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Rel. 301

The Orpheus myth retraced through the lens of the Nietzschean structure
Apollo/Dionysus:
A drama in five movements

Notes:

Two things should be noted--First, because of the nature of the excess of Nietzsche's writing, saying that I analyze with *the* Nietzschean hermeneutic is impossible. At best, I can hope to find and follow the thread of *one* Nietzschean hermeneutic, without getting lost in the overflow.

Second, As Nietzsche says the myth can have no "correlative in the...word" (Birth of... 103), I have not attempted to follow one 'version' of the Orpheus myth. Rather, I have culled my points from the "structure of the scenes and the concrete images" common to all versions.

I. Orpheus

A son of Apollo, himself a lyre player. His the perfection of illusion, the seems he sewed a redemption. Life-giving meaning, utterly controlled. He was born with his eyes closed, unconscious of the beyond. He only saw the embodiment in images of his music, his will, which Nietzsche calls the world. This mortal son created his godly father by singing the fantasy of Olympia to the people, defying Silenus' wisdom until it was forgotten. Orpheus still sings with closed eyes, ignoring the pain which is the only ground of being and upon which his illusions depend, since that horror makes those illusions necessary. His illusion becomes a mourning for a void he fails to recognize as his, in the since of his being claimed *by* that void. His erect individuality becomes a beautiful whitewashed tomb. That illusion, which is much longed for by the abject, is a longing itself, longing for the totality of itself to rend itself rightfully apart. An eruption. A party.

Orpheus, as the dreamer, in serene control, creates a bride of the illusion in his world. Since the illusion is constructed of his song, so is she his voice in the flesh (which, being married, is also his) having no say in the matter, being what is said. This 'she' is his work, coalesced into a *one* that was formed to bound his errancy, created in his image to be his truth, his creativity, a solipsized real oscillating in his closed eyes. She is the narcissistic mirror of him in which he sees his own excess, tracing onto her the frenzy which he can now put aside and continue to dam(n) himself with serenity. He created her as a sacrifice to Dionysus so that he *could* be rigidified into the military Doric, the strict camp of Apollo against Dionysus, ascending past the sensual altogether, castrating himself by despising her. Thus, leaving the despised parts of himself in his *work*, to become the pure singer (artist), never the song (work of art).

II. Eurydice -- (and anyone who offers him [Dionysus] her body to dwell in suffers the most extreme violence and survives only a short while)¹

Created as one who cannot act, she must act in order to act upon Orpheus, which is what he despises and desires. As an artistic image of excess, she is still controlled by the song, and thus is not the excess Orpheus needs to, unconsciously, define himself against. She is a definite woman, *la femme*, a truth-ridden symbol of the excess of difference. By embodying Orpheus' claim that she is truth, her falseness is exposed, since as illusion, her truth *is* falseness. And her truth, more specifically is falseness, since she is meant to contain all the 'false' outside of Orpheus' illusion's grasp, which Orpheus must believe *as* true for his continued existence. She must fail at that; her image is too present to hold that absence of the void. While she is inside of the controlling illusion, in his possession, she cannot be what he wants--which is that void which he cannot have since it is outside of the world he has created to actualize his individuality. And she cannot be, fully, what he despises, since he cannot define himself as individual against a partner that is present in his own creation. She must be wild, outside his boundaries, but this presents a conundrum, since she has no agency. She must escape somehow through his unconscious cracks, the cracks which he does not realize but which power the will of his music, which in turn is formed by his voice into this imagistic playground.

For his desires, as he created her, were slippery. His illusion of her Dionysian soul is picture perfect, wrong in it's claim to truth like a painting of excess framed, but handled, controlled. But her body, as the plague in his nature², cannot be handled; it is of necessity at the periphery of his rigid illusions because he has constructed it as incarnating the focus of his desire. Thus, he constructs her as 'castrated' (Derrida reads Nietzsche as saying all castration is man's construction³) so that he might despise and be afraid of her, convincing himself that

¹ Irigaray, Luce. Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche. Trans. by Gillian Gill. New York, Columbia U. Press, 1991. 123

² Krell, David Farrell. Postponements: Women, sensuality and death in Nietzsche. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1986. 50

³ Derrida, Spurs (48/) in Krell, 11.

he hates this dream in order to ascend beyond it, as Nietzsche says one must get beyond the flesh to rise⁴. And he marries her to make her that part of himself that he can despise.

But Eurydice cannot contain all of this, the strength of his desire cracks the illusion of her, and that in her which cannot be bounded begins to yearn for the freedom of dissolution. By creating her as Dionysian, he sets in motion the process which must lead to her pained gift. As artist, he knows that she must leave to give him a quest to fulfill. In that sense, he is her murderer. But it seems that she gives herself to the piercing of the Dionysian. Through the horrible pain which is the only possible ground, which John Sallis names 'abyss'⁵, she orgasms beyond into that other in which there is no 'she'. The body is transmuted into that abyss which inhabits everything evenly, and pokes holes in Orpheus' music. Her absence in his illusion makes present the possibility of absence to him--a touch of frenzy that breaks down the Apollonian bright world, bringing the knowledge of the possibility of death. Orpheus rails against it, sensing the possibility of his illusion for the first time *as* illusion, but makes the death fall within his song, altering the melody to image a void which he can mimetically figure as 'something'--a mere death, *a* death (objectified), that can be remedied. But this is impossible. Yes, but *an* impossible, a newly delimited impossible. One he controls, not the cold shudder of nothing he felt for a moment and brushed aside. Now that she is gone, she can function as his "second, dearly departed self,"⁶--which is not dear except departed-- acting on him *at a distance*,⁷ making a goal out of that created to contain that non-confinable 'that' which he wanted not to desire. He reconfigures her lost body as a ghost, a vapour which to Nietzsche is the goal of the ascent⁸ (and which he links to a voice as here the vapour is constructed from a voice) to be retrieved by an upside-down ascent into

⁴ Krell 10.

⁵ Sallis, John. "Dionysus--In Excess of Metaphysics." Exceedingly Nietzsche. ed. by Krell, David Farrell and David Wood.

London: Routledge, 1988. 7.

⁶ The Gay Science, Aphorism 60.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ 1872 fragment quoted in Krell 39.

the underworld, what David Krell calls (after Blanchot) ‘burrowing’.⁹ Or again, he is attempting to make a hermeneutic out of this ‘her’, a means to understand what he cannot control: She becomes the absence of death incarnate and that which can fill that absence, strange that they are the same, and he must burrow after her to find her and fill himself with her void. But the burrowing gives him meaning, works it all into his ascent.

III. The sublime walk

Blanchot gives two categories of night which he finds described in Nietzsche.¹⁰ The first one is bounded by day, realized as that time in which one confronts the possibility of death (as I have described in respect to Orpheus above). This “first night” is contrasted to the “other night,” which is the death one cannot discover. ‘One’ cannot discover this death because it is that night against which the self is composed and the self as conscious ‘self’ can only reach this night through its dissolution. This is the night of Nietzsche’s Dionysus, when she¹¹ comes out unmasked.

The shock of Eurydice’s willed dissolution, the intrusion of Silenus’ knowledge of the non-self, shatters doubt into consciousness throughout the supreme knowledge of the Apollonian illusion. It is infected precisely by that which it was created to restrain. Orpheus hears this inaudible whisper shouting out over his own music, “Be like me, the Original Mother, who, constantly creating, finds satisfaction in the turbulent flux of appearances!”¹²

But, as a hero, he bounds this night also, as he has bound all else, refiguring his world into a burrowing quest through the first night for this other night. Now that he sees a flaw in himself, his constructive fallacy of the truth is transmuted to the “illusion that thought, guided by the thread of causation, might plumb the farthest abysses of being and even *correct*

⁹ Krell, David. Lunar Voices. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1995. 147.

¹⁰ Blanchot, Maurice. The Space of Literature. Trans. by Ann Smock. Lincoln: U. of Nebraska Press, 1982. 163

¹¹ Krell, Postponements 36 Krell opens the questions of Dionysus as “always already” female. I say the sexuality of the Dionysus is constructed by the ‘one’ who confronts the illusion of it. Which is, for Nietzsche and Orpheus, undeniably feminine.

¹² Birth of Tragedy 103

it.”¹³ This corrective quest causes him to take the Socratic route within his own primary illusion, binding the non-imaginable other night *into* an image of the first night (which, as a possibility, is imaginable) created from the same vocal song as the former constructed world in which he lived. He locks the dread down into an object which is a dream-world he will journey through to find the ‘that’ (or the ‘her’) whose absence makes his abyss. He will find her at the edges, in the navel, at the threshold. But there will be no ‘her’ there.

His journey through the world is violent, since he must weave the net “absolutely tight” for a “complete conquest.”¹⁴ Nothing can stop him, he sings all the ghosts in line with his vision of a single hermeneutic of finding, killing what does not fit so that his song will match the reality. He forces the illusion to be *correct*, until he arrives at that point to which is attached (in freedom) the beyond. She has pulled him to this place, but he knows that he finds her of his own will, since the world is the embodiment of that will in music. But he cannot cope with her unworldliness, uncanniness, she is too much excess for him.

III. The constructing gaze

This formless thing which he wants to name as Eurydice is behind him at the base of the underworld. It does not appear, as that involves the phenomenon of illusion, nor does it enter, since that involves some idea of limit, of it being here and not there. It simply is what his burrowing has led him away from, in error, until he realizes that it is, and always was, behind him. It is the change in Orpheus brought about by wandering in the night that leads to the world-change which is behind him. His Eurydice. Being in front of her, he cannot know her *as* body or construct her as part of his illusion, since it is confined by the limits of his song, which is a gaze of sorts, proceeding from his living blindness. Thus, since the realization of her has made her close, but her departed nature as absence makes her distant, he can love her most completely. But he cannot grasp that there is no ‘her’ to love, and what she is now is too much for him as ‘him’ to love. For she is Dionysus.

¹³ Ibid. 93

The presence of that absence, that mad god of the void, now actualized along with its inescapable nihilism in realization, must break apart Orpheus' illusion. As his voice was his work that went out to actualize his 'self', silence must now reign in this awful liminality. She is Dionysus--and like a black hole which sucks up light, his realization of her sucks away his life-giving illusions. As the illusions are his work, thus part of him, his realization, his giving of part of his mind to her sphere, is what allows that illusion to be stolen. More and more of himself he gives to her in the love which is annihilation. But that part of himself which is not given, which remains one, must run back from the other night to the safety of the bounded day.¹⁵

In the daylight, his rigidity is reconfirmed, but she who is not 'she' pursues him with the horror of truth which he loves. Insofar as he remains 'one,' having given part of himself freely--his voice, his work--into the other, having wondered through the first night constituting Eurydice as the other night *by his voice* flowing out, the self that remains *as self* (that is, not dissolved into that other music) becomes that which must turn away from the all-encompassing realization of her. The self, that is, having separated from the song which previously loved the void and is now united with it without loving (since love implies separation), becomes a coalescence of the fear of the other night. It becomes that which must struggle to create an essence, that which must make the illusory separation with the other night, which must turn away, however much the whole Orpheus had wanted to give himself. Now, what is left must turn away and so , in order to turn away, he must turn towards.

If this howling Dionysus bereft of the mask of Eurydice is the other night he struggled to stuff into his song, she must be other, an abject agon difference void that cannot be an object. No longer within a hermeneutic where the errant woman is truth, she is outside of all hermeneutics, the true excess which cannot be written or sung but which can be approached musically. By turning slowly, eyes wide open, to look at the horror of her, his gaze

¹⁴ 95

objectifies her and her realness is lost to that entrapment of the first night, which is an image created by Orpheus.

Thus Orpheus fails, and is faced with nothing. But the quest was doomed to fail, as Nietzsche saw. More so, although this is a myth and thus artistic, Orpheus composes his life within the myth as an artistic endeavor. Thus, he does not love truly enough (in the sense of annihilation) to relinquish his artistic control, but must come back from the brink in an artistic tragedy that proves he does not live fully, because he remains alive and un-Dionysian.

V. The most piercing cry

In choosing to live his life as an artistic event, still one fundamental change has been worked in the quality of the images produced by Orpheus in his song. Whereas before, they were produced by nature to fill an unconscious lack, then produced with knowledge of the possibility of their nature as illusion, now they can be understood to be fully tragic, since they are a *remedy* for that lack which Orpheus feels *as* lack all too painfully.¹⁶ Knowing the illusions for illusions, he sees that there is no difference between the many and the one, between real and apparent.¹⁷ He sees that he must hold up his illusions in order to join the continuous play that is the lust for life inherent in the void. With his knowledge of this ‘other night’ subsumed again beneath his illusion-remedy, once again he longs for the distant void, though now he has the knowledge of what it is for which he longs. It is this loss, and this knowledge, which finally allows him to put on the mantle of a priest of Dionysus.¹⁸

But, as a *priest* of Dionysus, it is implied that there is still something to the ‘self’ known as Orpheus. In order to experience the Dionysian as Dionysian, an individual must be present to mediate. That is, one the one hand, to think the indeterminate Dionysus, a mind

¹⁵ Blanchot 169 “He who approaches it departs from himself.”

¹⁶ *Birth of Tragedy* 95

¹⁷ *Will to Power* 853

¹⁸ More, Brookes and Wilmon Brewer. *Ovid’s Metamorphoses (translation) and Ovid’s Metamorphoses in European Commentary*

(commentary). Volume II. Francetown: Marshall Jones, 1978. 1227

connected to a determinate language is necessary. On the other hand, to experience the Dionysian requires some *semblance* of a subject, as 'experience' requires a subject *to* experience. If that one is torn asunder, there is no Dionysian, as a word-concept, as there is no self to experience it. Dionysian art as such cannot be experienced, as it is the void in which the play of existence occurs. However, in a constructed world, all that is required is a semblance of frenzy, a fooling of ourselves into thinking that we had given ourselves into frenzy.

The problem gets more complex in the case of the generator of the frenzy. If this *is* still art and there is 'one' who can be called 'artist,' then it must be called tragic art, rather than Dionysian, since, for Nietzsche, the Dionysian artist must become a work of art, giving his 'one'-ness completely to the frenzy of music (as Orpheus nearly did to his Eurydice) and thus dissolving. So, *completely* Dionysiac art is impossible, since the generator of the music which produces the frenzy must hold onto some measure of his self in order to continue the song. For the listeners, burying themselves in the frenzy, that distinction can disappear, for a time, since they have to produce nothing, and merely nothing.

But Orpheus cannot stop his production--singing out his Dionysiac song of woe at his loss in the tragic style, separating himself from his frenzied sorrow in a way necessary to keep his 'self' alive. Conversely, this woe, this longing for dissolution, as vocal song (thus somehow Apollonian), produces the images necessary to keep Orpheus, as individual, alive. The song produces ecstasy, a completely metaphysical solace which Orpheus cannot fall into precisely because he must constantly produce it in some insane desire to live as one.

But the power of the music is Dionysian, is the excess of Orpheus, and the power is such to awaken Bacchanal passion. The women listeners, constructed by the song as the site of the excess (as Eurydice for Orpheus), are whipped into a frenzy and, in trying to find the source of the song, kill Orpheus in a vengeful reversal of his symbolic murder of Eurydice. They are pure Dionysian, not producers but listeners¹⁹ who must destroy individuals, they

¹⁹ The Gay Science Aphorism 60. As Nietzsche likened women to the ear.

become the hungry vortex that followed Orpheus from his underworld. His undoing is purely tragic since it, by its nature as a Bacchic murder, can have utterly no moral meaning but only beautiful aesthetic delight in the continual nature of life past all phenomena. He is “readied for this delight” by the tragic force of his own song actualized in the Bacchae “not through his victory, but through his undoing.”²⁰

The parable of the myth has served as a deception which lets us hear (as opposed to teaching us) the real, lustful power of music as pure, unreasonable will. Orpheus runs because of the balm of illusion still manifest in his song, but their howls are the true, unproduced Dionysian music which cut through the illusion by their very nature and not to any purpose. He is theirs, thus hers who is the Dionysus, whom he tried to name Eurydice. Curiously, when he dies all the music stops, with the Apollonian the Dionysian, and the women’s spell is broken. No longer the site of excess, they return.

²⁰ Birth of Tragedy 126

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