

Yu Wu

Abyss or Khora:

The Sea, Eternal Recurrence and Zarathustra's Hospitality

ABSTRACT: *Since Plato, western philosophy has had an uneasy relationship with the sea. The sea has always acted as the unspoken that threatens to break up the laborious definitions attained by philosophical achievements. Of all the thinkers who grapple with the maritime latency of philosophy and the openness inherent to thinking, Nietzsche is perhaps the most outspoken about the force of the sea for the birth of a new philosophy. Throughout his works, Nietzsche has consistently commended: "Aboard the ships, ye philosophers!" Nowhere has Nietzsche pursued the philosophical potency of the maritime so forcefully as in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this essay, I aim to show how the sea is pivotal to the thinking of eternal recurrence and how Zarathustra comes to embody the maritime and becomes a khoratic site of hospitality and transfiguration – for the birth of new historical values and for the condition of possibility of the value of values.*

KEYWORDS: *Sea, Abyss, Khora, Nietzsche*

Introduction

Beginning with Plato, western philosophy has had an uneasy and yet entrenched relationship with the sea. The sea has always acted as the unspoken – indeed sometimes even the unspeakable – that threatens to break up the laborious definitions and certainties attained by philosophical achievements. Plato takes care not to mention the sea in his building of the beautiful city during the decline and fall of the Athenian maritime empire. Descartes proposes method and certainties as antidote to the seasickness and topsy-turviness of perceived beings. Kant, the unwilling mariner, urges reason to legislate for itself and keep to the island of truth, rather than risk shipwrecking on the sea of metaphors ("illusions"). Of all the thinkers who grapple with the maritime latency of philosophy and the maritime openness inherent to thinking, Nietzsche is perhaps the most outspoken about the subterranean force of the sea for the possible birth of a new philosophy. In the *Gay Science*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, as well as his notebooks, Nietzsche has consistently commended: "Aboard the ships, ye philosophers!" But nowhere has Nietzsche pursued the symbolism and the philosophical potency of the maritime so comprehensively, beautifully and forcefully as in his self-claimed tragedy, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this essay, I aim to show how the sea is pivotal to the thinking

of eternal recurrence, “the most abyssal thought”, and how Zarathustra comes to embody the maritime and becomes a khoratic site of hospitality and transfiguration – not only for the birth of new historical values, but for the condition of possibility of the value of values.

1. Beyond the Mountain-Nietzsche & the Naive Sense of the Sea as Openness

Popular reception of Nietzsche has viewed him as more of a “mountain thinker” because of the logic of overcoming, sublimation and the doctrine of the will to power ascribed to Nietzsche. Even when Nietzsche’s maritime tendency was heeded and analyzed by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger in his magisterial study, *Nietzsche*, emphasis has been put on the openness of the sea as an unknown territory of knowing and inquiry, on the daring of the seafarers as a model for the new generation of modern thinkers, and on the ethos of discovery and expedition as the mood for thinking the “most difficult thought” of eternal recurrence. Admittedly, we cannot overstate the importance of the mountain imagery for Nietzsche’s thought, especially when it comes to comprehend Nietzschean categories like overcoming, sublimation and the more generic concept of the will to power. Neither can we deny the dimension of ontological openness which characterizes the sea, nor the attitude of courage and adventure (in that original sense of arriving and being about to happen) encouraged by the activity of seafaring. Such openness and daring are powerfully analyzed by Heidegger to provide the proper setting and company for Zarathustra to venture into thinking the thought of eternal recurrence. Nonetheless, I would like to draw attention to a common grammar of transcendence and sublation that undergirds both the mountain Nietzsche of overcoming and will to power and the maritime Nietzsche of openness and daring. Such commonality is of course no coincidence, since what is at stake is precisely to de-sever and to connect the mountain and the sea in Nietzsche’s thinking as belonging to the same philosophical topography of transforming the historical nihilism of 19th century Europe – a task Nietzsche set himself and in the figure of his hero and better alter-ego, Zarathustra. In other words, Nietzsche cannot be a mountain thinker without being a maritime thinker, and vice versa. The sea, however, exposes what is wanting in the mountain image of thought and seeks to supplement it.

What is philosophically more important, and also less accessible to the customary metaphysical way of thinking, is another dimension of the maritime in Nietzsche that interrupts and undoes the grammar of transcendence and sublation which drives both the mountain image and that of the “naive”¹ image of the sea as openness and daring. According to this other (and othering) dimension, the sea is not just unknown waters to be explored and conquered, but also the primordial abyss and a historical burial ground. It is not just a site of openness and daring

1 Here “naive” is employed in the Husserlian sense of being immediate in the lifeworld and pre-reflective. It is not intended in any pejorative or patronizing sense.

where the hero, like western civilization's most famous trickster Odysseus, is bent upon tricking the devil and tempting the tempter. The sea is also a site of necessary sinking [*Untergang*], historical deaths and the impossibility of human action. It is monstrous, exteriorizing, exceeding and destroying all human scales. The sea is not just the future where new land may be discovered and new values fashioned. It is also the past and has inscribed within it the eternity of all pasts which no human will can redeem or alter. The sea is not just history as Hegel described it in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* – the medium for the movement of spirit, but also an archive of traces in the perturbed mind of history where ghosts haunt and refuse to be exorcized. The sea is not unchanging and there, but can also be receding or rising, disappearing or inundating. The sea is not just for local or even global discoveries, political or philosophical. It can also be the diluvial which annihilates, purges and makes room for new beginnings, political, philosophical and transhistorical. I would like to argue that it is this other dimension of the sea that makes Nietzsche the maritime thinker he is, and it is to bring forth, enact and transfigure this other dimension of the sea that Nietzsche labored the thought of eternal recurrence. This other sea is the carrier and catalyst for Zarathustra the tragic hero, who in the course of the book becomes the carrier for this other sea, descends into its depth and summons it forth.

2. The Wanderer Unripe for His Fruits

To comprehend the structural and philosophical complementarity of the mountain-image and the sea-image, and to pinpoint the *topos* where the sea alters and explodes the mountain logic, there is no better point of beginning for us than from the middle – the point of transition and peak (understood in a literal as well as figurative sense) of the philosophical narrative of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There, the mountain and sea imagery conjoined. In “The Wanderer”, the opening chapter of the third part, Nietzsche made Zarathustra climb to the mountain ridge at midnight in order to descend to the other shore where he could embark and join the other seafarers. This is also the chapter that immediately precedes the famous chapter of “On the Vision and the Riddle” in Heidegger’s influential analysis, though it is seldom analyzed for its own philosophical merit. We are prepared for this strategic point by an inner event which immediately preceded the hike. At the end of Part Two, in the chapter “The stillest Hour”, which is reputed to have inspired much of Freud’s thinking, Zarathustra was driven into solitude by his own fearsome inner voice, which commanded: “Oh Zarathustra, your fruits are ripe for you, but you are not ripe for your fruits [*Früchte*]!”² The ordeal of mountain-climbing and *Untergang*, of anabasis and katabasis in “The Wanderer” is therefore undertaken for the process of ripening, but for what fruits? And why fruits? Two sets of symbolisms are at work here, one vegetal, the other maternal (as in the biblical sense of “be fruitful

2 Nietzsche 2008, 128.

and multiply”). On the vegetal side, the fruit participates in the symbolism of the wine god Dionysus in the tragedy of Zarathustra and harkens also to the “nameless vintner” who in time is to sacrifice Zarathustra’s overflowing, overripe soul in “The Great Yearning”. The fruits refer to the grapes which, when ripened, shall be cut from the vine and pressed into wine – the latter being a biblical sacrament as well as the nectar in the feast of Dionysus. What, then, do the wine-making grapes have to do with the wine-dark sea in “The Wanderer”?

This leads us to the second set of symbolism of fruits – “fruits” in a maternal and procreative sense. Unmistakable and more generic is the sense of progeny and embryo in the German word *Früchte*. Quite simply put, fruit means child (for the mother) and work (for the creator). The imperative that Zarathustra received from “The stillest Hour” and the task that he sets out to accomplish in “The Wanderer” chapter is hence not only to be the matrix to nurture and ripen the fruits, the fetus, the work, the child, but also to be the mother to deliver and give birth to them. Sandwiched between the two influential chapters said to have inspired Freud and Heidegger, “The Wanderer” actually contains and unleashes the seeds of time from within its narrative fold. It is an inceptual chapter that, besides a few brush strokes by Nietzsche that paint for us expressionistically the portrait of the solitary wanderer at the peak facing the dark waters, comprises entirely of Zarathustra’s inner dialogue. And I say dialogue, not a monologue. For unlike prince Hamlet’s soliloquy, it is a self-dialogue where one converses with oneself and addresses oneself with the second person *du*. Hannah Arendt would call such self-conversation the silent and inner dialogue that is thinking. The twoness of the thinking subject in both Nietzsche and Arendt is telling. So is the importance of the theme of natality for both thinkers, though for Nietzsche it is not conceptualized as such, but rises out of an experience of thinking about death. Before the self is to give birth to new beginnings and possibilities, it splits into two. Paradoxically, such twoness heralds a project of psychic integration, but one that is quite far from the Platonic version of hierarchy, order and ruling reason. By his last hike, Zarathustra is striving to command to the surface of consciousness (the self that is unripe) what lies underneath (the fruits that are ripe). But contrary to the mountain logic, Zarathustra’s project of psychic integration has to be achieved via a process of psychic disintegration, de-sublimation and self-annihilation. Life comprehended as will to power here needs to mature and ripen into a thinking about death as eternal recurrence. The latter seeks to incarnate a logic of death as natality, which combines and transcends both the Christian nativity and resurrection, as well as the eternal regeneration of the dismembered wine-god Dionysus. For the sake of the wine-fruits, for the sake also of the supreme self-love that Nietzsche diagnosed to lie behind all great work, total devotion and creator’s selflessness, the mountain-image and sea-image here meet and conjoin: “I stand now before my last summit and before that which has been saved up for me for the longest time... Summit and abyss – they are now joined in one!”³

3 Nietzsche 2008, 131.

3. Untergang, Schicksal und See

The convergence of the mountain- and sea-images, the highest and the lowest, the most solid and most fluid, marks the transposition of Zarathustra the mountain climber and daring seafarer toward becoming Zarathustra the visitor to the Underworld. He must dedicate himself over to such descent in order to think and embody the “heaviest” thought of eternal recurrence. The sea is to be the field and medium of such a wandering and errant movement, which, however, turns chance into necessity, accidents into destiny, and which gathers into the heart of the philosophical narrative, analogical to Odysseus’ visit to the Underworld in Book X of the *Odyssey*, a descent into and courtship of the sea as “*du dunkles Ungeheuer*” [you dark monster]⁴. The self-offering and loss of self requisite of this peregrination and ordeal recall the fate of Empedocles, who throws himself down into the crater. The submission to gravity and incapacitation of the will in the act of falling make the downward plunge inimical to the diurnal and Apollinian world of will to power. In an important sense, Zarathustra too was about to “throw” himself down in his incipient katabasis and *Untergang* in accordance with the nocturnal logic of self-destruction, regeneration and eternal recurrence. What sets Zarathustra apart from Empedocles is the caveat that Zarathustra’s resolved “throw” and “fall” take the form of a patient climb-down [*hinab steigen*]. The self-loss must be achieved through determined movements where with every step Nietzsche’s tragic hero approaches the ocean of suffering, unredeemable past and the eternal recurrence of all small humans. The summit whence the will to power has achieved its highest and noblest deeds must give way to its own opposite, the gaping void and abyss of the ocean where the will has no place, but has to learn to will the will-less rather than renounce itself altogether in a quick nihilism: “I recognize my lot, he said at last, with sorrow. Well then! I am ready. Just now my ultimate solitude began. Oh this black sad sea beneath me! Oh this pregnant nocturnal moroseness. Oh destiny and sea – now I must descend to you!” The temporality of the descent is a patient and painstaking undoing, even as such descent is a throw and a fall in an almost Heideggerian sense. Notice here the change of addressee of the pronoun *du*. No longer Zarathustra himself or a part thereof, which awaits persuasion and resolution, but the nocturnal, pregnant sea of suffering is the what or the who being addressed here. Zarathustra was no longer speaking to his own self as an other, but addressing the other (the sea) as Self, where such Self becomes a regulative ideal and image of tragic incorporation and inpsychation. As mourning becomes Zarathustra, his destiny becomes the sea.

What does the equation of destiny and sea at this critical juncture and midpoint of the book tell us? By announcing such equation, does Nietzsche not explicitly associate this other, dark, uncanny, monstrous and pregnant sea-image with the most difficult thought of eternal recurrence, which has been Zarathustra’s vocation to think and embody, ever after the bankruptcy of the

4 Nietzsche 1993, 195.

doctrine of the *Übermensch* staged already at the close of the Prologue? Once the limitedness and tenuity of the teaching of the *Übermensch* is exposed and acknowledged in full (“upon clouds we place our manikins and call them gods and overhumans”⁵), the naive sense of the ocean as openness and daring undergoes a reflection and deepening. The midnight thought of eternal recurrence calls for and is accompanied by a reflective, redoubled sense of the sea. This nocturnal sea is a space of suffering and nihilism, and it is the “destiny” [*Schicksal*] of Nietzsche’s tragic hero to make it emerge as a space where nihilism may be affirmed, transformed and surmounted. The nocturnal, pregnant sea is the watery graveyard of the undead, the miscarried, the ill-formed, the incorrigible, and it is the task of Zarathustra to turn it into the amniotic fluid of the *Thalassa*⁶, the teeming uterus before the historical birth of values, pre-natal and life-giving. Here comes the moment of tragic recognition: Zarathustra has finally attained the self-knowledge which precipitated him into the resolution that “I must first descend deeper than I have ever done before... deeper into pain than I have ever descended, even into its blackest flood!”⁷ The notion of the sea of suffering is a Buddhist thought, which Nietzsche takes from his youthful infatuation with Arthur Schopenhauer, and with which he keeps grappling throughout his creative years. We read about this symbolism of the sea as suffering already in his early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, where the self sits in the boat afloat on the sea of suffering, a *principium individuationis* impervious to and stoic against the inclement elements. The principle of individuation is the Apollinian drive toward form amidst and against the oceanic encompassing formlessness of pain and suffering. The connection of such a sea of suffering with Arthur Schopenhauer is pursued patiently, almost obsessively in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Apparently Nietzsche was so troubled by what he deemed as the phantoms from his youth that he transferred such bad dreams onto his hero Zarathustra [*das Grablied*], and cast his greatest educator (in terms of influence more primordial even than Wagner), Schopenhauer, here in the figure of the grim Soothsayer [*Warhsager*]. The Soothsayer is the bringer of ill tidings and counsels the Ecclesiastes’ wisdom of *vanitas vanitatum*: “All is nothing, all is vain, there is nothing new under the sun, the small humans too recur eternally”. The Soothsayer is the supreme nay-sayer; as such he is also to be the double, devil and enemy of affirmation, who came to tempt Zarathustra to his “ultimate sin” – pity [*Mitleid*, a suffering-with] – in part four of the book. Here in the beginning of the third part, the nihilistic pessimism of the Soothsayer/Schopenhauer is configured in the nocturnal sea of suffering which knows, as Zarathustra knows yet dares not accept, that

5 Nietzsche 1993, 164.

6 This amniotic reading of the ocean receives a convincing, almost scientific analysis in Sándor Ferenczi’s *Thalassa*. A similar interpretation, though from a more hermeneutic angle, is attempted in David Farrell Krell’s more recent *The Sea: A Philosophical Encounter*. The sense of the sea as mother, of the *mer* as the *mère* is beautifully rendered in Jules Michelet’s poetic meditation, *The Sea*.

7 Nietzsche 2008, 132.

the small humans too eternally recur. Such nihilistic pessimism has yet to be transformed into the affirmative pessimism of the Dionysian, in much the same way as the abyssal sea of suffering is yet to be transformed into the khoratic sea of possibilities and conditions for the birth of new values. The body and soul of Zarathustra are the hinges of such transformation.

How would the “blackest flood” [*schwärzeste Fluth*] of suffering here mentioned by Zarathustra function as the crucible for his thinking and embodying the thought of eternal recurrence? The reference to the diluvial is not merely a rhetorical or literary device, but summons forth, I would like to argue, a biblical world of watery purgation from the *Genesis*, divinely ordained to reset the corrupted and decadent world of humans back to the primordial world of chaos and non-differentiation, beyond or before the division (or naming) of good and evil. The analogy of a quasi-biblical cleansing through the diluvial and the rising of the seawater also occurs in the final book of *Zarathustra*, where the Soothsayer came to announce to Zarathustra the rising of the sea of nihilism toward his mountain top, which threatened to carry him away. And indeed Zarathustra was carried away. He was instantly plunged into the same historical tides of consummate nihilism by the cry of stress from the higher man and rushed down to offer his imminent help in an act of suffering-with, thereby succumbing to his last temptation (i.e. *Mitleid*) and intensified his *Untergang* in a repetition of the descent. The sea serves the function of catharsis here in the shaping of a new tragic which merges and transcends both Athens and Jerusalem. As we’ve labored to show, the diluvial, along with its intricate whorl of philosophical symbols (the sea – eternal recurrence – nihilism – abyss – the abyssal, midnight thought), is employed by Nietzsche as a vehicle of destruction, cleansing and regeneration, with an almost uncanny parallel to the biblical use of the diluvial and the maritime. It is not for nothing that eternal recurrence is repeated referred to as the “deepest thought” by Nietzsche, for in an allegorical manner, Nietzsche the philosophical playwright created a dramatic topography where his tragic hero Zarathustra is to descend into the depths of the sea of suffering in order to bring up the abyssal thought and affirm it to the light of the day, and also to the light of consciousness. The tragic irony consists in the seeming contradiction that the sea of suffering according to the nihilistic pessimism of the Soothsayer/Schopenhauer in effect drains the ocean of meaning, whereas Zarathustra’s descent into and probing of the depth of the sea of suffering restores depth to the drained ocean of meaning. Such vision of the restoration of meaning is the “meaning of the earth” which Nietzsche had formerly designed for the teaching of the Overman to accomplish. Now this will be achieved by the teaching of eternal recurrence. The historical world of devalued values needs to be reverted to the primal chaos, where the Spirit of the creator hovers and moves across the face of the deep, as in the first verses of the Hebrew bible. Zarathustra’s baptism by the “blackest flood”, i.e. his willing submission to thinking the thought of eternal recurrence, likewise would, in a thought experiment, plunge the world back (or forward) to a post-historical, post-catastrophic state more primordial than the nomological demarcation of good and evil. It will be a world where depth is possible, as Nietzsche made Zarathustra the host sing with his guests of higher men

in Book Four: “The world is deep/And deeper than the day had been aware”⁸. To the Soothsayer who had once lamented “Ah, where is there yet a sea in which we can drown”, Zarathustra will have finally shown “a sea in which he can drown”⁹, and by drowning, he will have buried the past and salvaged the future and vested both in the figure of eternity.

4. Sea-Faith, Solar Love, Natality

Unsurprisingly, the paradoxical restoration of such originary depth by the sea of nihilism and suffering explodes the logic of the day and sets in motion an ontological modification of the Apollinian drive of overcoming and sublimation. How do the mountain-image and the sea-image, and in parallel, the day-image and the night-image interact and reconfigure the philosophical topography? How does such topographical – and topological – reconfiguration propel and precipitate eternal recurrence? We know time (past-present-future-eternity) to be the ruling problematic of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but seldom noted is the structuring force of space, spatiality and topological vision for this temporal engine of *Zarathustra* at work toward eternity. In “The Wanderer”, Zarathustra was traversing the night as he did the mountain terrain to reach the sea at dawn. Hence we have at play all the four essential figures of thought: mountain, sea, night, day. At the peak of the mountain, caught in the grip of the painful ecstasy of self-recognition of his own fate, Zarathustra prophesied: “It is from the deepest that the highest must come to its height”¹⁰. Nietzsche gave us a genealogical and archaeological exposition and phylogenetic account of the mountain-sea conversion. To continue the biblical reference of the Flood, wherein Noah’s ark hit upon a mountaintop – a sign that the seawater had subsided, we are here told that the highest mountains come precisely from the sea. Their genealogy from the diluvial is inscribed on the stones and walls of their summits¹¹. To translate such prophetic utterance and figurative saying into philosophical terms, we might say that the greatest achievements of the will and the loftiest sublimation originate from the substratum and abyss of human life, the unthought and the unspeakable. And more importantly, Zarathustra’s utterance of the highest coming to its height out of the deepest is not merely descriptive, but contains an imperative, which collapses into one another genealogy and historicity, past accidents and future destined. It means that the highest of the will’s achievements *must* [*muss*] come from the deepest of the human unconscious, from the radically un-willable. For Zarathustra, it means the one thing that chokes him to death: the small humans recur eternally – the past can never be undone, not even by a better future. Interestingly, it is

8 Nietzsche 2008, 284.

9 Nietzsche 2008, 119.

10 Nietzsche 2008, 119.

11 Nietzsche 2008, 119.

from the mountain top that Zarathustra acknowledged the maritime origin of the mountain-image, and it is at the moment of such an acknowledgment and recognition that his descent toward the sea-image literally began.

Nietzsche's resort to and total reliance upon images and figurations at the most crucial developmental stage of eternal recurrence as a thought is striking. Despite the proclaimed death of God, despite even the consequent death of metaphysics and of logos, language itself harbors – or perhaps itself remains – the sea of possibilities. With unrivaled philosophical intuition, maybe even without himself planning too heavily upon this, Nietzsche has put his last faith in the metaphor of the sea, and in the metaphoricity of the sea. It is this bare sea-faith in materiality and in language that keeps alive the field of meaning generation. When all values and abstractions, gods and idols fail, we are thrown back upon a pre-civilizational world of primal elements. In the constellation and concatenation of the elemental signifiers, the sun is another essential figure in addition to the sea and the mountain, the night and the day. It interacts with all those elemental categories, but most intensely with the sea-image, bridging both the high and the deep, the midday and the midnight. For the sun is that which goes under the sea and rises again. As early as Book Two, in the chapter "Immaculate Perception", Nietzsche contrasted the barren desire of the moon with the creative love of the sun and pronounced: "Loving and going-under: that has rhymed for eternities"¹². Apart from the tragic hero Zarathustra, and the more generic hero of the "*Mensch*", the only – and arguably the most exemplary – subject of *Untergang* is the sun. The sun, as tragic hero, also regulates and liberates the dramatic economy of *Zarathustra* from a restricted economy of life, finitude and mortality to what Derrida would call a general economy – of life enriched by death, of radicalized finitude and of the eternity of the *Augenblick*. Just like the sea is said to be the true hero of Homer's epics, the sun can be seen as the true hero of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and as the elemental avatar of Zarathustra. Its mobility, overabundance and recurring pattern makes the sun the best ontological paradigm for the particular tragic hero of Zarathustra who brings a gift to humankind and needs to become the teacher of eternal recurrence. Just as the eagle and the serpent interweave into a token of eternal recurrence, the sun and the sea also intermingle into an *ur*-image of the *Untergang*, in the allegory of the sun dipping in the sea. The descent is a labor of love.

For all its poetic animism, Nietzsche does cast the interaction of the sun and the sea in an image of love to heuristically drive at the gift-giving, self-offering and sacrificial traits of Zarathustra's hospitality, of which eternal recurrence is the toughest moment. The love of the earth that is solar love inspired Zarathustra toward a poetic outburst: "At the sea she wants to suck and drink its depths up to her heights: now the desire of the sea rises with its thousand breasts. It wants to be kissed and sucked by the sun's thirst; it wants to become air and height and a footpath of light and itself light!"¹³ Observe how this metaphor functions:

¹² Nietzsche 2008, 107.

¹³ Nietzsche 2008, 107.

the sun is cast as the child, the sea as the mother, at whose breast the child sucks and is being suckled. We encounter again the maternal dimension of the sea, this time not as the uterus and amniotic fluid, but as the breasts filled with milk. Like the mother, the sea is not just birth-giving, but nurturing. The solar descent into the sea brings about a union of love such as occurs between the infant and the mother. Both harbor a desire for the other, the one to give and the other to receive. They become one again, after birth, in the act of nursing, in an ecstasy of the mother-child love (as any ordinary human mother who have nursed her child could have attested to). The most famous of such images of love in Christianized west is doubtless the widely painted motif of the Madonna and the child. It is unlikely that the connection to the Madonna-child motif is not unintended in such a chapter as the “Immaculate Perception”, which mocks and subverts the Christian notion “immaculate conception” that deteriorated into a form of ascetic lecherousness of non-touching. In contrast, the solar love is innocent, direct, creative and outpouring. It bears all the qualities Nietzsche attributed to the figure of the child in the third metamorphosis of the spirit. Throughout the text, we can discern a gradually clarified formation of the semantic nexus of child – sun – *Übermensch*. Zarathustra embodies partial traits of all these figures, yet remains a transitional figure himself and a medium of transformation. He is also the agent who stages the union of the sun and the sea and enacts it within his own psychic topography.

The sun rises from the sea and nurses upon the sea. The sea rises toward the sun; the waves are its thousand breasts. Despite the distance such an image of light and love could have from the dark image of impending suffering in “The Wanderer”, what is common to both images is the mutual spatial reconfiguration of the solar *Untergang* and the maritime uprise. Like the sun, the sea is not static. It too is infinitely capable of movement and self-transformation into another element (from water to light). It also gives respite and renewal to the sun, which descends to draw nourishment from the sea at twilight. And the night is the time of nursing, rest and sleep before daybreak. We see a perpetual vacillation and mutual conversion between dyads (day-night, sun-sea, mountain-sea, height-depth). The source of such movement, according to Nietzsche, is eros, or love, which contains an ontological lack even from out of overabundance (i.e. for the lack of a receiver). Indeed the lack that pertains to light makes it yearn for the night, darkness, the ontological paradigm of a receiver and a perfect receptacle. This idea is expounded poignantly in the famous “The Night Song”. Here, like the night, the sea also serves as a receptacle and a receiver. But the receptacle or receiver is by no means a passive one; it is ontologically more primordial than light and dwells beyond the differentiation of passivity and activity. In a biblical setting, it is the deep and the darkness upon which the Spirit hovers before the divine commandment of “let there be light”¹⁴. In the philosophical cosmos of *Zarathustra*, there is no unmoved mover; movement (especially the vertical movement of valuation) is an *erotic*

14 KJV, *Genesis* 1:2.

imperative: "... like the sun I love life and all deep seas... all depths shall rise up – to my heights!"¹⁵ According to Nietzsche's diagnosis, the need to love is internal to the act of all valuations, and human beings, in so far as we live, live upon values. Such is the underlying assumption of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and indeed of all Nietzsche's thinking. What makes the nocturnal sea a sea of suffering is precisely the projected impossibility of new value creation, a necessary consequence of eternal recurrence thought to its logical end. What makes the twilight sea from which the sun rises a sea of love and longing is likewise the possibilization of new values. The sea, kissed and sucked by the rising sun, rises upward to mingle with light and become one with it. These two diametrically opposed images of the sea (as suffering, death, impossibility vs. natality and possibility) are not at odds with each other as it may seem. There can be no more utopian vision than this image in Book Two of the sun rising from the sea and of the sea rising toward the sun. It offers a dialectical image of redemption, and then flits past. The post-metaphysical, bare sea-faith has yet to be tested in Book Three, and the tension within this dialectical image is yet to get resolved into a higher contestation.

5. The Sea as *Ungeheuer* & Zarathustra's Hospitality

As we've seen, one important legacy of this dialectical and utopian image of the sea sucked by the sun is the identity of the lover as mother and mother as lover. They are the two conditions for creation, a realm of activity ontologically sabotaged by the thought of eternal recurrence. To continue to unravel this very problematic and work on the strain at the heart of creation and repetition, in "The Wanderer" we learn that at the peak facing the sea, after his self-resolution to meet his destiny at sea, Zarathustra had grown "weary" [*müde*] and was "fuller of longing than ever before"¹⁶. There he felt pity for the sea, a sleeping monster that tossed and turned on its pillows because of bad dreams. Even as the sea, the *Ungeheuer*, regarded Zarathustra with strange eyes, Zarathustra felt its breath of warmth. The uncanniness and monstrosity of the sea does not place it cold beyond all rapport with the human, or rather it is Zarathustra the lover who found the sea lovable, touchable and companionable. He would like to befriend the *Ungeheuer* of the nocturnal sea, far more than he would the banality of the small humans or the last humans. As Zarathustra resolved to descend into the sea of suffering, he did not brace himself against the sea as an alien element, but regarded the face of the other in an almost Levinasian sense, with care and tenderness. In other words, Zarathustra rendered himself porous and receptive to what had hitherto struck him as belonging to the ultimate other – the nocturnal maritime realm of unredeemable suffering. His willing projection and externalization onto the maritime of his own fears – those bad dreams that repeatedly haunted him during midnights – further

15 Nietzsche 2008, 108.

16 Nietzsche 2008, 133.

blur the boundaries not only of the inner and the other, but also of interiority and exteriority. Hence the fitting designation of the sea as the *Ungeheuer*, the uncanny and monstrous, which points toward the strangeness residing at the heart of Being. The naming of the sea as the *Ungeheuer* also signifies the beginning of the becoming-other and being-stranger of Zarathustra to himself announced through the self-recognition of fate and sea [*Schicksal und See*] by the “The Wanderer” chapter. To think and embody the thought of eternal recurrence is a lesson of hospitality, and Zarathustra has to learn to welcome the strange guest *into* his self and *as* part of his self. To de-territorialize and replace the naive, unreflective sense of self, the kind of Self that is to emerge in this process will be a self in a quasi-Gnostic sense, transcendental and self-transcending, always already exceeding its own self and a Guest in one’s own house¹⁷. The hypothesis that the problem of hospitality lies at the core of eternal recurrence is also attested by Nietzsche’s writing of the entire Book Four with the feast of the higher humans, which came after the closure afforded by the tragic, as an appendix to the consummation of Zarathustra’s marriage with Eternity at the end of Book Three.

As we’ve come to realize, the problematics of hospitality and pity intensified and distilled in Book Four are already germinate in “The Wanderer”. Zarathustra pities the *Ungeheuer* and longs to deliver the ocean from what he takes to be its bad dreams: “Alas, that my hands have sufficient strength! Verily, I would dearly like to redeem you from your evil dreams!”¹⁸ The superiority internal to this structure of pity is not a moral superiority of cruelty at the sight of suffering, but an ontological, neutral sense of superiority (or the “inferiority” resulting from a giver’s lack) peculiar to the lover in relation to the beloved. It operates as a pretext for and symptom of the underlying love and impassioned comportment. Unbeknownst to each other, Zarathustra and the sea share the bad dreams and participate in the same perturbed historical unconscious. Dreams give phenomenological manifestation to the unredeemed; as such they are gateways that provide both guise and access to the thought of eternal recurrence, veiling it and revealing it at the same time. They are capsules of the undeadness of the past, the sound and fury, the grief and rage that cannot rest in peace but are forever restless toward periodic and ever more critical outbursts – without, however, the hope of redemption. The bad dreams that haunt both Zarathustra and the nocturnal sea mean that they are driven by a similar historicity, and “one must still have chaos in one in order to give birth to a dancing star”. Nietzsche emphasized that it is not the height, but the precipice that is terrible. In other words, it is the sight at the peak of the brooding, boiling sea beneath – of unredeemed pasts and presentiments of ill futures – that is terrible. The conversion and unveiling of such terror into love and a willingness to suffer-

17 By inventing the character of Zarathustra, Nietzsche too engaged in an exercise of hospitality. In the “Aftersong” of *Beyond Good and Evil*, he called Zarathustra the “guest of guest” who came to attend the “feast of feast” at midday, when the self splits into two. For a comprehensive analysis of the ontological importance of the two for Nietzsche’s philosophy, see Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*.

18 Nietzsche 2008, 133.

with [*Mitleid*] is the first step of Zarathustra's hospitality toward incorporating eternal recurrence. The sea is called the pregnant; Zarathustra, in his descent into and incorporation of the sea, becomes the doubly pregnant, an abyss enfolded onto itself. The entire Book Three is a lengthy process of his labor and delivery – to become ripe for his fruits, and to give birth to the ripened fruits, to the dancing star. The trope of Zarathustra's marriage with eternity that consummates Book Three pursues this motif of maternity and birth from another inflection. Indeed one may even argue that the figure of eternity is an incarnation of the transformed sea of eternal recurrence, where both figures find their introjection into the theatre of exteriority that is Zarathustra. The sea will have been turned into Zarathustra's bride and the *khora* to bear and give birth to the condition of possibility of new values (put figuratively, the child as *Übermensch* and the *Übermensch* as child).

6. Conclusion

One cannot hope to accomplish in the space of an essay what Nietzsche had labored to achieve in the span of the entire Book Three of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, namely, to enact, in an intricate web of figures and images, Zarathustra's thinking and embodiment of eternal recurrence. But it is my hope that one thing will have been accomplished in the course of our analysis: to show the pivotal position of "The Wanderer" as the hinge of Zarathustra's going-under, and the centrality of the sea in Nietzsche's philosophical topography for the development of such a thought as eternal recurrence. Scholars have noted and applauded the maritime quality of Nietzsche's thinking, and by this most mean the openness and daring of what we had called a naive sense of the sea in Nietzsche. One of the aims of this essay is to have deepened or supplemented this view of an immediate and unreflective sea, even though such a naive sense always already presupposes an active historical nihilism, which in turn can cause the kind of problems that will necessarily subvert the naive sense of the sea. I had aimed to show that what is really at stake for Nietzsche is precisely those ensuing and subversive problems that call for a reflective sense of the sea first as suffering and abyss, and then on an even deeper level, as the *khora* capable of receiving all suffering and transforming them into the *ur-ground* for the birth of new values. In the creation myth of Plato's *Timaeus*, the *khora*, as *triton genos*, the third cause, is what gives sustenance to all forms of life and shakes, shuffles and apportions them onto the world. It is the second beginning when the old dyadic structure of generation fail. The sea, as the cathartic and the diluvial, also promises to usher in a new beginning for the historical world inhabited by Zarathustra through destruction, repetition and regeneration. Its khoratic bearing of all beings and becomings incarnates and enacts the logic of death as natality, which is exactly eternal recurrence seeks to expound. Zarathustra, in his descent into and union with the sea, will have transformed the past, the future, and the historical present from the abyss of time to the khoratic sea of eternity. The sea will be the guest of guest to be welcomed into his house of Self and Being. To be capable of, and to dare such hospitality,

will have made Zarathustra what Nietzsche has tried so hard to make him into: the teacher of eternal recurrence. To welcome such sea-image into our heart, and following Zarathustra, to let the diluvial be destroyer and mother to all our values, makes such hospitality fundamentally a readerly virtue, to be attempted through the ages by all and by none.

Bibliography

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1993. *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, KSA 4. Berlin: De Gruyter.
– 2008. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Tr. Graham Parkes. New York: Oxford University Press.