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## Philosophy, Art and Transfiguration of Nietzsche and Raphael-Their Impact on the Aesthete of Literature: A Study

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### Abstract

This paper is a study on the impact of the Raphael's masterpiece in Nietzsche's philosophy and their rebellious ideas on truth, beauty and art. Raphael's Transfiguration is one of the most discussed pieces of art in the world, the painting that acted as the most perceptible influence in the life of Nietzsche. Here instead of adopting the biblical myth as it is, the painter elevates it to the height of the artistic quest after the ultimate truth and reality. In the transformative power of imagination, truth becomes a trope. The meaning of Raphael's painting becomes available only when the mise-en-scenes are supplemented. Instead of blindly subscribing to Christian theology and mysticism, Raphael makes a radical departure to create his own space in the world of aesthete of art. From this Raphael and Nietzsche set out to create an alternate reality for the themselves, trusting neither the divine agency nor the human world, leading onto the creation of a counter aesthete to which only the chosen ones can have access, an art and philosophy characterised by the most sublime states of the human consciousness. The ultimate meaning becomes available in the performative dimension of art, which Nietzsche identifies as Dionysian to the core. For both, art becomes an endless masked performance to the core, unleashing its energies in a Dionysian orgy.

**Keywords:** Transfiguration, mise-en-scene, aesthete, connoisseur, annihilation, abjection, sublimation, summum

One of the most astonishing observations regarding the connection between philosophy and art belongs to Nietzsche. The shock value of Nietzsche's description of philosophy as a Dionysian adventure has not subsided so far, which in turn derives its sustenance from the praxis of theatre. Here time ceases to be a transcendental continuum of empirical awareness. It never tires of revealing its immense potential of transformation which becomes the foundation of all our collective awareness of human culture and civilisation. But it holds themes of a disruption and disaster within by bringing about the rupture of time and space, two cardinal components that makes the comprehension of art possible.

Consequently this rupture leads onto the disruption of self-consciousness leading onto a situation of irresolvable chaos. Nietzsche believed that the ultimate artistic experience lies in these fissures and the fractures of the human time leading onto absences of a fragmented stream of consciousness. At its best truth has to survive here as a trope. To borrow a phrase from the cinematic jargon, art becomes an endless masked performance of *mise en scene*. Looking at this spectacle from the other end, viz, the non-topos of theatre provides the much required sustenance to understand the dynamics of theatre, wherein the never ending act of annihilation and identification keeps the art connoisseur and audience perennially trapped to the performance that is unfolded before him with ruthless intensity.

It is not difficult to see that ultimately to develop his concept of 'transfiguration', Nietzsche relied on Raphael's masterpiece with the same name. In Christian mysticism of Raphael, the ultimate redemption descends on man through the transformative power of imagination. The beauty of this premise lies in the fact that like all great mystics and arts, Raphael was not ignorant of its ambivalence, bringing about the unlikely merging of sublimation and abjection. The aesthetic brilliance of Transfiguration is corroborated by the poignant history that is associated with it. The painting made its public appearance precisely on the day of Raphael's death.

Giorgio Vasari puts it like this, '...Raphael came to the end of his life's journey on the same day that he was born, which was Good Friday of his thirty-seventh year, and we can believe that just as his talents embellished this world, so he himself will adorn heaven. As Raphael lay dead in the hall where he had been working, the painting of the Transfiguration he had done for Cardinal de'Medici was placed at his head, and the sight of his dead body and this living painting filled the soul of everyone looking on with grief...' 1

Vasari suggests how the corporeal vision of transcended mortality subtly invoked the gesture of redemption amidst destruction. It is here the theme of *mise en scene* begins its work, the rare corroboration of completion of his masterpiece and death of the artisan, the ultimate dissolution of his corporeal self, the confluence of the artistic genius, the ambivalences of sublime and the hermetical capacity for existential redemption. The most salient feature of this artistic attainment is that ultimately the artist has succeeded in creating an alternate reality, investing himself with

the power of imaginaire, where he overcomes even the Faustian dilemma, the ultimate bondage with and surrender to death.

In the rhythms of life and art, Raphael is bringing about the split in divine and the human subjectification. The corpse of the artist lying by the side of his ultimate master, reveals itself as the obscure nuance of the transfiguration phenomenon, a body that will begin to decompose in a short time, and a timeless masterpiece standing on its side. The self same person Raphael begins to represent here two contrasting images, the eternal life and temporal death- implicitly suggesting the *summum bonum* of his life as an artist and a mortal human being. Simultaneously there is the theme of the inevitable split in the configuration- the ultimate perfection the transcending genius and the artist's mortality.

The *mise-en-scene* pattern becomes immediately perceptible in the hybrid performative pattern of the whole scene- the decentralisation of the pictorial focus on two contrasting scenes, the most obvious of which is the 'Transfiguration of Jesus' on Tabor mountain juxtaposed with the 'possessed boy' to the distressed Apostles. Raphael in his ingenious way chooses not to follow the Biblical narrative verbatim. He altogether abandons the pious act of Jesus healing the boy- the artist has to differ from the devotee. In the typical Greek fashion it ends an offline narration, which is not avoiding mentioning the Apostle's failure. Failures hold a deeper fascination for the artist than the shallow success which the mundane mortal holds to his heart.

The scriptural and mythical narratives always hold onto a diachronic pattern, which becomes unveiled in the pictorial artistic representation, the beautiful *symphonia cocordum* of misery and agony. The traumatic ethereal situation is translated into the immediacy of the human experience and predicament. The advantage of performance is that this complex situation could be given a correspondence. Going by the theories of Walter Benjamin, it can be infinitely replicated, reinterpreted. The possibility of stagnation can be desisted for any stretch of time, but the possibility of transcendence will be evading forever.

The advantage of a symbol is that it is capable of infinitesimal possibilities, but never acceding to any singular explanation. The biblical symbolism of the 'Transfiguration' like other symbols of mysticism and mythology is holding a signet on the truth of Christ as a redeemer. The

synoptic presentation of presentation by Raphael breaks this signet and ends in the synoptic presentation of the Master's spiritual sublimity with the tortured possessed self of the boy.

The broken signet of the mystic meaning of the Scripture is led onto the candidness of the stage presentation effecting the split between aesthete of performance and the defining moment of transfiguration. It acts like a two storied theatre stage, compelling the viewer to become a mute witness- a scene gets framed before his vigilante perception. The hermeneutic discourse on painting is constantly interrupted as a result of these corrupted references that happen within the traditional framework. The immense complexity of the painting remained almost indecipherable to the consciousness of eighteenth century, which vouchsafed for the conceptual unity of the masterpiece. The idea is further substantiated with Nietzsche's philosophical analysis on *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872).

The performative and time bound event of transfiguration, the exposition of human existence and truth, which is best manifested in Raphael's painting, is at the core of Nietzsche's Dionysian philosophy of tragedy. For Nietzsche philosophy is synonymous with performance, which ultimately becomes 'the art of transfiguration. Here Nietzsche uses the term 'convalescent' to suggest it:

*'...As philosophers we are not free to distinguish/discern body and soul, as the mob does, we are even less free to distinguish body and mind....We always have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain...Life, that means for us to transform everything what are into light and flames, everything too, what hits us, we cannot do it differently.'*<sup>2</sup>

The philosophical process of cognition is due to the act of deliberate and systematic obliteration of signification and taking recourse to the imponderable abyss of temporality, the inevitable decay that constantly accompanies human endeavours. It is the 'tragic intelligence' that ultimately reinstates the human being to cognise his relative identity and the wallowing insignificance that awaits him at the end of the journey. But this tragic cognition is an existential and imaginative step which cannot be hermeneutically enforced by the consequent historical application and textual exposition, 'Existence and world are only justified as an aesthetic phenomenon'. The cunningness of the theatrical manoeuvres puts a mask on the performer, the double face of truth. By initiating the theatrical performance, it provides a kind of metaphysical supplement of a reality which has to be experienced.

It leads onto to the aesthetic subtlety of a theatrical intrigue, from which an imaginary emergence is possible, an experiential reality- an abyss of extinction, a caesura, a syncope- the Dionysian ritual is gathering onto its climatic moment:

‘The world that concerns us is false. I mean it is not factual, but fiction and assumption about some meagre amount of observation. It is flowing, something moving, a kind of again and again deferred falsity which is never approaching truth: for- there is no truth.’<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of perennial truth, the one who is watching the performance is free to deduce his own version of truth, based entirely on his subjective perception. It is some kind of a dialectics between a disappearing authenticity and a performing intention, the conflict between a temporal stream of consciousness and its conceptual foundation. Paul de Man puts it as, ‘assimilation of truth and trope’ and the ‘homology between concept and figure’. In Nietzsche, this search ends as, ‘the metamorphosis of the world in human beings’<sup>3</sup>

Time in Nietzsche becomes an abyss of mortality- the art of transfiguration- the perpetual antagonism between possibilities. Time is deprived of its transcendental continuum of intellectual identities, but as the ultimate artistic configuration of artistic images.

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