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Nietzsche's Shakespeare: Musicality and Historicity in *The Birth of Tragedy*

Katie Brennan

Nietzsche's interest in Shakespeare began long before he started his career as a philosopher. In 1860, when Nietzsche was sixteen, he wrote his mother asking for an edition of Shakespeare's writings as a Christmas gift[1]. The largest cluster of Nietzsche's comments on Shakespeare appears during his preparations for *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1870-71. In the final version of the book, Nietzsche mentions Shakespeare four times, but does not offer any substantial discussion of the author. His preparatory notes, however, clearly indicate that throughout the planning stages of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche had intended to devote an entire chapter to Shakespeare, in which Shakespeare was to serve as a bridge between the spirit of the great ancient Greek playwrights and Wagner[2]. Curiously, however, this chapter never made it into the final version of *The Birth of Tragedy*[3].

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1 Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life*, London, Quartet, 1981, p. 43.

2 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, eds Raymond Geuss and Alexander Nehamas, Engl. transl. by Ladislaus Löb, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 51; and Duncan Large, "Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures", in *Why Nietzsche Still?*, ed. Alan D. Schrift, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, pp. 45-65; pp. 47-51.

3 In his article "Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures" Duncan Large argues that Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare changes, just as Nietzsche's theories change, over the course of his philosophical career. Thus, understanding the relationship that Nietzsche has with Shakespeare is not a simple task. Nietzsche's understanding of Shakespeare the person as well as Shakespeare's plays is one that is constantly reconfigured and recontextualized throughout Nietzsche's career. An understanding of Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare is relevant to his writings in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but extends throughout all of Nietzsche's writings. Comments about Shakespeare appear in *The Gay Science*, *Ecce Homo*, *Human, All-Too-Human*, and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche also engaged in the debate over the true author of Shakespeare's plays. Nietzsche argues, in *Ecce Homo* and other

In this paper I discuss why Shakespeare, despite the absence of a detailed account of his work, is nonetheless essential to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy*. In section 1, I argue that Nietzsche's nearly exclusive focus on ancient Greek tragedy and Wagner should not overshadow the importance of Shakespeare to *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* illustrates that *The Birth of Tragedy* is not just a meditation on ancient Greek tragedy, but also a meditation on the possibility of the rebirth of great tragedy in the modern age. In section 2, I analyze the systematic importance of Shakespeare to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy. I ask whether, for Nietzsche, there can be tragedy without music. Finally, in section 3, I ask why Nietzsche did not include a more extended discussion of Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

1. Historical considerations

In turning to Nietzsche's analysis of Shakespeare, I would like to begin by discussing Silk and Stern's claim that Nietzsche's philosophy of art as developed in *The Birth of Tragedy* is saturated by categories that are "inescapably Greek"[4]. In *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Silk and Stern argue that Nietzsche "devised a construct so inescapably Greek that detailed discussion of other drama in its terms seems, to say the least, unreal. In colouring as well as intensity, his categories belong to the world of Greek tragedy"[5]. In their view, the Greek construct of Nietzsche's theory makes discussion of other dramas, even Wagner's musical dramas, "distractingly alien"[6]. Because of this, they argue that "Nietzsche's categories have no temporal connection with the world of Shakespeare or with any tragic

notebooks, that "Shakespeare, like Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, was actually a nobleman […] for over the course of the 1880s, concurrently with his rehabilitation of Shakespeare, he gradually convinces himself that 'Shakespeare' was but a pseudonym for his Elizabethan contemporary Lord Verulam, Francis Bacon" (p. 55).

4 M. S. Silk and J. P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 280.

5 Silk and Stern, p. 280.

6 Silk and Stern, p. 280.

world except the Greek […]. His thoughts on other drama, all in all, are perfunctory"[7]. In this section, I would like to question Silk and Stern's claim that Nietzsche's thoughts on Shakespeare's drama are merely perfunctory.

Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare focuses on the character of Hamlet. The discussion of Hamlet, in turn, clarifies two points. It offers (a) a key example of how a tragedy that lacks choral or Wagnerian music can present Dionysian aspects of the tragedy and (b) an illustration of how a modern audience could possibly relate to a tragic protagonist in the same way that the ancient Greeks connected to the tragic chorus[8]. I will say a bit more about each of these points.

(a) Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* offers an example of a modern artist who successfully synthesizes the Apolline and Dionysian artistic forces in a non-musical artwork. In Nietzsche's theory of art, the Dionysian is typically presented through the medium of music: the Dionysian is made present in ancient Greek tragedy by the musical chorus and in Wagnerian opera by the musical overtures[9]. The Dionysian is one of the two fundamental forces that Nietzsche views as the basis of art, the other being the Apolline. For Nietzsche, the Apolline represents the drive towards individuality,

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[7] Silk and Stern, p. 280.

[8] I will use the term 'modern' in this paper in the same way that Nietzsche does throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*. When Nietzsche describes art or audiences as 'modern' he is describing people of his own time. When Nietzsche first mentions Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy*, he claims: "Given the incredibly definite and assured ability of their [the ancient Greeks'] eye to see things in a plastic way, together with their pure and honest delight in colour, one is bound to assume, to the shame of all those born after them, that their dreams, too, had that logical causality of line and outline, colour and grouping, and a sequence of scenes resembling their best bas-reliefs, so that the perfection of their dreams would certainly justify us, if comparison were possible, in describing the dreaming Greeks as Homers and Homer as a dreaming Greek – and in a more profound sense than if a modern dared were to compare his dreaming with that of Shakespeare". Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, ed. Raymond Geuss, Engl. transl. by Ronald Speirs, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 19-20. (All subsequent references to *The Birth of Tragedy* will appear as BT followed by page number.) Nietzsche's use of the word 'modern' here simply refers to the time that Nietzsche was living in, not a period of 'modernity'. *The Birth of Tragedy* was published in 1872.

[9] Nietzsche explicitly identifies music with the Dionysian and sculpture with the Apolline at the beginning of his book: "Their [The Greeks'] two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysos, provide the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apolline art of the image-maker or Sculptor and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos" (BT, p. 14).

distinction, and order, while the Dionysian represents the loss of the individual, intoxication, and the forgetting of the self[10]. Sculpture and epic poetry (like that of Homer) are the purest forms of Apolline art[11]. Music is the purest form of Dionysian art[12]. Nietzsche believes that a successful tragedy combines the Apolline and Dionysian forces in a harmonious union. For Nietzsche, the chorus is typically responsible for presenting the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy. However, in Section 10 he claims that all the tragic heroes of the ancient Greek stage are actually Dionysus in disguise; the specific characteristics of each of these tragic heroes, Oedipus, Prometheus, etc., are simply masks for their true identity, which is Dionysus. This is an important change of argument. Nietzsche here leaves open the possibility that non-musical tragedies have a place in his theory by allowing for the Dionysian to present itself not just through music, but also through

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[10] Nietzsche describes the difference between the Dionysian and the Apolline as follows: "In order to gain a closer understanding of these two drives, let us think of them in the first place as separate art-worlds of *dream* and *intoxication*. Between these two physiological phenomena an opposition can be observed which corresponds to that between the Apolline and the Dionysiac" (BT, pp. 14-15).

[11] In Sections 3 and 4, Nietzsche identifies Homer as the paradigmatic naive, Apolline artist: "Homeric 'naiveté' can be understood only as the complete victory of Apolline illusion; it is an illusion of the kind so frequently employed by nature to achieve its aims. The true goal is obscured by a deluding image; we stretch out our hands toward the image, and nature achieves its goal by means of this deception" (BT, p. 25). Homer is paradigmatically naive because his characters illustrate the desire to evade the wisdom of suffering by hiding behind deluding images.

[12] At the very beginning of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche describes the Dionysian as "the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysos" (BT, p. 14, cf. note 9 above). As he develops his theory, Nietzsche argues that "tragedy arose from the tragic chorus and was originally chorus and nothing but chorus" (BT, p. 36). Nietzsche cites the musical, Dionysian chorus as being the origin of tragedy. Nietzsche notes that "[t]he fact that tragedy begins with the satyr, and that the Dionysiac wisdom of tragedy speaks out of him, is something which now surprises us just as much as the fact that tragedy originated in the chorus" (BT, p. 39). Tragedy originated out of this spirit of Dionysus, who was originally represented in the form of a musical satyr: "The metaphysical solace which, I wish to suggest, we derive from every true tragedy, the solace that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructible, mighty and pleasurable, this solace appears with palpable clarity in the chorus of satyrs, a chorus of natural beings whose life goes on ineradicably behind and beyond all civilization" (BT, p. 39). Nietzsche views the music of the chorus of satyrs as having the unique power to reveal the Dionysian truth that life is indestructibly mighty and pleasurable. Thus, music, for Nietzsche, has the unique ability to reveal the Dionysian. As Nietzsche says: "it was the Herculean strength of music which, having attained its supreme manifestation in tragedy, is able to interpret myth in a new and most profoundly significant way" (BT, p. 53).

a tragic hero, who is really a reincarnation of Dionysus. However, he does not provide a concrete example of how the tragic hero can present Dionysian artistic forces in ancient Greek tragedy; he does not explain how the typically *unindividuated* surge of Dionysian energy can present itself in an *individual* suffering from tragic circumstances. In the remainder of this section, I suggest that Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet explains how Dionysus can appear in the guise of a clear, definite, individual character.

In Section 10, Nietzsche introduces the possibility for the Dionysian to present itself in tragedy in a way other than through the musical chorus. Here, Nietzsche claims that "it is a matter of indisputable historical record that the only subject-matter of Greek tragedy, in its earliest form, was the sufferings of Dionysos, and that for a long time the only hero present on stage was, accordingly, Dionysos" (BT, p. 51). It is commonly agreed that ancient Greek tragedy evolved from being comprised of a chorus only, to having a multitude of characters and tragic heroes. As Nietzsche says, "tragedy arose from the tragic chorus and was originally chorus and nothing but chorus" (BT, p. 36). Nietzsche claims that not only was Greek tragedy originally made up solely of the chorus, but also that the only subject matter of this choral tragedy were the sufferings of Dionysus. Nietzsche argues that as Greek tragedy developed and gained more characters, "Dionysos never ceased to be the tragic hero, and that all the famous figures of the Greek stage, Prometheus, Oedipus etc., are merely masks of that original hero, Dionysos" (BT, p. 51). For Nietzsche, the main character of a Greek tragedy represents the suffering of Dionysus, who, according to some myths, was torn apart and then reassembled by the Titans when he was a boy. His being torn apart represents, for Nietzsche, the dissolution of the principle of individuation and the merging of the individual with nature. While Nietzsche's discussion of the tragic hero in Section 10 opens the door for non-musical tragedy to present the Dionysian, he does not provide an example of how the tragic hero could become the mask of Dionysus[13].

[13] Martha Nussbaum provides a different reading of this passage. For Nussbaum, the Dionysian forces of a tragedy do not typically come from the musical chorus, but through the "process of sympathetic identification with the hero". The chorus is not responsible for bringing out the depths of Dionysian misery. Instead the musical chorus, for Nussbaum, is an example of order asserted in the face of disorder – of artistic creation, which Nussbaum believes is an essential aspect of Nietzsche's

Only Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet provides a specific example of how Dionysian forces can present themselves through the tragic hero. Nietzsche compares Hamlet to a man who has experienced a pure Dionysian state and has returned to the real world:

> In this sense Dionysiac man is similar to Hamlet: both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have *acquired knowledge* and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion – this is the lesson of Hamlet, not a cheap wisdom about Jack the Dreamer who does not get around to acting because he reflects too much, out of an excess of possibilities, as it were. No, it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into a terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysiac man. (BT, p. 40)

Both Hamlet and the "Dionysiac man" have acquired knowledge that makes action difficult. This difficulty in acting is not the result of too much reflection, but of having too much *knowledge* – knowledge that makes one realize that individual actions are futile[14]. The knowledge that Hamlet has too much of is not just any type of knowledge, but knowledge of the Dionysian truths of nature. What Hamlet and a Dionysian man share is the knowledge that none of their actions can make any difference on the "eternal essence of things" (BT, p. 40). Hamlet's impotence in the face of his circumstances is caused by his knowledge that the world is full of Dionysian misery and de-

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notion of the Dionysian. Martha Nussbaum, "The Transfiguration of Intoxication: Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Dionysus", in *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, vol. I, eds Daniel W. Conway and Peter S. Groff, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 352.

[14] Nietzsche's interpretation of Hamlet may appear unusual. For example, Hegel's interpretation of Hamlet conflicts with Nietzsche's. Unlike Nietzsche, Hegel views Hamlet's predicament as the result of too much reflection. Hegel sees Hamlet's plight not as the result of too much knowledge, but as the result of spending too much time procrastinating on the knowledge that he already has (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Engl. transl. by Thomas Malcolm Knox, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 231). Nietzsche, however, is not alone. Literary critic Harold Bloom argues that "Nietzsche memorably got Hamlet right, seeing him not as the man who thinks too much but rather as the man who thinks too well" (Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, New York, Riverhead, 1998, p. 393). Though, it must be noted that Bloom changed his mind about Nietzsche's interpretation of Shakespeare in *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*, New York, Riverhead, 2003, p. 96.

struction; he has glimpsed the ugly hidden underbelly of existence[15]. What Hamlet is fighting against is the metaphysical construction of the world, the eternal nature of existence. Pure Dionysian knowledge thwarts action because, as Nietzsche claims, "action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of [Apolline] illusion" (BT, p. 40).

Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* illustrates how the protagonist of a tragedy can connect to the spirit of Dionysus. Hamlet is able to illustrate the tearing apart of the *principium individuationis*[16]. While tragic characters typically present Apolline individuation and clarity, in his discussion of Hamlet, Nietzsche provides an example of how a tragic hero also presents the breaking down of individuality through Dionysian suffering. Hamlet's knowledge of the futility of his actions breaks down the individual will and forces a recognition that the rest of the world is wrapped in a veil of Apolline illusion. Nietzsche's use of Hamlet as an example of someone who knows too much, who

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[15] Martha Nussbaum comments on just this point: "For the hero embodies in his person the inexorable clash between human aspirations and their natural/divine limits (§ 9): his demand for justice in an unjust universe entails terrible suffering". Nussbaum, "The Transfiguration of Intoxication", p. 352.

[16] Nietzsche borrows Schopenhauer's notions of the "principle of individuation" and "the Will" in *The Birth of Tragedy*. For Nietzsche, the *principium individuationis* is related to the rational and beautifying force of Apollo. The principle of individuation is responsible for shielding us from understanding the primordial unity of existence, which for Schopenhauer is the Will. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche equates the Schopenhauerian will with the spirit of Dionysus. In Nietzsche's words: "Schopenhauer has described for us the enormous *horror* which seizes people when they suddenly become confused and lose faith in the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world because the principle of sufficient reason, in one or other of its modes, appears to sustain an exception. If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy which arises from the innermost ground of man, indeed of nature itself, whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the Dionysiac" (BT, p. 17). Schopenhauer cites Hamlet as the type of character who "after a long struggle and much suffering […] renounce forever the goals they had, up to that point, pursued so intensely as well as renouncing all the pleasures of life, or even willingly and joyfully giving them up" (Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. I, ed. and Engl. transl. by Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman and Christopher Janaway, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 280). For Schopenhauer, the highest artistic achievements are capable of portraying the conflict of the will with itself. Hamlet is an example of a character whose experiences of suffering have lifted the veil of *maya*. "It sees through the form of appearance, the *principium individuationis*, and the egoism that rests on this principle slowly dies away, so that motives that had previously been so violent lose their power, and in their place, complete cognition of the essence of the world acts as a tranquilizer of the will and leads to resignation, the abandonment not only of life, but of the whole will to life" (p. 280).

has seen to the depths of Dionysian misery, illustrates that what traditional tragic heroes like Oedipus or Antigone were fighting was not the Gods or their fate, but the unchanging and eternal Dionysian truths. Therefore, Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet provides a key example for understanding how a tragic hero can be Apolline and Dionysian.

Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet also explains how the Dionysian can be incorporated into a non-musical drama. While Nietzsche typically argues that the Apolline aspects of a tragedy are manifested in its words and characters and the Dionysian in music, his argument in Section 10 illustrates that *some* characters, namely tragic heroes, can present the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy. Nietzsche's discussion of how the tragic hero can be a mask for Dionysus offers a possible explanation of how Shakespeare's non-musical tragedies could be said to embody both the Apolline and Dionysian aspects of a tragedy. While, in Nietzsche's theory, the musical chorus typically adds the Dionysian elements to the tragedy, Nietzsche also provides another, non-musical avenue for the Dionysian to present itself. Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* is a concrete example, which is not offered in Nietzsche's discussion of ancient Greek tragedy, of how a tragic hero can come to present the Dionysian. The character Hamlet not only manifests the "simple, transparent, beautiful" (BT, p. 46) Apolline qualities of tragedy, but also the unsettling truths of the Dionysian. As a tragic character, Hamlet manifests both Dionysian and Apolline forces.

(b) Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet also helps us understand how modern, non-Wagnerian tragedy can be accommodated into his theory of art. Nietzsche's comments about Hamlet occur in the midst of his discussion of the differences between ancient and modern audiences. Understanding the differences between Aeschylus or Sophocles and Shakespeare bridges the gap between ancient Greek tragedy and Wagner and explains how modern artists can be incorporated into Nietzsche's system. Nietzsche's discussion of Hamlet illustrates, in particular, the differences in the relationships between the spectator and the characters in ancient and modern tragedy. Nietzsche's comments on Hamlet enable us to understand how modern drama can engage its audience in a way that is similar to ancient Greek tragedy. *Hamlet* represents the tragic predicament in the modern era.

According to Nietzsche, in ancient Greek tragedy the spectator imagines himself to be a member of the chorus. The spectators of ancient Greek tragedies identified with the chorus and felt as if they

were the actors on the stage. For Nietzsche, this intimate relationship of spectator and character is not found in modern theaters, in which spectators are explicitly aware of the difference between themselves and what is going on onstage. The audience of modern theater appreciates theater in a vastly different manner than does the Greek audience. According to Nietzsche, the spectator of modern theater maintains at all times the knowledge that the play on stage is not real, but is in fact a work of art. As Nietzsche says: "We [modern audiences] had always believed that a proper spectator, whoever he might be, always had to remain conscious of the fact that what he saw before him was a work of art and not empirical reality" (BT, p. 37). The ancient Greek audience, on the other hand, does not observe this distinction between art and reality. Instead, the audience, who becomes part of the tragedy by becoming one with the chorus, must believe that the figures on stage are real, physically present beings[17].

Nietzsche's discussion of *Hamlet* in Section 7 indicates how modern theater can provide, despite the differences outlined above, a connection between spectator and theatrical truth similar to that found in ancient Greek tragedy. It helps us understand how modern theater can be incorporated into Nietzsche's theory. For Nietzsche, Hamlet is an archetype for how the ancient Greek audience would feel if they were confronted with Dionysian insight. The revulsion that Hamlet feels after meeting with the ghost of his father is similar to the revulsion that the audience of a Greek tragedy might feel if they were confronted only with the Dionysian aspects of the tragedy, which, for Nietzsche, are typically presented by the chorus. In Nietzsche's words: "But as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion" (BT, p. 40). According to Nietzsche, the ancient Greek spectator "has gazed with keen eye into the midst of the fearful, destructive havoc of so-called world history, and has seen the cruelty of nature, and is in danger of longing to deny the will as the Buddhist does" (BT, p. 40). The spectator, in this scenario, in no way identifies the action on the stage as separate from himself. Instead, the spectator responds to the Dionysian truths being presented to him through the chorus and is unsettled by be-

[17] Of the ancient Greeks' relationship to theater, Nietzsche states: "The tragic chorus [and by proxy the ancient Greek spectator] of the Greeks is required to see in the figures on stage real, physically present, living beings" (BT, p. 37).

ing reminded of the necessities of everyday existence. For Nietzsche, the chorus goes beyond politics, social convention and everyday life – it uncovers the scary and unsettling truth that reveals the "inner, terrible depths of nature" (BT, p. 46). In Nietzsche's theory, tragedy has two dynamically related parts: the Dionysian and the Apolline. Tragedy takes its audience to the edge of the Dionysian abyss and, just before falling irrevocably into its depths, is saved by the soothing veil of Apollo. Hamlet, for Nietzsche, has had the same experience as the audience of Greek tragedy that is dangling on the edge of the Dionysian abyss.

Given the differences between ancient and modern tragedy, how are modern audiences supposed to connect and become one with the characters onstage? How can modern drama entrance audiences in the same way as ancient Greek tragedy? My suggestion is that, unlike ancient Greek spectators who connect to the Dionysian only through the mediation of the chorus, the modern spectator has no need for the tragic chorus and connects directly with Hamlet, who is ultimately Dionysus is disguise. Instead of becoming one with the chorus, the modern spectator – who, as Nietzsche asserts, is used to a comfortable separation between spectator and character – becomes one with Hamlet and gets in touch with the Dionysian spirit through empathizing with Hamlet's plight. Modern audiences cannot get in touch with the Dionysian through the chorus because they do not have the same sense of shared culture as the ancient Greeks and thus cannot participate in a chorus in the same way. Instead, they must do so through identification with a tragic hero who himself embodies the tearing apart of the *principium individuationis* and the communion with the Dionysian unity.

Thus, Silk and Stern's argument that Nietzsche's philosophy of art is based almost solely on ancient Greek concepts does not lead directly to the conclusion that all of Nietzsche's comments about Shakespeare are merely "perfunctory". Instead, Nietzsche's comments on Shakespeare help to flesh out a plausible account of how his theory can be applied to modern, non-Greek tragedy. In the next section, I address another key difference between Shakespeare and Greek tragedy: that Shakespeare's plays have no music or musical origin. I argue that the lack of music in Shakespeare's plays does not preclude them from being able to tap into the Dionysian and Apolline forces of nature.

2. Systematic considerations

One problem with Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is that it seems to privilege music over all other forms of art. As Julian Young asks: "Why, for instance, assuming Verdi's *Otello* to be a fine opera as operas go and Shakespeare's *Othello* a fine play as plays go, should Verdi's be a greater work of art merely because Shakespeare was not a composer?"[18] Young notes that Nietzsche's commitment to music as the sole means of expressing the Dionysian creates an unwarranted bias against non-musical art. The presence of Shakespeare in *The Birth of Tragedy* is essential for understanding that Nietzsche should not be taken literally when he claims that music is the sole vehicle through which the Dionysian can express itself in tragedy.

Nietzsche's inclusion of Shakespeare as a respected artist makes it impossible to assert that Dionysian forces are limited to the musical elements of tragedies or dramas. Shakespeare's inclusion forces us to look for other ways that the Dionysian can be incorporated in non-musical drama.

One of the consequences of the discussion in the previous section was that Nietzsche's analysis of Hamlet illustrates that the tragic hero is actually a mask for Dionysus, thus providing one way that non-musical tragedy can present not just Apolline illusion, but also Dionysian truth. Nietzsche's introduction of the concept of "musical mood" offers an additional explanation of how a non-musical drama, like Shakespeare's, can achieve a balance between the Apolline and Dionysian, which Nietzsche insists characterizes Greek art[19].

In his comparison of lyric and epic poetry, Nietzsche introduces a distinction between music and "musical mood" that can be used to understand how a non-musical tragedy can come to bear the spirit of Dionysus. In his discussion of the lyric poetry of Archilochus, Nietzsche introduces the concept of musical mood, borrowed from Schiller, to explain how lyric poetry is born out of the spirit of music and thus manifests the Dionysian forces of nature:

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[18] Julian Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 35.

[19] Julian Young suggests this concept of musical mood as a solution to Nietzsche's problem of non-musical artworks on p. 35.

> Schiller has thrown some light for us on the process of poetic composition, as it affected him, in a psychological observation which seemed inexplicable but which did not worry him; he confesses that, in the state of mind preparatory to the act of writing poetry, what he had before and within him was not, say, a series of images, with his thoughts ordered in causal sequence, but rather a *musical mood*. ("In my case the feeling is initially without a definite and clear object; this does not take shape until later. It is preceded by a certain musical mood, which is followed in my case by the poetic idea.") (BT, p. 29)

Nietzsche's invocation of Schiller gives an example of how non-musical poetry can be generated out of, as the original title of *The Birth of Tragedy* states, "the spirit of music"[20]. Nietzsche views Schiller's experience of poetic creation as parallel to the experience of Archilochus, a lyric poet, who Nietzsche describes as a Dionysian artist. This lyric poet, in the process of creating an artwork, assumes the spirit of music and becomes one with the primordial unity of Dionysus. It is through this spirit of music that the lyric poet is able to transmit his oneness with the primordial unity into the images of a poem. In Nietzsche's words: "The lyric genius feels a world of images and symbols growing out of the mystical state of self-abandonment and one-ness, a world which has a quite different colouring, causality, and tempo from that of the sculptor and epic poet" (BT, pp. 30-31).

The lyric poet is fundamentally different from the epic poet, who stays safely within the realm of Apolline dream images[21]. The lyric poet and the epic poet both generate images. However, while the epic poet generates beautiful representations of the world around him, the lyric poet generates images that reflect his own immersion in the Dionysian spirit. His images do not dwell in the mere contemplation of things, but reflect the oneness that he feels with the primordial unity. Thus, the lyric poet, who deals in words and images instead of music, is not condemned to be a merely Apolline artist. While ancient lyric poetry was traditionally related to music, and was meant to be sung instead of read, Nietzsche's discussion here illustrates that it is not the music

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[20] See BT, p. viii.

[21] In his comparison of the lyric and the epic poet, Nietzsche states: "Both the sculptor and his relative, the epic poet, are lost in the pure contemplation of images. The Dionysian musician, with no image at all, is nothing but primal pain and the primal echo of it" (BT, p. 30).

that was responsible for representing the Dionysian in lyric poetry, but the musical mood that accompanied the creation of the poet's words and images.

Nietzsche's discussion of the creation of poetry out of musical mood illustrates a clear way of understanding how Shakespeare could be an artist who successfully incorporates both Apolline and Dionysian elements into his art. Unlike purely Apolline artists like Homer, Shakespeare generates his tragedies through the spirit of Dionysus. This theory is supported by the fact that Nietzsche describes Shakespeare as a Dionysian artist throughout the course of *The Birth of Tragedy*. As we have seen, Nietzsche compares Hamlet to a Dionysian man. In other places, Nietzsche hints that Shakespeare's plays are similar to Greek tragedies and implies that Shakespeare is an artist who escapes the trappings of the majority of modern art and who succeeds in tapping into the Apolline and the Dionysian forces of nature[22]; Nietzsche compares Shakespeare to Beethoven, a Dionysian artist[23]. It is only in Section 2 that Nietzsche's reference to Shakespeare *might* be construed as painting him as a purely Apolline artist[24]. However, given that Nietzsche refers to Shakespeare as a Dionysian artist in the rest of the book, a more plausible reading would argue that Nietzsche's comments in Section 2 simply illustrate that he took Shakespeare to be a well-rounded artist who is capable of conjuring the spirit of *both* Apollo *and* Dionysus.

Nietzsche's discussion of lyric poetry illustrates how non-musical artworks can be generated out of the spirit of music. Nietzsche's equation of Shakespeare with the spirit of Dionysus throughout *The Birth of Tragedy* illustrates that he believes that Shakespeare is an author who is also capable of generating a work of art through the spirit of music. While limited in scope, Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare is nonetheless essential for understanding how non-musical artworks can be successful. Shakespeare illustrates a key way that non-musical drama can be as powerfully Dionysian as a Greek tragedy or Wagnerian opera. Through

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[22] Nietzsche mentions Shakespeare four times in *The Birth of Tragedy*: in Sections 2, 7, 17 and 22. His discussion of *Hamlet* occurs in Section 7.

[23] See BT, p. xii.

[24] Nietzsche's use of Shakespeare in Section 2 is complicated and could be construed in a number of different ways. His discussion here leaves open to interpretation what precise role Shakespeare might have for Nietzsche. Cf. BT, pp. 19-20, and the passage quoted above in note 8.

Shakespeare, we see that Nietzsche's claim that music is essential to evoking the Dionysian in art should not be taken literally. Instead, we should understand his discussion of music as a metaphor for engaging with the Dionysian spirit of oneness with the primordial unity.

3. Metaphysical commitments: why did Nietzsche leave Shakespeare out?

Despite this evidence for the importance of Shakespeare to Nietzsche's theory of tragedy, we are left with the lingering question of why Nietzsche decided to leave Shakespeare out of *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this final section, I argue that Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner is responsible for his assertions, throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*, that music is the sole vehicle through which the Dionysian can be presented. This commitment to Wagner offers a possible explanation for why Nietzsche decided to remove a comprehensive treatment of Shakespeare from his book[25].

Furthermore, even though Shakespeare and other non-musical tragedy can be seen as having a place in Nietzsche's theory (as I have argued above) his discussion of the manifestation of the Apolline and Dionysian in Wagner in the second half of *The Birth of Tragedy* leaves little room for non-musical drama; in this second half of the book, Nietzsche views music as the sole vehicle through which the Dionysian can be expressed. In the first half of *The Birth of Tragedy* (Sections 1-15), in which Nietzsche discusses ancient Greek tragedy and Socratism, there is room for Shakespeare in his theory of tragedy. But this is not true of the second half of the book (Sections 16-25), in which Nietzsche discusses Wagner and the rebirth of tragedy. This dispar-

[25] That Nietzsche's theory of tragedy is made inconsistent by his dogmatic love for Wagner is also noticed by Julian Young. Young asserts that there is a distinction in *The Birth of Tragedy* between Nietzsche as a Wagner propagandist and Nietzsche as a philosopher of art. Young believes that, as a Wagner propagandist, Nietzsche is happy to relegate all non-musical artworks to a level of achievement far below that of ancient Greek tragedians and Wagner. However, as a serious philosopher and aesthetician, Nietzsche was sensitive to the fact that artists like Shakespeare and Goethe presented great examples of non-musical artwork. "In line with this, we find that his more considered discussions moderate the demand that great art should be literally musical to the requirement that it should be generated out of 'musical mood' (BT, p. 5); that is, in the words of the original title of the book, 'the spirit of music'" (Young, p. 36).

ity between the first and second half of *The Birth of Tragedy* provides a method for understanding its troubled metaphysics. Nietzsche scholars have spent a lot of energy trying to understand or make consistent the metaphysical commitments in *The Birth of Tragedy*. One line of argument asks whether or not Nietzsche is committed to a Schopenhauerian metaphysics[26]. Another line of argument asks whether or not the metaphysics of *The Birth of Tragedy* is internally consistent[27], with some commentators insisting that Nietzsche must not have been serious about the book's metaphysics and instead suggesting that the book should be viewed as myth[28]. One form of the latter is taken up by Aaron Ridley and Henry Staten. Ridley argues, against Staten, that there is no reason to assume what he calls a "bipartite reading" of the text. Unlike Staten, who argues that the first (Sections 1-15) and second (Sections 16-25) halves of the book have different metaphysical commitments, Ridley argues that, while *The Birth of Tragedy*'s metaphysics are indeed slippery, there is not sufficient evidence to separate the two parts of the book on metaphysical grounds[29]. I argue that the presence of Shakespeare sheds light on this debate and illustrates that understanding Nietzsche's aesthetic commitments is useful to understand his metaphysical ones.

Ridley is the first to refer to the division of Sections 1-15 and 16-25 as a "bipartite reading". In his book *Nietzsche on Art*, he attacks the argument of Staten, who claims that "Nietzsche apparently tried to write the metaphysical will out of *The Birth of Tragedy* but found, on

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[26] See Young, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Art*; Beatrice Han-Pile, "Nietzsche's Metaphysics in *The Birth of Tragedy*", *European Journal of Philosophy*, 14 (2006), pp. 373-403; Nussbaum, "The Transfiguration of Intoxication".

[27] See Henry Staten, *Nietzsche's Voice*, Cornell, Cornell University Press, 1990; Aaron Ridley, *Nietzsche on Art*, New York, Routledge, 2007; Paul de Man, "Genesis and Genealogy (Nietzsche)", in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 70-102; and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Le Détour", *Poetique*, 5 (1971), pp. 53-76.

[28] Peter Poellner, "Myth, Art and Illusion in Nietzsche", in *Myth and the Making of Modernity: The Problem of Grounding in Early Twentieth-Century Literature*, eds Michael Bell and Peter Poellner, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, 1998; de Man, *Allegories of Reading*; James Porter, *The Invention of Dionysus: An Essay on* The Birth of Tragedy, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000.

[29] Aaron Ridley argues against Staten's bipartite reading: "My own view, then, is that there is no reason to accept a bipartite reading of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The Wagner sections clearly presuppose (at least) the weak version of the metaphysical thesis, and there are no obvious grounds to think that the first fifteen sections are any different" (Ridley, p. 30).

arriving at Section 16, that he could not do it"[30]. Ridley argues that Staten's reading separates the book into parts that, on metaphysical grounds, glorify Wagner and parts that do not. Both Ridley and Staten acknowledge the important confluence of the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and the art and theory of Wagner. Both Wagner and Schopenhauer privilege music over other art forms. For Schopenhauer, our everyday lives are nothing more than an illusion that distracts us from the innermost nature of the world, which he calls the will. This will consists of a meaningless striving and insatiable desiring. Schopenhauer views music as being uniquely capable of refracting the *will* in a form that human beings can comprehend. Thus, Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner's music as the paradigmatic form of modern art is intimately tied to his, and Wagner's, early interest in Schopenhauer, who claims that music is key to transcending the limits of everyday experience. It is beyond doubt that Nietzsche incorporated elements of Schopenhauer's philosophy in *The Birth of Tragedy*[31]. The argument that Staten is making (and that Ridley is refuting) is that Schopenhauer's metaphysics is absent from the first half of *The Birth of Tragedy*, but has crept into the second half. Staten argues that "before the long quotation from Schopenhauer in Section 16, Nietzsche avoids using the term 'will' in its metaphysical sense"[32]. Ridley, on the other hand, believes that metaphysical uses of the will also appear in the first half of *The Birth of Tragedy*. While, Ridley claims, Nietzsche does not adopt a fully Schopenhauerian or a fully consistent metaphysics throughout the book, he does argue for a 'weak' metaphysics that runs throughout the entire book[33]. This weak metaphysics lies somewhere between a full adoption of Schopenhauer's metaphysics and a psychological thesis, which would presuppose no metaphysical commitments. I argue that the different

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30 Staten, p. 192.

31 Nietzsche provides direct references to Schopenhauer throughout *The Birth of Tragedy*. In the very first section, Nietzsche mentions Schopenhauer multiple times, quoting directly from *The World as Will and Representation* in his description of Apollo and Dionysus (BT, pp. 14-18). In his description of the Dionysian, Nietzsche states: "In the same passage Schopenhauer has described for us the enormous *horror* which seizes people when they suddenly become confused and lose faith in the cognitive forms of the phenomenal world because the principle of sufficient reason, in one or other of its modes, appears to sustain an exception" (BT, p. 17).

32 Staten, p. 192.

33 Ridley, p. 23

roles that music plays in the first and second halves of the book supports a variety of the bipartite reading.

In the second half of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche places more emphasis on the close relationship between music and the Dionysian than he does in the first half. He makes it clear that the Dionysian is more important than the Apolline because of the ultimate importance of music for tragedy. This does not mean, however, that he finds no place for the Apolline. He argues that Wagner's operas, devoid of their characters, would be too painful to listen to[34]. It is the presence of Apollo that allows us to tolerate the Dionysian power of Wagner's music. The Apolline provides a deceptive shield against the Dionysian forces of the music and offers images and concepts that allow one to connect to the world of the drama.

While the Apolline is essential to Wagner's operas, the Dionysian still maintains the "upper hand" (BT, p. 103). Nietzsche argues that the Dionysian "produces, taken as a whole, an effect which goes beyond all the effects of Apolline art" (BT, p. 103):

> In the total effect of tragedy the Dionysiac gains the upper hand once more; it closes with a sound which could never issue from the realm of Apolline art. Thereby Apolline deception is revealed for what it is: a persistent veiling, for the duration of the tragedy, of the true Dionysiac effect, an effect so powerful, however, that it finally drives the Apolline drama itself into a sphere where it begins to speak with Dionysiac wisdom and where it negates itself and its Apolline visibility. (BT, pp. 103-4)

In Nietzsche's discussion of Wagner, music, and the Dionysian spirit that it embodies, takes on a greater level of importance than it did in his discussion of ancient Greek tragedy. Nietzsche emphasizes that "[t]hanks to the pre-established harmony which exists between fully realized drama and its music, drama achieves a supreme degree of visual intensity which is unattainable by spoken drama" (BT,

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[34] It is interesting to note that in Nietzsche's later writing *The Case of Wagner*, he calls Wagner the "scientist par excellence" and that he "vastly increased the linguistic capacity of music". Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner: A Musician's Problem*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, eds Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, Engl. transl. by Judith Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 247. While Nietzsche originally emphasized the power of Wagner's music to present the Dionysian in his operas, he eventually abandons his faith in Wagner's music and classifies Wagner as a Socratic or scientific artist.

p. 102). Nietzsche claims that music helps us to see more intensely the world of the stage. Music helps us *internalize* what is going on on stage, so that the spectator sees the play not only with his or her eyes, but with his or her imagination and spirit. Here, Nietzsche's language becomes highly metaphorical. He uses the image of weaving delicate fabrics to illustrate that music simplifies the actions on the stage, so that they can be internalized as what they really are: an expression of Dionysus. In one metaphor, Nietzsche compares the effect of music to a delicate tissue: "music forces us to see more, and in a more inward fashion than usual, and to see the events on stage spread out before us like some delicate tissue" (BT, p. 102). In a related metaphor, Nietzsche compares the effects of music to a loom: "If drama, with the help of music, spreads out all its movements and figures before us and with such inwardly illuminated clarity, as if we were seeing a tissue being woven on a rising and falling loom, it also produces an effect which goes beyond all the effects of Apolline art" (BT, p. 103). Music, in this case, is responsible for clarifying and illuminating the events on the stage, allowing the audience to "gaze into the interior of things". The combination of music and drama exceeds spoken dramas because music allows the viewer to experience the depths of Dionysian wisdom. As Nietzsche puts it: "What could the poet of the world hope to offer that is analogous to this, as he strives vainly, with the much more imperfect mechanism of word and concept, to achieve that inward enlargement of the visible world of the stage and its illumination from within?" (BT, p. 102)

Nietzsche's emphasis on music as integral to tragedy contradicts his suggestion that the Dionysian can be embodied in the tragic hero or be generated by a musical mood. In his discussion of Wagner, he explicitly cites music as the source of the Dionysian and does not leave open the possibility for the characters or words of a drama to embody the spirit of Dionysus. Instead, he cites the words and characters as the source of the Apolline in Wagner. It seems that, with regard to Wagner, the characters are not themselves masks for Dionysus, but are instead the pure manifestation of Apollo. Nietzsche specifically states that the characters of *Tristan and Isolde* bring forth compassion, light and a mask that covers over the dark truth presented in Wagner's musical scores (BT, pp. 101-2). The only function of the characters and their words is to present the Apolline aspects of the tragedy, which make it possible for us to tolerate the unsettling

Dionysian truths presented in Wagner's music. The characters are a mere lens through which we can safely view the Dionysian aspects of the opera.

Nietzsche's discussion of how the Apolline and Dionysian are manifested in Wagner is different from his discussion of how the Apolline and Dionysian are manifested in ancient Greek tragedy. While Wagner is, for Nietzsche, a modern instantiation of a lost form of art, his characters play a different role in the Apolline/Dionysian relationship than in ancient Greek tragedy. The characters in Wagner's operas are not capable of manifesting or revealing any type of Dionysian truth, but instead provide only an Apolline mask for the musical-Dionysian aspects of the drama. This strict assignment of the Apolline to words and characters and the Dionysian to music makes it impossible to understand how Shakespeare's music-less plays could manifest the Dionysian spirit. While Nietzsche provides a way for characters like Hamlet to present the Dionysian spirit in his discussion of Greek tragedy, he offers no such allowance in his discussion of Wagner. Shakespeare appears to be more compatible with ancient Greek tragedy than he is with other modern artists, like Wagner. This discrepancy may simply reveal a difference in the art of ancient Greece and Wagner. More seriously, I believe it reveals a deeper inconsistency in Nietzsche's theory of tragedy: one that divides the first half of the book from the second.

Since music is the gateway to the Dionysian in Nietzsche's theory and the Dionysian is the force that most resembles Schopenhauer's metaphysical concept of the will, it is clear that Nietzsche's thoughts on music are not irrelevant to the discussion surrounding the metaphysical commitments of *The Birth of Tragedy*. I want to suggest that Nietzsche's inflexible attitude towards music in the second half of the book reflects not only a stronger commitment to Wagner as an artist he idolizes, but also, and relatedly, a stronger commitment to Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Thus, Nietzsche's attitudes towards music should not be ignored in a discussion about the metaphysical commitments of the book.

4. Conclusion

Nietzsche's relationship to Shakespeare is not a simple one.

It is clear, from his preparatory notes, that Shakespeare was important to Nietzsche. His preparatory notes, however, also reveal

that Nietzsche was conflicted about the position that the author should play in his theory of tragedy. This conflict is, I believe, the result of his commitment to Wagner as the modern instantiation of ancient Greek tragedy. Nietzsche's commitment to the musicality of Wagner's operas as the key to its successfully manifesting both the Apolline and Dionysian forced him to remove a systematic treatment of an artist who he clearly cherished: Shakespeare.

This conflict between Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner and his interest in Shakespeare, however, does not ultimately negate the importance of Shakespeare for Nietzsche's theory of tragedy. Instead, the references to Shakespeare that Nietzsche failed to purge from *The Birth of Tragedy* prove to be essential to filling the gaps that Nietzsche's commitment to Wagner left in his theory. Nietzsche's discussion of Shakespeare helps us to see how modern, non-musical drama can be incorporated to Nietzsche's system. Furthermore, it can help readers to understand that, despite the differences between ancient Greek and modern culture, modern audiences can still experience a unifying connection to the spirit of Dionysus. Shakespeare ultimately illustrates that the Apolline and Dionysian have not been lying dormant, but have reemerged in the guise of non-musical Shakespearian drama.