

N IETZSCHE I NVERTED

I appreciate the artful way
in which you elucidate Nietzsche's
style and discourse in an
almost non-misleading manner.

The paper shows a good grasp of
Nietzsche and an ability to
associate him with main
figures and thoughts of the
German tradition. Your argument
with Sedgwick is well conducted.

Merrill Cole
Department of English, Box 354330
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195

4.0
Ernst Behler

Supposing falsehood is a man—what then? Are there not grounds for the suspicion that all philosophers, insofar as they refuse dogmatism, have become very expert about men? That the exquisite levity, the deft inconspicuousness with which they have begun to tease falsehood have been gracious and fitting indirections for winning a man's heart? What is dubious is that he had allowed himself to be won—and today every kind of seduction lies close, gay and emphatic. *If it is lying down at all!* For there are true believers who claim that it has arisen, that the lie stands at attention—even more, that the lie upholds life.

Is it plausible to parody a discourse that is itself a parody? Must the poor critic act the Alexandrian fool, follow Nietzsche's performance with cap and bells, quotation and footnote? Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, opens his discourse by mocking traditional philosophy's truth narratives. Nonetheless, the customary scripting of gender and sexuality goes unchallenged. It is perhaps the oldest story, old as Genesis, painfully reinscribed. Woman as truth. Woman as hard to get. Woman as cheat. Woman as temptress. Woman as—get out the whip. As Rachel Blau Duplessis notes, discussing male Modernists in the American tradition, "readability depends upon such reliable gender narratives. Their radical forms are made radically accessible—readable—by the familiarity of gender limits, the iconographies they inherit and repropose" (42). Does Nietzsche's radical philosophy depend upon a decidedly reactionary gender role-playing? A "soft" Nietzsche interpreter might argue that Nietzsche's hypothesis—"Supposing truth were a woman—What then?" (*Beyond* 1)—should be read as an instigating rhetorical gambit, a moment of high drama, and certainly not as a "truth."¹ Nietzsche provokes, in other words, rather than preaches. But does this 'extreme rhetoric'

alibi abjure him of neglecting to deconstruct gender oppositions, when he dismantles virtually every other opposition? Nietzsche, still cleaving to gender disparity, asks his readers to question "whether there are any opposites at all" (Beyond 10).

Where does this gender opposition place "the dogmatists" (Beyond 1)? Poor suitors to a particularly insufferable feminine abstraction, the philosophers Nietzsche ridicules experience sexual frustration and, perhaps, impotence. They are effeminate. They are feminized, and truth—even worse—might be a woman. But wait . . . who, precisely, is effeminate? who is decadent? who is intellectually perverse? who has his fruitfulness "somewhere else than in children" (Genealogy 111)? Does Nietzsche manage to escape the tightening circles of his own accusations? It would appear that, for every condemnation within Nietzsche's oeuvre, a corresponding identification can be located. In *Ecce Homo*, he considers that the "dual series of experiences, this access to apparently separate worlds, is repeated in my nature in every respect: I am a *Doppelgänger*, I have a 'second' face in addition to the first" (225). Both decadent and non-decadent, Nietzsche is his own double.

Yet, beyond questions of misogyny, bombast, and the duplicitous self, there is another foolish suspicion I would like to put on stage.

3

What hides in that "secret garden the existence of which no one suspected" (Genealogy 17), the "labyrinth of audacious insights (Ecce Homo 264)? Would it be the abundance of "*hidden* dirt at the bottom of many a character" (Ecce Homo 233)? Or Eve's apples? Does this horticultural hideout have to do with women at all? In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that "many of Nietzsche's most effective intensities of both life and writing were directed toward other men

and toward the male body" (133). Body of Christ. Body of Dionysus. Sedgwick observes that "presentations of male beauty frame the human image" (131) in the scandalous body of Christ, "in extremis and/or in ecstasy, prescriptively meant to be gazed at and adored" (140). She also notes the evocative eroticism of Dionysus:

the tempter god and born piper of consciences whose voice knows how to descend into the netherworld of every soul; who does not say a word or cast a glance in which there is no consideration and ulterior enticement; whose mastery includes the knowledge of how to seem—not what he is but what is to those who follow him one *more* constraint to press ever closer to him . . . who smooths rough souls and teaches them a new desire . . . and is a divining rod for every grain of gold that has long lain buried in the dungeon of much mud and sand; the genius of the heart from whose touch everyone walks away richer . . . newer to himself than before, broken open . . . full of hopes that as yet have no name . . ." (Beyond 233-34).

Nietzsche offers "a sexy thematics of ripeness, fructification, mess, ecstatic rupture, penetration, between men" (Sedgwick 136). The big secret, or the greatest temptation, according to Sedgwick, revolves around "(unnameable) prohibitions attached specifically to the beautiful male body" (137). At the end of the long passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* quoted above, Nietzsche stops himself with the question, "but what am I doing, my friends?" (234). What is he doing? This essay is a fragmentary attempt at a response.

Nietzsche writes of the artist's "'maternal instinct,' the secret love of that which is growing in him" (Genealogy 110). Some artists inseminate, and some are impregnated. When a male writer appropriates the female ability to reproduce, how is this carried out *physically*? Nietzsche so often relies upon physical and physiological analogies to bolster his philosophy that the physical locus of male

mothering, of Nietzsche's mothering, deserves inspection. Where, and how, would a man produce his children? One answer suggests itself in "the dungeon of much mud and sand," quoted above. Perhaps Nietzsche's is a distinctly *anal* erotics. He may very well be the artist who, "after all," is "only the precondition of his work, the womb, the soil, sometimes the dung and manure on which, out of which" his work grows (Genealogy 100). What kind of 'breaking open' does Nietzsche endorse? What fertilizes his secret garden?

"What strange, wicked, questionable questions!" (Beyond 9). Such nasty suspicions to cast! Walter Kaufmann, in his "Translator's Introduction" to *The Gay Science*, implores that "this book will not be misconstrued as implying that Nietzsche was homosexual or that the book deals with homosexuality" (5). Yet Kaufmann, in all scholarly honesty, has to admit, "Nietzsche says some very unkind things about women, and he extols friendship and the Greeks" (5). Kaufmann's desire to deflect homoerotic implications, however prudish or obtuse, devolves from dynamics inherent in Nietzsche's text. Nietzsche, the self-awowed decadent, exclaims, in one instance, "[a]way with this "inverted world"! Away with this shameful emasculation of feeling!" (Genealogy 124).

Apparently, inversion is so diseased, so contagious, so filthy, that even to cite it requires quotation marks. Kaufmann wishes to place imaginary quotation marks around the "gay" in *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche, thereby, can be called "gay," but only in a certain restricted sense.² Nonetheless, the protests of punctuation can render a statement emphatic. Are there grounds for calling Nietzsche, "straight"? Would he approve of such designation? If there had been self-professed gays in his world, would he not have championed them, as he sides with others he calls decadent? Nietzsche refers to the subject of inversion without grounding it in its obvious Late-Nineteenth Century context, and this lack of grounding, in itself, is cause for speculation.

In "Epigrams and Interludes" Nietzsche proclaims, "woman's game is mediocre" (Beyond 85). "Woe when 'the eternally boring in woman'—she is rich in that!—is permitted to venture forth!" (Beyond 163). Nietzsche does not want to hear the voices of women, and especially not the articulation of their desires ("they threaten with medical explicitness" (Beyond 163)). Woman, thus, should have nothing to do with philosophy. Nietzsche's seems to be a philosophical game for men only. A seduction in an all-boy's club. "Nothing is true and everything is permitted." (Genealogy 150). But woman's game is not worth playing. Woman is not allowed. Who, then, will be the daredevil? Who, the free spirit? Obviously, not a woman.

Yet this entire argument is obvious. It is well-covered critical turf. Sedgwick raises a different problem:

given all the thought recently devoted to the position of women in Nietzsche's writing, it is striking how difficult it seems to have been to focus on the often far more cathected position of men there. There are reasons for this even beyond the academic prudishness, homophobia, and heterosexist obtuseness that always seem to obtain: Nietzsche offers writing of an open, Whitmanesque seductiveness, some of the loveliest there is, about the joining of men with men, but he does so in the stubborn, perhaps even studied absence of any explicit generalizations, celebrations, analyses, or reifications of these bonds as explicitly same-sex ones (133).

The love that dare not speak its name, or the love that will shout everything except its name? Is it love at all? I could argue, following Sedgwick, that Nietzsche recharges the pederastic scene of classical pedagogy with a Christian metaphoric of blame, denunciation, and prohibition. Thus, by compounding Dionysus with

Christ, Nietzsche's writing achieves a "shocking magneticism" (Sedgwick 139), a seductive interplay of homoeroticism and homophobia that rigidifies neither into a firm affirmation nor into an explicit rebuke.

I suspect, however, that such an analysis does not tell the entire story. In her otherwise astute and suggestive study of Nietzsche and Oscar Wilde, Sedgwick neglects to scrutinize *the signal position of the lie* for both writers. The lie too easily becomes a synonym for the closet, for a veil to pose against a supposed inner truth.³ I believe that the lie deserves attention on its own merits.

Sedgwick's analysis of Nietzsche depends upon her reading of "the double stage of seduction staged in . . . the Preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*" (138); that is, seduction is described in a narrative which itself entails yet another form of seduction. Sedgwick excerpts the following passage from the Hollingdale translation:

To be sure, to speak of spirit and the good as Plato did meant standing truth on her head and denying *perspective* itself, the basic condition of all life; indeed, one may ask as a physician: "how could such a malady attack this loveliest product of antiquity, Plato? did the wicked Socrates corrupt him after all? could Socrates have been a corrupter of youth after all? and have deserved his hemlock?" —But the struggle against Plato, or, to express it more plainly and for "the people," the struggle against the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia—for Christianity is Platonism for "the people"—has created in Europe a magnificent tension of the spirit such has never existed on earth before: with so tense a bow one can now shoot for the most distant targets. (*Beyond*, 14) (Sedgwick 138-39).

Sedgwick comments, "Nietzsche frames the proto-Christian fall into metaphysics as an incident of classroom sexual harassment among the ancients. The seduction at

which his own language aims, however . . . is the seduction of the reader" (139).⁴ Nietzsche's seduction overlays Socrates'. The reader is a double target, at whom Nietzsche's rhetoric stretches "so tense a bow." Sedgwick, however, does not explore the complex relation of Nietzsche to the lie, and she passes over Nietzsche's ambivalent treatment of Plato.

5

Comparing Nietzsche to Wilde, as dual exemplars of Late-Nineteenth Century definitional crises surrounding the male body, Sedgwick overlooks one simple congruence: the similarity of Nietzsche's 1873 title, "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense" to Wilde's 1889 title, "The Decay of Lying." The comparison goes beyond the titles, because both essays accentuate the importance of lying. In the spirit of Wilde's essay—a repartee between two fictional characters, Vivian and Cyril—and in the hope of furthering the dialogue Sedgwick initiates, I would present another imaginary conversation:

Wilde Lying for the sake of the improvement of the young, which is the basis of home education, still lingers amongst us, and its advantages are so admirably set forth in the early books of Plato's *Republic* (669).

Nietzsche A real lie, a genuine, resolute, 'honest' lie (on whose value one should consult Plato) would be something far too severe and potent for them: it would demand of them what one *may* not demand of them, that they open their eyes to themselves, that they should know how to distinguish "true" and "false" in themselves. All they are capable of is a *dishonest* lie (Genealogy 137).

Wilde They never rise beyond the level of misrepresentation, and actually condescend to prove, to discuss, to argue. How different from the temper of the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind! (658).

Plato is perhaps the very instigator of the tangle of lying, homoeroticism, and art that captivates both writers. In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, gaining a boy's love requires delicate deception. It is a sly Socrates, indeed, who counsils the ephebe, Phaedrus, on the capture of the beautiful boy: when the boy sees that the lover is in love with him, his soul,

in its turn, is filled with love. So he loves, yet knows not what he loves; he does not understand, he cannot tell what has come upon him; like one who has caught a disease of the eye from another, he cannot account for it, not realizing that his lover is as it were the mirror in which he beholds himself (501).

This is a trick mirror: love sustains its imitative operation only in the boy's ignorance. Were the boy to see the illusion as illusion, were he to discover the mirror of mimesis at work, its efficacy would vanish. Love appears to be a nurturing false image, or a beneficent disease.⁵ To believe in the reflection, the boy (and, perhaps, the lover, too) cannot discern the work of the reflector. The recognition of "true beauty" (496) requires deception; that is to say, it requires a seductively realistic art.

In the *Republic*, Socrates authorizes several occasions for "opportune falsehoods" (658). In the ideal society, the noble lie is a proper institution:

"[i]t seems likely that our rulers will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception for the benefit of their subjects. We said, I believe, that the use of that sort of thing was in the category of medicine" (698).

Lying is a medical art. Is Plato not the veritable father of lies? Of course, Plato's mode of lying, which throws poets out of the republic, and puts story-telling always in the service of higher truth, is inimical to Wilde and Nietzsche. Wilde favors

the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy natural disdain of proof of every kind!

After all, what is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence (658).

In a similar, yet more philosophically phrased, vein, Nietzsche argues against the constraint of an "unconditional will to truth" (Genealogy 151). Plato's ideal is, for him, a peculiarly dishonest form of lying. Nietzsche and Wilde mock Plato on aesthetic grounds.

In Plato's dialogues, lies, like everything else, must work for the benefit of ideal forms. Nietzsche reserves no swing of his hammer for the ideal; in one particularly concise swipe, he writes,

The *lie* of the ideal so far has been the curse on reality; on account of it, mankind itself has become mendacious and false down to its most fundamental instincts—to the point of worshipping [*sic*] the *opposite* values of those which alone would guarantee its health, its future (Ecce Homo 218).

What for Plato is good medicine, for Nietzsche is the worst of poisons. While Nietzsche does not present absolute truth as an option, "[i]t does indeed make a difference for what purpose one lies: whether one preserves with a lie or *destroys* with it" (Anti-Christ 192). To say that there is no truth is not to claim that all truths are relative, that all lies are equally worthwhile. The ideal is the worst of lies.

7

The conversation continues.

Nietzsche Where once the intuitive man, as in more ancient Greece, bore his weapons more powerfully and victoriously than his adversary, in favorable cases a culture can form and the domination of art over life be established. That dissimulation, that denial of poverty, that splendor of metaphorical intuitions and,

in general, that immediacy of delusion accompanies all manifestations of such a life (On Truth and Lie 256).

Wilde [S]ociety sooner or later must return to its lost leader, the cultured and fascinating liar (664).

Nietzsche [A]rt, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience (Genealogy 153).

Wilde And when that day dawns, or sunset reddens, how joyous we shall be! Facts will be regarded as discreditable, truth will be found mourning over her fetters, and romance, with her temper of wonder, will return to the land. The very aspect of the world will change to our startled eyes. Out of the sea will rise Behemoth and Leviathan (669).

Nietzsche That enormous structure of beams and boards of the concepts, to which the poor man clings for dear life, is for the liberated intellect just a scaffolding and plaything for his boldest artifices. And when he smashes it apart, scattering it, and then ironically puts it together again, joining the most remote and separating what is closest, he reveals that he does not need the emergency aid of poverty, and that he is now guided not by concepts but by intuitions. From these intuitions no regular road leads to the land of ghostly schemata, of abstractions (On Truth and Lie 256).

Wilde Life and nature may sometimes be used as a part of art's rough material, but before they are of any real service to art they must be translated into artistic conventions (670).

Nietzsche As long as it can deceive without harm, the intellect, that master of deception, is free and released from its usual servile tasks, and that is when it celebrates its Saturnalia; never is it more luxuriant, richer, prouder, more skillful and bold (On Truth and Lie 255).

I do not pursue this mock-dialogue out of mere fun, or out of an uncomplicated desire to surprise my readers. Although I offer no final unraveling of the complex tangle of lying, art, and homoeroticism knotted by Nietzsche and Wilde, it is a difficult topic that merits more attention. Sedgwick's epistemological closet, while certainly eye-opening and apropos, elides the art of lying too quickly with homosexual secrecy. In Wilde's writing, same-sex desire often wears the lightest of veilings, as numerous commentators, including Sedgwick, have remarked. Homoeroticism curtains itself behind a necessary Victorian decorum, on which the knowing reader is trusted to fasten loose signifiers to meanings that the writer leaves elegantly half-open. Yet Wilde's discretion does not explain away the hyperbolic wit of his pronouncements in favor of lying, and he ties lying to the value of art.

Wilde stresses the value of wearing masks: "[i]n point of fact, what is interesting about people in good society . . . is the mask that each one of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask" (661). It is most important to create life, and not simply to copy it: this is Wilde's artistic principle. Nietzsche more or less concurs, enjoining his readers "to risk trying even what is artificial—as the real artists of life do" (Beyond 43). With no recourse to an untouched nature—for Wilde, repugnant; and for Nietzsche, unattainable—life becomes more a choice between copying and creating, between either depending on the poor trickery of mimesis, or on what Wilde terms, "style" (663). The mask, then, is an act of self-creation. Nietzsche proclaims, "[e]very profound spirit needs a mask: even more, around every profound spirit a mask is growing continually" (Beyond 51). "Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion is also a hideout, every word a mask" (Beyond 229). Whereas the rhetoric of the closet focuses upon acts of disclosure—'unclosetings'—both Nietzsche and Wilde state in no uncertain terms

that the mask is more estimable than anything that might be hidden behind it. An outstanding student of this attitude, W. B. Yeats, gives it concise poetic formulation:

It was the mask engaged your mind,
And what set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind." (Yeats 95, l. 8-10)

Value rests emphatically on the surface.

9

Nietzsche Whoever is completely and wholly an artist is to all eternity separated from the "real," the actual (Genealogy 101).

Wilde The final revelation is that lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of art (670).

10

Sedgwick claims that

An antifiguralist modernism per se never seems to have formed any part of Nietzsche's program. It seems, however, that after the revulsion against his love for Wagner, opera functioned for Nietzsche rather as figuration itself did for Wilde; it stood, that is, for a fascinating, near-irresistible impulse barely transcended if transcended at all, but against which a scouring polemic might none the less productively and revealingly be mounted. Thematically, and rhetorically, as well, Nietzsche's treatment of opera is similar to Wilde's treatment of mimesis (167).

Without disputing Sedgwick's interpretation of the place of opera for Nietzsche, I think it important to show that this analysis is shortsighted, insofar as it avoids examining the problem of Nietzsche's own "antifiguralist modernism." It seems

absurd to separate "Nietzsche's program" from the the rhetoric he uses to advance it, to imagine that Nietzsche's texts have a singular meaning that one can extract from his highly-wrought textual strategies. I would argue that is precisely in conceptions of the lie and the mask that Nietzsche develops his own version of antfiguration.

Figuration, as Plato emphasizes, always relates to the truth of representation. A good figure, thus, is verisimilitudinous (this definition is importantly tautological). Plato's charge against the poets is that they misrepresent the ideal:

Shall we, then, lay it down that all the poetic tribe, beginning with Homer, are imitators of images of excellence and of the other things that they 'create,' and do not lay hold on truth, but, as were just now saying, the painter will fashion, himself knowing nothing of the cobbler's art, what appears to be a cobbler to him and likewise to those who know nothing but judge only by forms and colors?

Certainly.

And similarly, I suppose, we shall say that the poet himself, knowing nothing but how to imitate, lays on with words and phrases the colors of the several arts in such a fashion that others equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent, whether he speak in rhythm, meter, and harmony about cobbling or generalship or anything whatever. So mighty is the spell these adornments naturally exercise, though when they are stripped bare of their musical coloring and taken by themselves, I think you know what sort of showing these sayings of the poets make (Republic 825-6).

Plato makes the philosopher, as opposed the the frivolous poet, the one responsible for conveying the truth; only the philosopher, who has contact with ideal reality,

can be trusted with mimesis. That this distinction runs counter to almost everything Wilde and Nietzsche write hardly requires remark; what is important is that Plato, however grudgingly, establishes a criteria for a proper (and non-poetic) form of mimesis: "we have set forth what is to be said and how it is to be said" (Republic 643). Plato, then, is not only the founder of ideal forms, but also the first guardian of proper representation.

It is in the context of proper representation as such that Nietzsche launches a definitively antifigurative modernism. Polemicizing against all forms of asceticism, he writes,

art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscious, is much more fundamentally opposed to the ascetic idea than is science: this was instinctively sensed by Plato, the greatest enemy of art Europe has yet produced. Plato versus Homer: that is the complete, the genuine antagonism—there the sincerest advocate of the "beyond," the great slanderer of life; here the instinctive deifier, the golden nature (Genealogy 153-54).

Although Homer's art is figural, it is an art of figuration that pays no attention to Platonic criteria. Homer's lies, Nietzsche asserts, are far more valuable than Plato's pale "beyond."

Nietzsche thus again extols art as mask, in lieu of art as representation. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he presents a sort of anti-figure that works in the service of opposing idealism:

Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," absolute spirituality, "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an

eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* perspective seeing, *only* a perspective "knowing"; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity" be (119).

Nietzsche debunks traditional conceptualization as nonsense; such ways of seeing, such false perspectives, actually perceive nothing at all. To show the impossibility of philosophy's ideal eye (and ideal "I"), Nietzsche creates a figure that is "completely unthinkable," completely impossible to see. How should we visualize an eye that is capable of visualizing everything? This seems to me the point of Nietzsche's anti-figure.

The deconstruction of the unitary self accompanies the deconstruction of other prominent aspects of philosophical idealism. And Nietzsche's idea of philosophic objectivity is surrounded by necessary quotation marks. The absurdity, here, is vital. Nietzsche does not wish to court any unsmiling form of seriousness, any assembly of believers. He writes, "I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon.— Perhaps I am a buffoon. Yet in spite of that . . . the truth speaks out of me" (Ecce Homo 236).

11

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche writes, "I am one thing, my writing is another matter" (259). He categorizes his writing, an "extreme case," not as something to be understood, but as something that creates new standards of intelligibility: "a book speaks of nothing but events that lie altogether beyond the possibility of any

frequent or even rare experience—that it is the first language for a new series of experiences" (261). Such a book dispenses of all conventional relations between author and reader. The aphorisms of Nietzsche's expanded second edition of *The Gay Science* conclude with an ambiguous address:

At least what you are about to hear is new; and if you do not understand it, if you misunderstand the *singer*, what does it matter? That happens to be "the singer's curse." His music and manner you will be able to hear that much better, and to his pipes—dance that much better. Is that your *will*? (348).

While it is easiest to read this passage as Nietzsche's apostrophe to his own writing, one can also consider the address turned the other way around; that is to say, to read it as the voice of the textual spirits that call Nietzsche "back to order." And the *Epilogue* strongly hints another sort of auditor altogether: it requires no stretch of the imagination to interpret this finale as Nietzsche's exhortation to his readers. Song—that is, art—here preempts all claim to representation.

The question about whether these are songs addressing the singer, or the singer addressing the songs, is crucial to understanding the modernism of Nietzsche's project. Can we find the real Nietzsche beyond his language, so that we could postulate a person-in-himself, a singular identity, behind the magnificent concert of voices? Is it so easy to separate the singer from the song, the philosopher from the philosophy? W. B. Yeats rephrases these questions some fifty years later:

Labour is blossoming or dancing where
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom, or the bole?

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance? (Yeats 217)

Finding the philosopher behind his masks is ultimately a distraction, a move away from appreciation of the dancing. We cannot stop the *adagio* to pull "truth" off the stage. Nietzsche suggests that the will to truth, the will to find and confine truth, conceals a will to death. It hides a will to a static closure, which may be just another name for death. The quest for a termination to error is, in the last analysis, hostile to life, but the fine art of lying favors life.

12

You shall know the lie, and the lie shall set you free.

¹ The distinction of "soft" and "hard" interpretation deserves at least a footnote. It suggests a distinct phallicity, involving tumescence, penetration, and male sexual mastery. Nietzsche, perhaps, calls forth such a metaphoric; in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, for instance, he insists that the better philosopher must point "imperiously into the depths" (16). At the conclusion of the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil*, wishing to decry good Europeans, those "free, very free spirits," Nietzsche employs a language redolent of male sexual excitement: "we still feel it, the whole need of the spirit and the whole tension of its bow. And perhaps also the arrow, the task, and—who knows?—the *goal*—" (3).

² Kaufmann is at pains to clear this matter up: "it is no accident that the homosexuals as well as Nietzsche opted for "gay" rather than "cheerful." "Gay science," unlike "cheerful science," has overtones of a light-hearted defiance of convention" (4-5). Given that the word, "gay," has lost most of its defiant overtones in contemporary English, would Nietzsche's book today be translated better as "the queer science"?

³ Tim Dean complains that Sedgwick reinstates a "normative, ego-based model of subjectivity" that is constitutively "inadequate for comprehending perverse desire" (Dean 122). Sedgwick risks reinstating a 'true subjectivity,' a person-in-himself, that hides behind closet walls. Nietzsche writes, "the ego itself is really only a 'higher swindle,' an "ideal" (*Ecce Homo* 266).

⁴ Sedgwick traces Nietzsche's "aptitude for perceiving decadence" to his direct "affinity with it" (169). A play of paranoid accusation, of "scapegoating attribution" (154), together with "oblique, tangential investments of attention and attraction" (156) and "promiscuously vicariating impulse[s]" (168) characterize Nietzsche's highly-fraught relation to male-male erotics. Far from serving as a validation of homosexuality, however, such "avowals of identification with desire for the signifieds of decadence . . . barely loosen . . . the horrifyingly potent knot of accusatory decadence-attribution" (178). In simpler terms, Nietzsche's homoeroticism is difficult to distinguish from homophobia.

⁵ And thus, in Nietzschean terms, a decadence.

Works Cited:

- Dean, Tim. "On the Eve of a Queer Future." *Raritan* 15:1 (Summer 1995): 116-34.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- _____. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. And *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- _____. "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense." Trans. Sander Gilman. *Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989: 246-57.
- _____. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.
- _____. *Twilight of the Idols / The Anti-Christ*. Trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin, 1990.
- Plato: Collected Dialogues*. Ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1990.
- The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*. Ed. Richard Finneran. New York: Scribner, 1989.
- Wilde, Oscar. "The Decay of Lying." *Critical Theory Since Plato: Revised Edition*. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.