we are infused by it, makes us semi-divine beings....The infinite power to add an arbitrary quantity: it is no longer a question of a game after the manner of Leibniz, where the moral imperative of predetermined rules combines with the condition of a given space which must be filled ex hypothesis. It is rather a question of a throw of the dice, of the whole sky as open space and of throwing as the only rule. The singular points are on the die; the questions are on the dice themselves; the imperative is to throw. Ideas are the problematic combinations which result from throws. The throw of the dice is in no way suggested as an abolition of chance (the sky-chance). To abolish chance is to fragment it according to the laws of probability over several throws...By contrast, the throw of the dice affirms chance every time; every throw of the dice affirms the whole of chance each time.[\[38\]](#)

## Dancing With Lady Chance

- ¶31. Thus, by what may seem a rather circuitous route, we come back to the problem (or speculative question) with which we began: what could be the patterns of interplay and identity-and-difference (in Derrida, in Nietzsche, in French feminism) of/between the trope (dominant in French feminism) of woman-as- generative-mother (as unlimited womb that encompasses the rational male limit) and the trope (which dominates Derrida's reading of Nietzsche in *Eperons*) of woman as ironic self-distancing of truth? A (putative, hypothetical) correlation which has thus far remained implicit I now make explicit: the "horizontal-metonymic" figure/trope/model of woman-as-ironic self-distancing is tied to the force of ironic questioning as that which lays bare the emptiness of the question with which it begins, that is, lays bare its own emptiness, leaving us only with gaps or spaces (Derrida's "spaces of reading" perhaps); the "concentric-metaphoric" figure/trope/model of woman-as-womb is tied to the force of speculative questioning as that which (like the explosion of the Nietzschean/Deleuzian dice- throw, of Deleuze's Nietzschean eternal return as dice-throw) opens Up new (question-answer-question) possibilities. The latter is in some sense ultimately more "serious" than the former, inasmuch as it is a questioning which expects answers that are not merely predetermined (as in rhetorical questions) or (perhaps the same thing) mere repetitions of the question. Yet one way, at least, to see the congruence of these two woman-figures lies in the praxis of man-woman dialogue, of "androgynous" questioning-and- (possibly)-answering.
- ¶32. As noted above, Derrida's *Eperons* begins as a reflection on "the question of style... that is, of woman," and yet the author seems finally not to be interested in the concrete praxis of questioning itself, even though this is so manifestly used by Nietzsche to "enact" the man-woman "question" (this last being Derrida's more abstract use of the term) in *Zarathustra*. This is perhaps because Derrida is ultimately an "ironist," for if his "woman question" is finally "abstract," that is, is itself its own "ironic self-distance," then it merely lays bare its own emptiness, its devoidness of concrete "content." Thus the whole hymen-dialectics in *Eperons* of a male style (stylus, pen, penetrating phallus) and female (surface, not womb) of "writing"—a surface which is penetrated/"deflowered" by that style yet simultaneously penetrates/deflowers it—somehow remains a purely "rhetorical" gambit or interplay, one which by definition cannot penetrate "beneath the surface," one which is (and precisely in this sense) concerned purely with the irony of style.

- ¶33. And so we have Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's "Woman as Action at a Distance" [39] near the beginning of *Eperons* (47-49). Nietzsche's male speaker stands on the noisy sea-edge gazing at a distant, silent, tranquil (and perhaps empty) boat ("woman") far out at sea: "The enchantment and the most powerful effect of woman is, to use the language of philosophers, an...actio in distans; there belongs thereto, however, primarily and above all—distance (dazu gehort aber, und vor allem—Distanz)!" Derrida's gloss: "What is the opening step of that Distanz? Its rhythm already is mimed in Nietzsche's writing. The hyphen, a stylistic effect inserted between the Latin citation (actio in distans) which parodies the philosopher's language and the exclamation point, suspends the word Distanz. The play of silhouettes which is created here by the hyphen's pirouette serves as a sort of warning to us to keep our distance from these multifarious veils and their shadowy dream of death." Yet the ballet dance- step (pirouette) of the "hyphen" (which in Greek means "under one," that is, "identity")—the purely ironic, self-distancing dance (or step) of style—surely does not keep us (as) "males" safely distanced from any real ("female") danger here; we are far from the world of Zarathustra's Sphinx-ladies who eat men alive with their sharp-toothed questioning. [40]
- ¶34. Perhaps we might correlate the hyphen's pirouette (woman's ironic "action at a distance") here with the ironic (and Socratic?) skepticism of Nietzsche's "skeptical old woman" in *Gay Science* 2.64: "I am afraid that old women are more skeptical in their most secret heart of hearts than any man: they consider the superficiality of existence its essence, and all virtue and profundity is to them merely a veil over this 'truth,' a very welcome veil over a pudendum—in other words, a matter of decency and shame, and no more than that." [41] "Pudendum" means in Latin "something to be ashamed of" and thus (by extension) "the external genitals of the female, or of either sex." In this "figure" then women know that life's meaning is essentially something superficial and also sexual (bodily, external), so that they are glad of the metaphysical illusions which veil this "shameful" emptiness of things. Derrida (*Eperons*, 59) comments: "the blushing movement of that truth which is not suspended in quotation marks casts a modest veil over such a surface. And only through such a veil...could 'truth' become truth, profound, indecent, desirable." [42] Yet this feeling of "shame" and the desire to conceal one's (female) sexuality also suggests a "movement" or dynamic force (and the term "action at a distance" in Newton's physics refers in fact to magnetic and gravitational forces) that goes beyond the mere surface-pirouette, or "suspension" (between quotation marks), of "style." On the other hand, it seems we must also distinguish this movement from that of Lady Dawn in "Before Sunrise" (near the beginning of *Zarathustra III*), who is surely too "innocent" and "sincere" for this sort of (rather cynical, feigned) "modesty." This is the female figure/goddess of Sky-Dawn way "above" the male speaker, praised by him as goddess of pure Chance:

- ¶35. “Over all things stand the heaven Accident, the heaven Innocence, the heaven Chance, the heaven Prankishness [der Himmel Zufall,...Unschuld,... Ohngefähr,...Übermuth]. ‘By Chance’—that is the most ancient nobility of the world, and this I restored to all things: I delivered them from their bondage under Purpose...I taught that over them and through them no ‘eternal will’ wills....all things...would rather dance on the feet of Chance [auf den Füßen des Zufalls—tanzen]. O heaven over me, pure and high! This is what your purity is to me now...that you are to me a dance floor for divine accidents [Tanzboden für göttliche Zufälle], that you are to me a divine table for divine dice and dice players [Göttertisch für göttliche Würfel und Würfelspieler]![\[43\]](#)
- ¶36. Unlike the “Action at a Distance” passage in which the man merely speculates on the tranquil yet deceptive Otherness of the (self-) distant (self-differentiated) woman, this “Dance Floor” passage (not discussed by Derrida) maintains the man-woman dialogue. The man (below) says to the woman (above): “This is what your purity is to me now...that you are to me a dance floor for divine accidents, that you are to me a divine table for divine dice and dice players;” he is dancing on her floor, and/or she on his; in the dance which is also a dice-throw the genders also got mixed or “thrown together.” This Lady Dawn is indeed the male speaker’s alter ego, the “sister soul to his insight” or (like the Stillest Hour) his “inner voice;” the two co-exist in a relationship based on mutual affirmation or “‘Yes’- and ‘Amen’-saying”:
- ¶37. To throw myself into your height, that is my depth. To hide in your purity, that is my innocence...Are you not the light for my fire? Have you not the sister soul to my insight? [Hast du nicht die Schwester-Seele zu meiner Einsicht?]... But I am one who can bless and say Yes, if only you are about me, pure and light, you abyss of light; then I carry the blessings of my Yes into all abysses. [\[44\]](#)
- ¶38. The speaker and Lady Dawn thus interpenetrate and “exhaust” one another; they become one another’s “abyss” when the bright sky at dawn appears clear and cloudless to the man below: but this is just the moment of their total, “uncanny and unbounded ‘Yes and Amen’ (das ungeheure unbegrenzte Ja- und Amen- sagen).” This “dialogue” is a variation on the purely rhetorical dialogue of male speaker and the Stillest Hour, in which she bids him “Sprich und verbricht” (“Speak and burst”); here the two are mutually affirmative or confirmative to a virtually “infinite” degree—each the affirmative answer to the other’s question, to the (their) one rhetorical question whose affirmative answer is not forced but simply “natural”: “Are you not the light for my fire?” While various images connect the Dawn-Lady here (like the Stillest Hour) with Zarathustra’s “most abysmal thought” of eternal return, in saying “yes” to her he is saying yes to this immanent life itself (in/as eternal return), just as

she/it is saying yes to him.

¶39. But even if this Lady Chance's purity and innocence suggest(s) Derrida's (Nietzschean) "affirmative" woman, in all her "multiplicity" (rather than either his "castrated" or "castrating" woman), her/his dance on the "dance-floor of chance" suggests not the mere surface-dance of style (the finally non-penetrating stylus), not a pirouette/ ballet-step, but something much nearer the Deleuzian-Nietzschean dice-throw, the opening Up/out into new speculative possibilities of/for the future, new possibilities of thinking, meaning, interpretation— "dancing on the feet of chance." That is, this dance could also be a violent one, perhaps this is the potential violence of androgyny itself; the future possibilities thrown out by the dice throw/dance—like Zarathustra throwing Up/out his most abysmal (unthinkable) thought—could be something truly unexpected, even monstrous. It could be something no longer even (merely) playful in the sense of ironic self-distancing, something too "deep" for that, something whose extreme "playfulness" (in the sense of unpredictability) could not but be deadly serious if only in its extreme non-seriousness. And if Derrida does not make explicit in *Eperons* ("Spurs") this more potentially violent (and thus "serious") trope of woman-as-womb, woman-as-generative-matrix, he ends "Structure, Sign and Play" with precisely the image of mother-giving-birth:

¶40. There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign...The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism...[T]hese two interpretations of interpretation...are absolutely irreconcilable even if we live them simultaneously...I do not believe that today there is any question of choosing—...because we must first try to conceive of their common ground, and the difference of their irreducible difference. Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose conception, formation, gestation, and labor we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of child-bearing—but also with a glance toward those who...turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.[\[45\]](#)

¶41. That is, perhaps, in the form of the unnamable "sun" itself, whose name still blinds our (merely human, all too human) understanding.

END NOTES

1. See Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1978). The word "structure"—to construct, to construe—comes from "strewing" ("piling up") and thus already contains, as Derrida notes, a certain self-deconstructive tendency.
2. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, translated by Margaret Waller, New York: Columbia University Press (1984).
3. Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, translated by Barbara Harlow, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1979), 57.
4. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, New York: Columbia University Press (1991), 353-354.
5. Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1982).
6. I'm thinking of the "concentric" model here—whether or not the "center" is inside or outside of this "solar system" (or equivalent to the circumference), it is still somehow "implied"—in Derrida's sense in "White Mythology" (*Margins of Philosophy*), where "heliotropic metaphors" point inward toward the "sun" (or hypothetical "center," "origin," "unquoted text"). My distinction here of metaphoric/metonymic may not then precisely match the standard French structuralist distinction as found in Saussure and Jakobson; but after, we have with Derrida (and the later Barthes) moved into "poststructuralism."
7. To say no "responsible" sex here—although Derrida's recent concern with "responsibility" in a more Kierkegaardian and Levinasian "ethical" context hardly qualifies it as a "sexual" concern—might seem to be going a bit too far.
8. Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, translated by G Gill, New York: Columbia University Press (1991).

9. Here we might think that the speaker "hears" the voice of "eternal return" and then (from out of his inner abyss) "responds." But the context suggests that he is calling to that "most abysmal thought" which is a "worm" (Wurm) deep within him-the oroboros or snake biting its own tail has already appeared as figure of the return--that has either crawled down his throat or somehow appeared there: "Up, abysmal thought, out of my depth! I am your cock and dawn, sleepy worm. Up! Up! My voice shall yet crow you awake!" Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 327. The connection here of orality to both the "nauseating depths" of the inner body and to "speech" and "thought" suggests Kristeva's notion in Powers of Horror of "abjection" (which owes something to Bataille) in the "pre-Oedipal" relationship between the mother and the infant which is "abjected" out of her own body and which also "abjects" that body. It also suggests Deleuze's view, in *The Logic of Sense*, of the close proximity of mouth as "organ of speech" (and by extension of "thought") to mouth as "organ of eating" (and by extension "shitting"). Thus the abyss "speaks," inner "sun" or "daughter" speaks, spews or strews out "particles" which may or may not ultimately (as totality) "make sense."
10. Fredrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Muschen: Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag/de Gruyter (1988), 4.271 (Kaufmann, 328).
11. See Ainley, *Ideal Selfishness': Nietzsche's Metaphor of Maternity* in D. F. Krell and D. Wood (Eds.), *Exceedingly Nietzsche: Aspects of Contemporary Nietzsche-Interpretation* London, New York: Routledge (1988). Speaking of Nietzsche's trope of "pregnancy" Ainley sets "pulsation" in relation to "punctuation," which suggests a further elaboration of Derrida's Nietzschean hyphen (-) as "pirouette" in Eperons. (Of course, unlike pregnancy, the pirouette as pure spinning on one's toes "goes nowhere.")
12. One reason why Irigaray (Amante Marine) thinks Nietzsche/Zarathustra needs a healthier sexual "attitude."

13. Cosmic "origin" as self-extroverting/introverting mother who embeds her own power of self- (re)-generation in an indefinite series within/without herself, and thus as purely temporal act of "pulsation"—this might be one way to read the Chinese I Ching and also Lao-tzu's Tao which can be "always used" yet is "never empty" (pu ying, ??, "never overflows," "never needs to be filled"). Perhaps the womb-origin could be the Taoist shih (?) -origin which Needham claims is "woman within woman" or "womb within womb," since the character (he says) is a figure of "mother and embryo." Lao-tzu 1: "Wu ming, t'ien di chih shih" (??,????), "No name (Nothing names), the origin of heaven-earth;" no name can "name" it as it is itself the force of cosmic pulsation which splits open meaning like nuclear fission and fusion. Perhaps the pulse of the sun-womb's continual contractions and expansions, introversions and extroversions is after all magnified both without (pulsation of the cosmos) and within (atomic and sub-atomic pulsations). But such a notion of "time" would need to be set in some relation to Kristeva's "cyclic" and "monumental" time, both distinguished (as "Woman's Time") from (male) linear, chronological and historical time—that is, "Hegelian" time. Kristeva in this essay first correlates (echoing the I Ching's yang/yin) man with "time" and woman with "space" (womb, khora); the (female) cyclic and monumental time with thus be both in some way "spatial": "As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity . . . On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature . . . [or] cosmic time . . . . On the other hand . . . there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits: all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space . . . . these two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to female subjectivity in so far as the latter is thought of as necessarily maternal . . . ." (191-192). The maternal nature of cyclic time is tied to the dynamic process of gestation (pulsation); that of monumental time to its "all encompassing" spatiality, its (spatialized) "infinity." This monumental time we would also need to set in some relation to the Aion or "playful eternity" of Nietzsche—the "child, game, self-propelled wheel," eternal return in its "highest aspect" as "pure Being." Deleuze's own Aion (also grounded in Nietzsche's eternal return as a "repetition of difference" and contrasted with the Kronos of linear time) is a kind of spatial projection of (linear) time onto a flat surface, where it can thus be seen as "totality" (yet also, as the playful Aion suggests, mere "simulacrum"). One thinks perhaps too of the fetus or starchild orbiting a/ the planet at the end of Kubrick's "2001."

14. That is, Derrida here puts "questioning" back into a Heideggerian-metaphysical context, one which has appropriated "the immediate and localized "force of difference" of paradoxical, aporetic, "self- veiling/unveiling" (indeed riddle-like, a path Derrida does not pursue here), "ironic-woman" tropes. Thus, while no doubt the paradoxical space opened by the Derridean trope of deflowering/unveiling (in the "interpenetration on the surface" of style/writing) may suggest that of the "question" or "problem" itself, Derrida somehow never "specifies" his notion of "question" in *Eperons*. True, he opens the book (following a citation of Nietzsche's innocently "romantic" letter, in 1872, to Malvida von Meysenbug) with "The question of style": "The title for this lecture was to have been the question of style. However-it is woman who will be my subject. . . The 'question of style' is, as you have no doubt recognized, a quotation [citation]. Thus it serves to indicate that what I shall put forth here is already a part of that space which certain readings . . . have demarcated (degage) . . . . [T]hey have opened Up that problematic field [champ problematique] to the very margin in which . . . I shall remain . . . In the question of style there is always the weight [examen] of some pointed object. . . ." Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, translated by Barbara Harlow, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1979), 35-37. To "put forth as part of an already opened space" suggests, indeed, "question" in the more or less Heideggerian sense of opening (into/toward the still unthought/unthinkable); examen as trope for "weight" is also telling in this context, as (coming from exigere, "to drive out," "demand," "measure" as in "exact") it means "tongue of a balance" (Derrida's first meaning here, "weight") and "examination" (the latter defined as "formal interrogation"). But again, the whole problematic of "the question" is never made explicit in *Spurs* in relation to that of irony and (sexual) difference, or indeed that of "woman," never specified in this way. The "question of Being" (Seinsfrage) or "question of metaphysics" (and of the *Vergessenheit des Seins*, "forgetting of Being") does come explicitly into play in the later discussion of the implications, for the late Heidegger's "Being as ereignis/event of appropriation," of Heidegger's seeming "sexlessness" (specifically his ignoring, in his own reading of Nietzsche's "The History of an Illusion," of the parenthetical remark that in "becoming Christian," after Plato, the "truth became female")-here Derrida is suggesting that the pro/re/appropriation that precedes/conditions (as localized and multiple force) any "fundamental ontology" is/can be read as the violence of "sexual difference." Yet this "violence" never goes, in my view, beneath the "surface of style" in *Eperons*, and (therefore) the question of "the question" is never directly set in relation to that of (an empirical or dynamic) sexual difference.

- [15.](#) For this interpretation of Nietzsche see also my essay Frank W. Stevenson, [Nietzsche's Umsphinx: Riddles and Rhetorical Questions](#), *Concentric*, 28 (1) 2002.
- [16.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 339.
- [17.](#) Here reden-"say" is closely tied to reden-"read" ("interpret," "riddle").
- [18.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 257-258 (KSA 187-188).
- [19.](#) And here "zerbrich" echoes "sprich," "speaking" is already "breaking" on a purely "poetic" level.
- [20.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 128.
- [21.](#) *ibid.*, 197—a likely parody of the "Last Supper".
- [22.](#) *ibid.*, 33. In this passage the "contingency" of rhetoric is foregrounded: these are the words of Zarathustra's animals, who "know how you would speak to yourself . . . if you wanted to die now." And the author's concluding comment: "When they animals had spoken these words they were silent and waited for Zarathustra to say something . . . but Zarathustra did not hear that they were silent . . . for he was conversing with his soul" (332-333).
- [23.](#) Thus—at least for this kind of "reading" (reden, un-riddling)—it may be crucial that whereas Nietzsche's "What do you matter, Zarathustra!" is an exclamation, Kaufmann translates it as a question.

- [24.](#) Perhaps in this violent emergence the question becomes (almost) an "exclamation" (see previous note). This trope of the question's emergence out of silence is already found in certain mystical forms or readings of Western monotheism (though Nietzsche in *Z.* explicitly parodies and subverts Christianity), e.g. in Derridean ones: "Silence is seen [also] by Derrida to be dynamic in nature. Rather than being the cessation of language . . . Derrida's silence is the origin, the source of all speaking, and yet a source that locates itself in the quiet between the letters of his writing. Language, both ours and God's, originates . . . in God's keeping still-it 'starts with the stifling of his voice and the dissimulation of his face. This difference, this negativity in God is our freedom, the transcendence and the verb which can relocate the purity of their negative origin only in the possibility of the Question.'" [Derrida and Negative Theology](#) H. Coward and T. Foshay (Eds.), Albany, NY: SUNY Press (1992), 221. (Coward is quoting Derrida in "Edward Jabes, or the Question of the Book," *Writing and Difference* 67.)
- [25.](#) See previous note.
- [26.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 259.
- [27.](#) Perhaps this is a "teaching" the (still "unripe") teacher can give "without bursting." The Life-Zarathustra dialogue at the end of *Z* III (discussed above) is also a good example of purely "rhetorical dialogue" as redundancy.
- [28.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 418-419 ( KSA:4 382-383, Nietzsche's italics).
- [29.](#) Derrida's writing/style interplay of the feminine operation also involves a mutual stabbing or "penetration," but I am arguing here that this "violence" of Eperons remains merely "on the surface (of style)."
- [30.](#) The "paradise air," for instance, seems to have fallen from the "moon" where Monde echoes the Munde, mouths of the maidens.
- [31.](#) Robert Gooding-Williams, *Zarathustra's Dionysian Modernism*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press (2001), 83-84.

- [32.](#) Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony: With Conceptual Reference to Socrates*, translated by H Hong and E Hong, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press (1989), 35-38.
- [33.](#) Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, New York: Columbia University Press (1994).
- [34.](#) *ibid.*, 63.
- [35.](#) *ibid.*, 63-68.
- [36.](#) *ibid.*, 195.
- [37.](#) *ibid.*, 195-196.
- [38.](#) *ibid.*, 197-198.
- [39.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage: Random House (1974), 2.60.
- [40.](#) The pirouette in ballet is just spinning on one's toes, thus a purely "rhetorical" (and ironic) step which "goes nowhere" but only repeats itself- as in answers that merely repeat their questions.
- [41.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Vintage: Random House (1974), 125.
- [42.](#) Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, translated by Barbara Harlow, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1979), 59.
- [43.](#) Walter Kaufmann, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York: Viking Press (1954), 278 (KSA 209-210).
- [44.](#) *ibid.*, 276-277.
- [45.](#) Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1978), 293 (Derrida's emphasis).

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