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The Seduction of Metaphors

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Love is a self-made thing

Love is a self-made trap

– Kae Tempest, “I trap you”

The Book of Traps and Lessons, 2019

In a note from 1875, Nietzsche considers words to be seducing philosophers and capturing them in the nets of language: “The seducers of philosophers are words, they wriggle in the nets of language.” (KSA 8:6[39]) One of the reasons for this seduction, Nietzsche explains, is that philosophers do not question the prejudices that are embedded in language and believe that through language they are getting at the essence of things, “they really believed that in language they had knowledge of the world.” (HH 11) Philosophers are therefore misled into believing in a metaphysical true world and language becomes the place *par excellence* where metaphysics operates. Language conditions the philosopher to think metaphysically, for instance through the opposition between object and subject or doer and deed¹. By taking language for granted, philosophers take metaphysical dualisms for granted. To the contrary, Nietzsche argues that we must escape these dualisms, that we must not fall for the seduction of language.

In this essay, I argue that Nietzsche’s metaphor of seduction can be understood as a critique of language and of the metaphysical dualisms embedded in it. However, confronting this metaphor to the metaphor of truth as a woman reveals that Nietzsche himself might have been caught “in the nets of *language*.” Is there a way to escape these nets or are philosophers bound to be trapped in them? I answer this question in three steps. First, I focus on the metaphor of seduction that Nietzsche uses to criticise the metaphysics of language. Second, I explore how Nietzsche’s metaphor of truth as a woman shows that he himself has been seduced by this metaphor and falls back into the metaphysical traps he is trying to overcome. Third, I explore how Hélène Cixous’s use of language in *Angst* offers an alternative to

the seduction of metaphors. Her literary use of language aims at uncovering the metaphysics of language and at offering a poetic alternative.

Nietzsche and the Metaphor of Seduction

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche considers many philosophical ideas to contain a *contradictio in adjecto* in which philosophers believe because of the seduction of words:

There are still harmless self-observers who believe in the existence of “immediate certainties,” such as “I think,” or the “I will” that was Schopenhauer’s superstition: just as if knowledge had been given an object here to seize, stark naked, as a “thing-in-itself,” and no falsification took place from either the side of the subject or the side of the object. But I will say this a hundred times: “immediate certainty,” like “absolute knowledge” and the “thing in itself” contains a *contradictio in adjecto*. For once and for all, we should free ourselves from the seduction of words! (BGE 16)

The analysis of the expression “I think,” Nietzsche argues, reveals that philosophers are being misled by language. Where philosophers see an “immediate certainty” runs in fact a whole process of thought that establishes an agent, an action, a cause, etc. As for the opposition between subject and object, the ideas of agent, action or cause are metaphysical presuppositions rather than matters of fact. To say “I think” cannot be immediate because it presupposes a whole metaphysical framework, namely the metaphysics of the subject.

Nietzsche specifies this idea by arguing that certainty comes from comparing different states of thought and can therefore never be “immediate:”

Enough: this “I think” presupposes that I *compare* my present state with other states that I have seen in myself, in order to determine what it is: and because of this retrospective comparison with other types of “knowing,” this present state has absolutely no “immediate certainty” for me. (BGE 16)

There is no immediate certainty, just as there is no thing-in-itself nor absolute knowledge. These philosophical “certainties” have led philosophers to strange conclusions, especially to believe in the existence of a true world different from the apparent one and to overlook the world of appearances in favour of this metaphysical true world. Because of their focus on certainty, truth, and the metaphysical true world, philosophers have overlooked important aspects of life such as bodily matters or what Nietzsche calls the “nearby things” in opposition to the philosophers’ “important things” in *The Wanderer and his Shadow*.² As Nietzsche argues in a note from 1884, it is the

seductions of language, “*die Verführungen der Sprache*,” (KSA 11:26[300]) that leads philosophers to underestimate bodily things.

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche pursues his investigation of the seduction of language by focusing more specifically on the concepts of force and action, thus revealing how philosophers usually overlook the physical and the bodily.

But there is no such substratum; there is no “being” behind doing, effecting, becoming; “the doer” is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything. The popular mind in fact doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as its effect. Scientists [*Naturforscher*] do no better when they say “force moves,” “force causes,” and the like—all its coolness, its freedom from emotion notwithstanding, our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language [*Verführung der Sprache*] and has not disposed of that little changeling, the “subject” (the atom, for example, is such a changeling, as is the Kantian “thing-in-itself”); no wonder if the submerged, darkly glowering emotions of vengefulness and hatred exploit this belief for their own ends and in fact maintain no belief more ardently than the belief that *the strong man is free* to be weak and the bird of prey to be a lamb—for thus they gain the right to make the bird of prey *accountable* for being a bird of prey. (GM1 13)

In this famous passage, it is not only the philosophers who are seduced and misled by language, but also the popular mind and the scientists (*Naturforscher*). Against the positing of an agent behind a deed—which requires a notion of causality: the agent causes the deed—Nietzsche considers that there is no doer behind the deed. It is because the “fundamental error of reasons are petrified” in language that we consider it necessary to posit such a doer. It is our belief in the notion of causality that brings us to this consideration. But, as Nietzsche argues, this idea is problematic as it suggests that the strong is responsible for being strong as much as “the bird of prey is *accountable* for being a bird of prey.” Language and the fundamental errors of reason embedded in it forces nature to be counter-nature, the strong to be weak.

The idea of seduction also appears in relation to the will to truth. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche argues: “The will to truth that still seduces us into taking so many risks, this famous truthfulness that all philosophers so far have talked about with veneration: what questions this will to truth has already laid before us!” (BGE 1) The will to truth seduces us into taking risks because we are led to believe its certainties. Nietzsche’s philosophy requires taking risk, and more specifically taking a risk regarding the value of truth: “And, believe it or not, it ultimately looks to us as if the problem has never been raised until now, – as if we were the first to ever see it, fix our gaze on it,

risk it. Because this involves risk and perhaps no risk has ever been greater.” (BGE 1) It is a risk because it moves away from certainty and towards the realm of the perhaps. Thus, Nietzsche considers that “philosophers of the dangerous Perhaps” are approaching. These philosophers are opposed to the “fundamental belief of metaphysicians” that is “the *belief in oppositions of values.*” (BGE 2) Against the metaphysical belief in opposition of values, the philosopher of the future considers that they are “merely provisional perspectives” that need to be worked on. Against the dualisms of metaphysics, the philosopher of the future argues for the fluidity of perspectives.

Language seduces the philosopher into believing in “absolute knowledge” and into rejecting bodily things. It is this danger that Nietzsche aims to avoid by offering a different conception of philosophy in which language is no longer considered metaphysically, but as a way to deconstruct metaphysics. It is in this sense that his “new language” is strange: “We do not consider the falsity of a judgment as itself an objection to a judgment; this is perhaps where our new language will sound most foreign.” (BGE 4) This new language is a language of “dangerous perhaps.” Against the dualisms of metaphysical language, Nietzsche suggests using language poetically (in the etymological sense of *poiesis*, making) and this poetic use of language requires metaphors. Seduction is already a metaphor that personifies language, and it is inscribed in a broader metaphorical network.

The Seduction of Metaphor

Der Wahrheit Freier — du? so höhnten sie
 nein! nur ein Dichter!
 ein Thier, ein listiges, raubendes, schleichendes,
 das lügen muss,
 das wissentlich, willentlich lügen muss,
 nach Beute lüstern,
 bunt verlarvt,
 sich selbst zur Larve,
 sich selbst zur Beute
 das — der Wahrheit Freier?...
 Nur Narr! Nur Dichter! (KSA 6.377-378)

The poem “Only Fool! Only Poet” stages the poets’ opponents as declaring them fools. While the poets consider themselves to be “suitsors of truth,” the opponents reply “Only Fool! Only Poet!” In a sense, this poem replays the

Platonic move of banishing poets from the ideal city because they are not telling the truth and thus corrupting the minds of the citizens.³ But what is more interesting in this poem is the fact that the poets consider themselves as “suits of truth,” thus pursuing the metaphorical line of seduction discussed in the previous section. The poets would be, in this context, trying to seduce truth and, to do so, they need to lie willingly. Poets are compared to animals who must lie, bringing the body back in the bodyless philosophical pursuit of truth.

There is an opposition between the poet and the philosopher as both pursuing truth: the former focuses on the body and the senses while the latter has an “ideal” conception of truth. This opposition reflects Plato’s philosophy, but Nietzsche is critical of this picture as he blames Plato for establishing a “true world” behind the world of appearances. By using metaphors and embracing poetry, Nietzsche attempts to overturn Plato’s philosophy, as he describes his philosophy in an early note: “My philosophy is an *inverted Platonism*: the further something is from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better it is. Living in illusion as the goal” (KSA 7:7[156]).

The metaphor of the poet and the philosopher as suits of truth is further developed through Nietzsche’s famous metaphor of truth as a woman. At the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche compares truth as a woman whom philosophers attempt to charm. However, the little success they have had in this enterprise suggest that philosophers are not very good at it. This metaphor has been the subject of many interpretations, especially because of Nietzsche’s misogyny and of his critical approach to truth. However, we can read this metaphor of truth as a woman through the metaphor of seduction to offer a slightly different picture. Ruth Abbey insists on the fact that we must find a middle ground between misogyny and metaphor in approaching Nietzsche’s conception of women: focusing only on misogyny shadows interesting parts of Nietzsche’s reflection while focusing only on metaphor “risk depoliticizing Nietzsche’s works.”⁴ She therefore suggests that the works of the middle period “neither entirely demean women nor exclude them from the higher life.”⁵

In this context, the metaphor of truth as a woman can enlighten some of Nietzsche’s concepts. Kelly Oliver for instance suggests that the woman “destroys the authority of the metaphysic of truth by substituting a multitude of interpretations for the dogmatist’s one, objective, reality.”⁶ The metaphor of truth as a woman therefore moves the theory of truth from a dogmatic one to a perspectival one. For Frances Nesbitt Opper, it is the seduction of truth that brings Nietzsche to consider it a woman: “Truth then enters Nietzsche’s work as Life, whose seductive veil—the veil of maya, of sensation and form, of metaphor, of art—keeps us in love as we work through our difficulties in accepting Life as serpent changeable only, and connected to time and the earth.”⁷ Both Oliver and Opper suggest that Nietzsche’s metaphor of truth as a woman aims at offering an alternative conception of truth that is concerned

with life in its seductive veil. Where the traditional conceptions of truth fail to account for life, fail to charm truth as a woman, this metaphor suggests that we need to focus on the seductive veil.

In other words, as Babette Babich suggests, “To catch the truth of untruth, we need a logic attuned to the fragrance of thought, and deliberately, firmly rooted in metaphors elided as such, taken as true. This would be an aesthetic logic. And only a logic of imaginary truth or symbolic untruth could be supple enough for the confessions of a dogmatist, supposing truth is a woman.”⁸ The metaphor of truth as a woman escapes dogmatism and becomes a way of escaping metaphysics. Against traditional logic, Babich argues that there is an aesthetic logic at play in Nietzsche’s works, and I would argue that we could call it a poetic logic insofar as it involves the creation of interpretations. Metaphors are ways of escaping metaphysics because they escape the dualisms that structure metaphysical language. Poetry becomes a way of escaping traditional philosophy and dogmatism.

This criticism of the metaphysics of language is already at play in Nietzsche’s early unpublished essay *On Truth and Lie* where he considers concepts to be dead metaphors. He suggests that the construction of language moves from the unicity of metaphors to the generality of concepts and that this move is essentially metaphysical. It is through this becoming general, this “equation of non-equal things,” (TL 1) that language becomes metaphysical. In order to move away from this metaphysical conception of language, Nietzsche suggests going back to metaphors, to the liveliness and uniqueness of metaphors. Pursuing Nietzsche’s thought on that matter, Jacques Derrida suggests that concepts are marked by a history of metaphors and that metaphor is therefore central to philosophical discourse: “Our certainty soon vanishes: metaphor seems to involve the usage of philosophical language in its entirety, nothing less than the usage of so-called natural language *in* philosophical discourse, that is, the usage of natural language *as* philosophical language.”⁹ In order to uncover the working of metaphysics in language, we therefore need to understand how the concept of metaphor works within the philosophical text. For Nietzsche, returning to the metaphorical origin of concepts seems to be the solution to the problem of metaphysics.

However, this undermining of metaphysics does not necessarily lead to the end of metaphysics. As Antoine Mériau suggests, while Nietzsche rejects a certain form of metaphysics it does not reject all metaphysics, because metaphysics is a seduction process that can never stop.¹⁰ According to Mériau, Nietzsche rejects a form of reactive metaphysics but accepts an active one: “Reactive seduction separates the true world from the apparent one and makes us live in the false world. Active seduction can also separate the world in two, but it makes us live in the superior world, in the true world.”¹¹ This interpretation however misses an important point in Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics, namely that by abandoning the real world the world of appearances is also abolished. It is the whole dualism that

Nietzsche aims to overcome and Mérieau's distinction between active and reactive seductions remains trapped in this dualism.

In trying to escape the metaphysics and seduction of language, Nietzsche uses metaphors. But the metaphor of truth as a woman, rather than escaping metaphysics, reinstates and reinforces a dualism at a different level. The opposition between man and woman remains effective, such as the opposition between active and passive as Mérieau suggests. In keeping these oppositions alive, Nietzsche's metaphor of truth as a woman falls back into the traps and seduction of language. In other words, Nietzsche is being seduced by language and by the efficacy of metaphor. His use of the metaphor of truth as a woman brings him back to the metaphysics he is trying to escape.

The difficulty lies in the fact that in order to talk about the metaphysics of language, we must use language. As we must use language to express our thought, the danger and seduction of language is always already there. In discussing Paul de Man's reading of Nietzsche, Andrea Mirabile considers that this seduction of language is the seduction of rhetoric: "De Man's seduction of rhetoric is, after all, the seduction of the illusory natural coincidence between word and thing: metaphors, such as 'state,' 'man,' or 'love,' and literary artifices, such as euphonies and evocative images, draw readers aside (in Latin *seducere* means to draw aside) from the vertiginous, almost unbearable negative truth of the noncoincidence of language and reality."¹² What is at play is no longer the adequation between the real world and the world of appearances, but the adequation between word and world. The metaphors, rather than helping readers to get closer to the world, seduces them and draws them aside from the noncoincidence of language and reality. Without this rhetoric, the connection between word and world reveals its artificial character.

For Sarah Kofman however, Nietzsche's metaphor of truth as a woman also brings a positive dimension, through another image, that of women's small ears:

Women's small ear is this third ear mentioned by Nietzsche, the artistic ear which, positioning itself beyond metaphysical oppositions such as truth and falsehood, good and evil, depth and surface, clarity and obscurity, is capable of hearing (understanding) an incredible (unheard) language incommensurable with vulgar language and its logic or metaphysical presuppositions, an ear which is sufficiently noble to discern the pathos of distance, the difference which separates Heraclitus's ear from that of the metaphysicians who later appropriated that language in a virile manner in order to obscure it and reduce it to vulgar reason by way of illuminating it.¹³

For Kofman, women's small ear is a way to escape metaphysics. Philosophers need to explore this small ear in order to escape the traps of metaphysics. Kofman argues that Heraclitus's use of language (that leads Aristotle to

consider him obscure) is closer to the woman's small ear than to the metaphysician's ear. This artistic small ear requires going back to metaphors and away from the generality of concepts.

Philosophers are usually seduced by the metaphysics of language and fall into the trap of believing in the generality of concepts. Nietzsche, and Derrida after him, suggests that going back to metaphors is the best way to avoid falling into this trap. However, metaphors are also a tool of language, that cannot be extracted from the metaphysical language in which they are used. In a way, metaphors also participate in this seduction of language and the risk is to take metaphors as a new generality. The problem is not necessarily with language itself, but with the way we relate to language. The same goes for truth, it is because we consider truth to be the most valuable and essential part of life that we fall for it. The metaphor of truth as a woman therefore suggests that the problem lies not in women or men, but in the way the opposition of values is embedded in language. With this metaphor, Nietzsche perpetuates the metaphysical dualism that opposes man and woman, and thus reiterates against his will the dualisms that are related to it.

The question therefore remains, can we escape the metaphysics of language, can we escape the charm of truth, can we escape the seduction of life? In a sense, we cannot. But we can be aware of that by working with metaphors in order to affect language in new and different ways. We must however remain cautious as these metaphors can seduce us into going too far. There is a seduction of metaphors that lead poets and philosophers to fall into traps of language, where language becomes an autoreferential playground. The danger of metaphor is the danger of rhetoric as the effects of speech are not totally controllable. Can we use metaphor to escape dualisms without falling back into them?

Overcoming Dualisms

Hélène Cixous offers an interesting insight on this question. In *The Newly Born Woman*, she suggests that the metaphysics of binary oppositions is based on the man/woman dualism:

Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatale, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions are couples. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought—all concepts, codes and values—to a binary system related to “the” couple man/woman?¹⁴

Cixous questions the notion of “couple” that marks the history of metaphysical oppositions. If thought is organised in opposing couples, is the man/woman dualism the most fundamental one? In that case, Cixous further

argues, it seems that undermining this “fundamental couple” is a prerequisite to transforming thought, and she considers bisexuality as a way to overcome the man/woman couple. As Alan Schrift argues: “When Nietzsche addresses issues of gender, his thinking remains constrained within the human, all-too-human prejudices which he, as a transvaluer of values, should be faulted for not having gone beyond. By setting Nietzsche’s discussion of plenitude and generosity together with Cixous’s discussion of feminine libidinal economies and the giving of gifts, the affinities between their respective accounts emerge in a way that shows how Nietzsche might have gone beyond his misogynistic prejudices.”¹⁵ According to Schrift, Cixous offers an alternative to Nietzsche’s misogyny and a way to go beyond the prejudices of gender. According to Cixous, the hierarchy that is established within these oppositions is related to the activity/passivity opposition: “Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity.”¹⁶

This opposition between active and passive brings us back to Nietzsche’s philosophy, and reveals once again that him too, has been trapped by the seduction of metaphysics. Mérieau’s opposition between a good (active) metaphysics and a bad (passive) one does not help him out, to the contrary as it further perpetuates the dualistic logic of metaphysical thinking. What is the way out of this trap? Can we even get out while using language or is language a tool that is already necessarily metaphysical? Cixous shows that there is a way out of this metaphysical language, and it is by using language in a creative way. That is not only by using metaphors that are, as we have seen, one of the traps that language uses to seduce us, but by deconstructing the logic of language and thought.

Her book *Angst* is exemplary of such a creative use of language. It explores the fear of loneliness by relating two abandonments: that of the lover and that of the mother. Rather than following a linear narrative plot, this book expresses the inner turmoil of the narrator’s psychic life. In exploring this feeling of loneliness, the narrator moves away from language and back to the experience (from the generality of concepts to the uniqueness metaphor to follow Nietzsche’s idea in TL):

C’était l’époque de la Grande Solitude. J’étais dehors. On ne peut y arriver que seule. On n’y parlait pas de langue ordinaire ; rien ne peut être expliqué. Les choses qui s’y passaient ne se disaient pas, je les connaissais, je les exécutais. Elles se décidaient dans notre corps. Je voyais tout. Sous l’angle de l’éternité. Toutes les choses étaient décisives. Les décisions s’accomplissaient dans notre chair, sans un mot.

[It was the time of the Great Loneliness. I was outside. You can only get there on your own. No ordinary language was spoken; nothing can be explained. The things that happened were not expressed in words; I knew them; I carried them out. They were decided in our bodies. I saw

everything. From the point of view of eternity. Everything was crucial. Decisions were made in our flesh, without a word.]¹⁷

There is no ordinary language; there is no generality; there is no way to express what is felt. There is only the feeling of the flesh that is decisive, without a word, without language. In this context of going back to the flesh, metaphors are of no help: “Si seulement c’était de la métaphore! Mais ce qui s’écoule du corps, ce n’est pas seulement de l’urine et des fèces, ce sont tous les organes de l’amour.” [“If only this were a metaphor! But it’s not just urine and faeces running out of the body, but all the organs of love.”]¹⁸ The body, the flesh, is something that is experienced and is not metaphorical. The metaphor is already a move away from the experience of the flesh and towards the generality of language.

In this sense, metaphors are a trap, a web of language that attempts to entrap the subject:

Les phrases noires se détournent de quelque chose qui devait être immonde. Il ne les disait pas. Il les avançait. Elles ne serpentaient pas vers moi. Elle faux fuyaient. « Que vous soyiez arrivée au moment voulu par un autre ! » Leur puissance, leur finesse de mouches, j’étais piquée. Leurée. Leurs pattes d’araignée. Leur toile de métaphores, d’allusions étouffées. J’étais requise, harcelée, suppliée. Accusée de lenteur, de prudence. Entolée dans une guerre. Sans l’ennemi désigné. Je ne te cherchais pas. Personne ne me retenait. Il attendait que je me confonde avec lui dans une querelle dont j’ignorais l’origine. Un combat reprenait. C’était ma faute. Quand je vous rencontre à l’avant-dernier jour. Des plaintes étaient déposées. Je me débattais dans la toile.

[The black words were avoiding something that must have been foul. He didn’t ‘say’ them. He ‘put them forward’. They didn’t win their way towards me. They hedged. ‘You came at the right time for another!’ Their power, craftiness—I was stung. Taken in. Their spidery legs. Their web of metaphors, smothered innuendos. I was summoned, pressed, beseeched. Accused of being slow, cautious. Recruited for a war. Without knowing the enemy. I didn’t come looking for you. No one was holding me back. He was expecting me to join him in a quarrel whose origin I didn’t know. A battle was beginning all over again. It was my fault. When I meet you on the day before the last. Complaints had been lodged. I was struggling in the web.]¹⁹

The narrator is trapped in the sentences and the metaphors of the other, her past lover (but also a certain idea of language). The narrator is “struggling in the web” of metaphors, like Nietzsche’s philosophers “wriggle in the nets of language,” and Cixous uses the spider metaphor to express the feeling of being entrapped. Metaphors are dangerous in the sense that they bring back to language, but they are also a way of escaping the trap, of expressing what cannot be expressed.

In contrast to the narrator's struggle—a contrast that is expressed in the opposition between “phrases noires” and “phrases blanches”—the language of the other is affirmative. “Ses phrases blanches me sidéraient. On aurait dit qu’elles parlaient pour moi.” [“His transparent sentences staggered me. You would have thought he was speaking for me.”]²⁰ His sentences speak for her, thus denying her subjectivity by entrapping it in the “objectivity” of language. But this language is no more objective than hers, it is just more affirmative:

Il me parlait dans sa langue, sans hésiter. Comme s’il avait eu l’assurance que je la comprendrais ; que je devais l’entendre. Ce n’était pas la mienne. C’était une langue étrange, dans laquelle les pronoms me désignaient à tout bout de champ, sans merci. Une langue d’affirmation. Je ne pouvais pas dire non. Et pas de place dans sa voix pour ce qui aurait fait question. C’était une voix qui m’arrêta, qui m’effrayait ; me donnait envie de fuir, m’en empêchait, me rivait de mon gré au lit que je ne pouvais plus quitter, dans lequel je me terrais, je m’enfonçais, je rapetissais, je me sentais rajeunir et oublier.

[He talked to me without hesitation in his own language. As if he were sure that I would understand it; that I had to hear it. It was a strange language whose pronouns came straight for me at every turn, pitilessly. A positive language. I couldn't say no. And he left no place in his voice for doubt. It was a voice that checked me, frightened me; made me want to run away, kept me willingly riveted to the bed which I couldn't leave, where I had gone to ground; buried myself; shrunk, felt myself getting younger and forgetting.]²¹

There is no space for doubt in the language of the other, there is no space for the narrator to object or escape. The language is so affirmative that it cannot be contested. The language oppresses the narrator and forces her to bury herself in doubt. In the same way, the language of metaphysics represses the language of experience.

More than doubt, the positive language of the other brings the narrator to the feeling of angst, of anguish. This existential feeling that nothing makes sense anymore, that there is no escape from language, no escape from the web of metaphors. This angst is what prevents the narrator from speaking: “Tu veux parler de l’angoisse qui te coupe la parole.” [“You want to talk about the anguish that leaves you speechless.”]²² However, it is also in speech that angst comes to existence. The rupture (in the sense of the break-up but also in a broader sense of rupture) operates in language, and more specifically in writing:

Trois jours sans sens, les mots crèvent les bêtes se fuient, le chevaux deviennent fous et s’entredévorent. Plus de phrases. Personne ne peut plus jurer. Sauf de rien. La rupture était écrite : dans le papier, avant que les mots s’y laissent tomber. Tu penses cela, ce n’est pas une consolation. Rien n’est accidentel. Pas d’erreur.

[Three senseless days, words burst apart, beasts flee from each other, horses go mad and devour each other. No more phrases. No one can be sure any more—except that he's not sure of anything. The split was written in the paper, before the words fell onto it. That's no consolation. Nothing happens by chance. There is no mistake.]²³

The rupture is written on paper and thus acquires the force of positive language. The consequence is that nothing makes sense anymore, 'three days without meaning.'

Speech generates angst that in turn generates a loss of meaning. But it is also through speech that meaning can be gained back, by playing with words, by making sense of these words. One example is the play on meaning (*sens*) and blood (*sang*). These words sound similar but have a different meaning: "J'avais perdu trop de sens. Je voyais trouble." ["I had lost too much sense. Things were confused."]²⁴ The narrator lost too much meaning, but also too much blood. Her vision is blurred by the lack of blood and meaning, both on a physical and on a linguistic level. "Ton sens ne fait qu'un tour. Je vois tout !" ["In a flash you see. I see everything."]²⁵ The tables are turned here as the other becomes angry while the narrator understands and sees everything.

This relation between meaning and blood reminds of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which Zarathustra says: "Of all that is written, I love only that which one writes with one's own blood. Write with blood, and you will discover that blood is spirit." (Z, "On Reading and Writing") Blood is spirit for Zarathustra, blood is meaning for Cixous. And Nietzsche further adds: "Whoever writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read, but rather to be learned by heart." (Z, "On Reading and Writing") Writing in blood (and therefore reading blood) is not a matter of sole intellectual activity but is a bodily experience. Kelly Meyer connects Nietzsche and Cixous around their emphasis on the primacy of the body: "In their texts, both Nietzsche and Cixous emphasize the primacy of the body and the merely secondary role of consciousness; similarly, both negate the unitary subject who lords it over the body, emphasizing plurality within. But for Nietzsche, recognizing the centrality of the body in our intellectual endeavors and the manifold, contradictory nature of consciousness is not part of any putative 'écriture féminine'; it is a masculine insight par excellence. Indeed, those who assert the contrary—to seek to develop and maintain 'objective', metaphysical systems based on the distinction between mind and body—amount to inadequate men."²⁶ In this bodily experience the question of meaning and blood brings up the question of truth. A factual truth against a physical or emotional truth:

Cette scène est si violente qu'après-coup personne n'a la force de la raconter. Ni le cœur, ni la langue. Et personne n'a la vérité. Car pendant la scène, le vrai s'est retourné en faux, le doute s'est installé dans la

certitude comme s'ils avaient été conçus l'un pour l'autre, il pouvait faire nuit en plein jour et personne pour protester.

[This is such a brutal scene that afterwards no one has the strength, nor the heart, nor the tongue, to tell it. And no one knows the truth. Because during this scene what was true has become false; doubt has made itself at home with certainty as if they were made for each other—you could say night was day and no one would argue.]²⁷

Once again, no one has the heart nor the language to tell the original scene of abandonment. Because the scene disrupts the idea of truth, casts doubts on its certainty. Doubt and certainty are linked together and cannot be separated. The only truth resides in the personal experience; it is an existential truth:

Tout reste vrai. Illusions, projections, agonies, poumons blessés, arrêts du cœur ; sécrétions de la chair et de l'éloignement. Tout faux ? Il est vrai que seules les vérités, sans événement, les croyances, sont absolument, personnellement vraies : l'amour, la vie, ce qui n'arrive pas, ce qui est, ce qui ne se passe pas ; ce qu'on ne peut pas se raconter ; la mort. Tout le reste est une fiction.

[All is true. Illusions, projections, death-struggle, wounded lungs, heart failure; secretions of the flesh and of distance. All false? It's true that only truths, beliefs when nothing happens, are absolutely personally true: love, life, what doesn't come, what is, what doesn't happen, what you can't tell yourself; death. All the rest is lies.]²⁸

What is absolutely true are the most personal things. The rest is a fiction. A linguistic construction that entraps us into believing things. What is primordial is what we feel, what cannot be said but only experienced. As soon as we enter the realm of language, we fall into a world of fiction.

Conclusion

Language is full of traps that guide and restrain our ways of thinking. Language seduces us into believing in the categories of thought. Nietzsche uses this metaphor of seduction to explain the force of metaphysical language. But he himself is seduced by language and the metaphor of truth as a woman, rather than overcoming dualisms, further enforces them. Nietzsche is seduced by the metaphor that has an undeniable stylistic and performative force, but he does not realise that behind this force lies the seduction of metaphysics. To overcome these dualisms, we need to move away from language and back to the experience. However, such an experience cannot be shared unless translated in language. This moment of translation is when the creative powers of language need to be used at their maximal capacity. Cixous offers a way of escaping these dualisms by reconsidering how meaning and truth

work. In this overcoming of dualisms, truth and meaning are moved from the realm of objective certainty to the realm of personal subjective experience.

List of abbreviations for Nietzsche's works

KSA: *Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter and DTV, 1999)

HH: *Human, All Too Human I*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

WS: *The Wanderer and his Shadow*, in *Human*, in *All Too Human II*, trans. Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013): 145-294.

BGE: *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marion Faber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)

GM: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Z: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

TL: *On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense*, in *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 253-264.

¹ "Objekt und Subjekt – fehlerhafter Gegensatz – kein Ausgangspunkt für das Denken! Wir lassen uns durch die Sprache verführen." (KSA9:10[D67])

² "Conversely, the high estimation for the 'most important things' is almost never wholly genuine: the priests and metaphysicians have admittedly gotten us completely accustomed to a hypocritically exaggerated *use of language* in these areas, and yet not changed the tune of our feeling that these most important things are not to be taken to be as important as those disdained nearby things." (WS 5)

³ The poem "Only Fool! Only Poet!" epitomizes many of Nietzsche's thought and various interpretations have arisen. I have argued elsewhere that this poem—and more broadly Nietzsche's *Dionysus-Dithyrambs*—offers an inverted Platonism (Philip Mills, "Ma philosophie est un platonisme inverse": une lecture de *Rien qu'un fou, rien qu'un poète!* comme réévaluation des rapports entre philosophie, vérité, et poésie", in Céline Denat and Patrick Wotling, eds., *Nietzsche. Les textes de 1888* (Reims: Épure, 2020), 159-167). Among other interpreters, Christina Kast suggests that this poem reveals Nietzsche's attempt to ground philosophy in poetry and Nathalie Schulte connects it to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to show the complex relation between truth and lie. (Katharina Grätz et al., eds., *Nietzsche als Dichter: Lyrik - Poetologie - Rezeption* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 377-99; Grätz et al., 273-95.)

- ⁴ Ruth Abbey, 'Beyond Misogyny and Metaphor: Women in Nietzsche's Middle Period', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34, no. 2 (1996): 234.
- ⁵ Abbey, 235.
- ⁶ Kelly A. Oliver, 'Woman as Truth in Nietzsche's Writing', *Social Theory and Practice* 10, no. 2 (1984): 197.
- ⁷ Frances Nesbitt Opper, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2005), 187.
- ⁸ Babette E. Babich, 'The Metaphor of Woman as Truth in Nietzsche: The Dogmatist's Reverse Logic or Rückschluß', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 12 (1996): 35-36.
- ⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 209.
- ¹⁰ Antoine Mérieau, 'Nietzsche: La métaphysique de la séduction', *Philosophique*, no. 16 (2013): 160.
- ¹¹ Mérieau, 153-54. My translation: "La séduction réactive sépare le monde vrai du monde apparent, mais nous fait vivre dans le faux monde. La séduction active peut aussi séparer le monde en deux, mais elle nous fait vivre dans le monde supérieur, dans le monde vrai."
- ¹² Andrea Mirabile, 'Rhetoric of Seduction and Seduction of Rhetoric in Paul de Man's Allegories of Reading', *Enthymema*, no. 2 (2010): 19.
- ¹³ Sarah Kofman, 'Nietzsche and the Obscurity of Heraclitus', trans. Françoise Lionnet-McCumber, *Diacritics* 17, no. 3 (1987): 48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464834>.
- ¹⁴ Susan Sellers, ed., *The Hélène Cixous Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 38.
- ¹⁵ Alan D. Schrift, 'Logics of the Gift in Cixous and Nietzsche: Can We Still Be Generous?', *Angelaki* 6, no. 2 (2001): 119.
- ¹⁶ Sellers, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, 38.
- ¹⁷ Hélène Cixous, *Angst*. (Paris: Des femmes, 1977), 243. English translation by Jo Levy, Hélène Cixous, *Angst*, trans. Jo Levy (London: Calder, 1985), 190.
- ¹⁸ Cixous, *Angst*, 14. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 11.
- ¹⁹ Cixous, *Angst*, 163. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 127.
- ²⁰ Cixous, *Angst*, 161. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 125.
- ²¹ Cixous, *Angst*, 155. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 121.
- ²² Cixous, *Angst*, 32. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 25.
- ²³ Cixous, *Angst*, 58. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 46.
- ²⁴ Cixous, *Angst*, 35. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 28.
- ²⁵ Cixous, *Angst*, 46. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 37.
- ²⁶ Ursula Pasero and Friederike Braun, eds., *Wahrnehmung und Herstellung von Geschlecht* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 1999), 173.
- ²⁷ Cixous, *Angst*, 66. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 52-53.
- ²⁸ Cixous, *Angst*, 214-15. English translation by Jo Levy, Cixous, *Angst*, 167.