

**Review of Paul Bishop. *On The Blissful Islands with Nietzsche and Jung. In the Shadow of the Superman.*  
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ISBN: 978-1-138-79161-6 (pbk). 237 pp.**

In the second section of the second part of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [*Also sprach Zarathustra*] (1883-1885), Zarathustra is on a piece of land called the 'Blissful Islands', delivering a speech to his 'friends'. The subject of the speech concerns the liberating power of 'willing' to create the 'superman' [Übermensch], as opposed to the heaviness of Christian values and God. Zarathustra concludes: 'Now my hammer rages fiercely against its prison. Fragments fly from the stone: what is that to me? I will complete it: for a shadow came to me — the most silent, the lightest of all things once came to me! The beauty of the Superman came to me as a shadow. Ah, my brothers! What are the gods to me now!' (Nietzsche 1978: 109-112 ). Paul Bishop's book *On the Blissful Islands* is an attempt to interpret these final lines in the light of an aesthetics of the shadow and notions of self-sculpting. The book traces these two ideas (and practices) to the Platonic and Neo-Platonic traditions, and follows their development in the Italian Renaissance, in German Idealism (where he claims they culminate), and all the way to C. G. Jung, who is reckoned to have embraced them. This book displays an impressive array of sources, which it weaves into a densely patterned story of an inherently fascinating topic. Readers of this review should bear in mind, however, that this is not a historical study in the true sense of the word, but rather a meditation on the symbolical constellation 'blissful islands-shadow-self-sculpting', developed upon an interdisciplinary kind of hermeneutics. Such hermeneutics handles literary, psychological and philosophical topics, trying to merge them together in a wider understanding, thus recalling Jung's very own interpretative method.

Bishop's investigation is developed on three different levels that correspond to elements from Jung's analytical psychology: the shadow; the need for sculpting—in the sense of both the actual art form and the symbolical meaning of self-sculpting—; the idea of self-transformation. Seemingly based upon Jung's understanding of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*

as the self, this latter topic is in reality at the basis of ‘an important *aurea catena* in the central tradition that links Goethe, Nietzsche and Jung’ (xxi).

The first chapter, ‘On the Blissful Islands. In the Shadow of the Superman’ is dedicated to contextualising the image of Nietzsche’s ‘blissful islands’ in a wider tradition, commencing with the Greeks. Dwelling upon the image of the shadow, as interpreted by Jung in his seminar on *Zarathustra*, Bishop argues that Jung has missed the main question: ‘why is it that what comes to Zarathustra as a shadow is not simply the superman, but *the beauty of the superman?*’ (10). To answer his own question, Bishop develops the rest of the chapter, grounding it on both Nietzsche’s aestheticising ethics and Jung’s idea of the shadow—developed throughout an entire tradition: from the Hermetic, Kabbalistic and Neoplatonic schools, through alchemy and Gnosticism, to European mysticism. Finally, Bishop highlights the centrality of the pregnancy theme in Nietzsche’s idea of the *Übermensch*, whose announcement is ‘analogous to that of the Old Testament God’, but aims at replacing ‘the divine’. Bishop concludes: ‘Because he represents a totality, the superman is beautiful, hence it is *the beauty of the superman that came to Zarathustra as a shadow*. Beauty is totality; it is both light and dark, both illumination and shadow, both good and evil’ (62-63).

“‘Never Cease Chiselling’. Statues and Self-Sculpting’ is the title of the second chapter, which dwells on the idea of self-sculpting. In ‘On the Blissful Islands’, Nietzsche wrote that Zarathustra saw ‘an image sleeping in the stone, the image of [his] visions’ (Nietzsche 1978: 111). The ‘sequence VISION TO ACTION via QUESTIONING and RESOLUTION’ constitutes the core of Bishop’s investigation (79). Such an investigation explores the meaning of sculpture and statues in Platonism, Neoplatonism, Christian Mysticism, Italian Renaissance, Enlightenment, German Idealism—wherein Bishop, loyal to his own idea, places Nietzsche as well—, Klages, Cassirer, Manly P. Hall, Heidegger and finally Jung. Again, the author sees continuity between ‘the path of ascent (Plato)’, the alchemical transformation of ‘the *materia prima* into the Philosopher’s Stone’ and Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*: ‘[t]aken together, these ideas constitute a persistent appeal to their reader to embark on the path of self-transformation as well’ (129).

In chapter 3, ‘Shadows or Forms. Life and the Ideal’, this very idea of self-transformation is taken up through a comparison between ‘On the Blissful Islands’ and Schiller’s poem ‘The Ideal and Life’ [Das Ideal und das Leben] (1795). Here, Bishop notes how Schiller shifted from the first working title ‘The Kingdom of the Shadows’ [Das Reich des Schattens], to ‘The Kingdom of the Forms’ [Das Reich der Formen], to the final one, in order to point out the closeness between shadows, forms, ideal

life and beauty—not only in Schiller’s thought, but in the whole tradition he is examining. Again, what is common to Schiller and Nietzsche is the necessity of sculpting to bring the image to reality, while rising up ‘into the aesthetic realm’ (154). So, Bishop concludes, ‘[r]ead in the light of Schiller’s poem[...] Zarathustra’s reference to “the beauty of the superman” coming to him “as a shadow” can be seen as an example of rhetorical repetition, for the *shadow* (in the Schillerian sense) *is beauty*’ (165).

The last chapter of *On the Blissful Island with Nietzsche and Jung, ‘Journey’s End. Platonic, Nietzschean, and Jungian Attitudes to the Body’*, focuses on the role of the body in Plato, Nietzsche and Jung. As opposed to many scholars, Bishop sees not only continuity in Nietzsche’s understanding of the body and Plato’s, but also ‘*affinities*’ between the two, founded in the notion of ‘hierarchy’ (204). Bishop concludes his argument by unveiling a lexicological connection in German between ‘power’ [Macht] and ‘to do’ [machen], which he extends to ‘love’ and ‘beauty’: ‘ultimately the will to power is the will to love; and its highest expression is—beauty’ (208). In this sense Jung comes back in the discourse with the inscription ‘love never ends’ on the crown brought by the ‘white bird’ at the end of *Liber Novus* (Jung 2009: 326). According to Bishop, *Liber Novus* and analytical psychology must be understood as ‘a new kind of *vitalist aesthetics*’—re-articulating the old ‘relation between life and love’ (209).

With these three big claims Bishop makes his point very clearly: ‘Beauty is totality’ (63); ‘the *shadow* [...] *is beauty*’ (165); love is beauty and, by extension, life (209). Such claims are held together by the idea of ‘self-transformation’, which undoubtedly plays a major role in both Nietzsche’s and Jung’s thoughts. Exploring how that very idea originates in such a wide philosophical and literary tradition is helpful as well as fascinating. Bishop’s writing style, which courses freely along a wide swath of the history of Western thought, requires an in-depth familiarity with continental philosophy, German literature and classical studies. This is not a book for first-time readers of Nietzsche or Jung—nor for someone not fully steeped in German and classical literature and philosophy.

Moreover, despite Bishop’s extensive knowledge of both Nietzsche and the German language, to endorse his hypotheses, he sometimes draws on *The Will To Power*. This is a book that Nietzsche decided not to publish—despite the many plans he had drawn up—and which was released after his death, compiled by his sister and Peter Gast (Heinrich Köselitz), with omissions and substitutions, based on their own ethical principles. Since all of Nietzsche’s *Nachlaß* is

freely accessible online and easy to consult, the question needs to be posed as to why Bishop would prefer to cite this questionable source.

Lastly, despite the plausibility of Bishop's argument, Jung's interest in creating 'a new kind of *vitalistic aesthetics*' is implied throughout but never explicitly proven. Such a reading, however, can open up new perspectives in the exegesis of Jung and of his literal and philosophical sources, which can really enrich the history of analytical psychology.

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