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The Halcyon and the Anthropocene

Gary Shapiro

In 1873 Nietzsche wrote a famous fable about the human intellect and its place in nature. It begins:

In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been poured, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and mendacious minute in "world-history"; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die.

Today Nietzsche could have added this: well before the sun consumed itself and the planet froze, these all too clever animals deployed their invention of cognition to devise tools, construct engines, overpopulate the earth, make war upon one another on industrial scale, detonate atomic weapons, pollute lakes, rivers and oceans, turn forests into wastelands, and exhaust much of the soil. They burned trillions of tons of other animals' fossils, overloading the air with carbon. They overheated their habitat, provoking the sixth great extinction of earthly life, pushing their vaunted civilization to a precarious brink, subjecting many to flood,

drought, starvation, and disease. *Long* before the planet froze, the few survivors declared science and technology to be forbidden practices. "World-history," if remembered at all, was seen as a sinful episode for which their shrinking populations would be atoning until they too disappeared.

Is it too late now to pledge loyalty to the Earth?

In the late nineteenth century only a few isolated voices speculated about the possibility of human-induced climate change and holistic environmental ruin. Max Weber thought the capitalist juggernaut would rule until it burnt the last bit of fossil fuel. Yet he didn't anticipate climate change. Did Nietzsche suspect anything of what we see now? We find a few tantalizing suggestions. In notebooks from around 1882, when composing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he wrote:

"Man soll das Böse schonen, wie man das Wald schonen soll. Es ist wahr, das durch das Lichten und Ausroden des Waldes die Erde wärmer würde - -"

"We should save [or spare] the evil, as we should save the forest. It's true that the Earth will become warmer through thinning and clearing the forest - -" (KSA 10:191)

So global warming was not beyond the limits of his imagination. Later I want to come back to the theme of the forest. In the same year Nietzsche read and annotated books on human geography, notably Friedrich Ratzel's *Anthropo-Geographie* (1882).

There's another warning about the Earth in the *Zarathustra* chapter "*Von grosse Ereignisse*," where Nietzsche's hero tells the fire-hound "The Earth...has a skin; and this skin has diseases. One of these diseases is called, for example, 'humanity.'"

Now, we might say the skin-disease has so spread and embedded itself that the scarring is irreversible. Geologists name our era the Anthropocene. If humans were to disappear, whether swiftly or slowly, alien geologists, millions of years in the future, would still observe the Anthropocenic stratum that had been added to the others that it covers and mingles with. They would find evidence of the sixth great extinction of life and nuclear explosions.

In great contrast, the myth of the halcyon celebrates a supremely calm, nurturing, atmospheric surround. About thirty years ago I explored some ways in which this story haunted Nietzsche. He re-introduced the word "*halkyonisch*" into German after a lapse of two hundred years or so. He said that we'd fail to understand *Also sprach Zarathustra* unless we heard its halcyon tone. Tonight I want to try to think about Nietzsche's ideas of time and history, both in terms of this embedded halcyon mythos and in relation to the Anthropocene, which he did not see coming but might have been able to comprehend with his philosophical and imaginative resources.

First, then, briefly to the story. I don't need to remind you of Alcyone's sad narrative, her transformation along with her husband Ceyx into sea-birds, and the remarkable peace settling down on the Mediterranean at the winter solstice while she hatches her eggs in the amazing floating nest -- which some of antiquity's greatest minds testify to having examined. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* gives the fullest account. This is one of the poet's many stories showing "bodies transformed into other bodies," humans into animals or plants. This may be punishment, reward, or compensation. Sometimes, as with Alcyone or Daphne's re-embodiment as a tree, the transformation is a way of saving the person from death, rape, or other dangers. We might see a proto-evolutionary theme in Ovid, a poetic affirmation of the entanglement of humans with other life-forms. Before the Abrahamic monotheisms persuaded much of the world that humans were absolutely different from all other forms of life, pagans like Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Ovid intuited that these barriers are permeable. Evolutionary theory confirmed this, showing life forms morphing into new species, although gradually, without divine intervention. The gods' agency has been replaced by DNA. Humans can't be instantly transformed into mice, but we share 97% of our DNA with these rodents, who've become excellent subjects for testing medications that we might use ourselves. According to a novelist I'll soon be discussing "myths are basic truths twisted into mnemonics" (Overstory 162).

How odd that just when we begin to understand our massive entanglement with the natural world, we must wonder whether it's too late to preserve the metastable, shifting equilibria that condition human memory, history, and legend. Now as perpetrators and spectators of the sixth great extinction, we hope to preserve rare seeds and to clone extinct animals from their frozen remains. Hegel said that the owl of Minerva takes flight only at twilight. Philosophy paints its gray on gray when the shades of night are falling. We come to know where we've been and how we've gotten here, only when the process is complete and yielding to a new phase. The great idealist Hegel turned to a bird's story as he sought a metaphor for the hinge or caesura of past and future. Of course, he was speaking of a human history that he imagined as taking place in a relatively permanent natural setting.

Perhaps the halcyon myth owes something to the existence of a certain seasonal micro-climate in the Mediterranean Sea. A micro-climate is one form of what Gilles Deleuze would call an assemblage: a fortuitous combination of factors arising from various sources, converging to produce a noticeably distinctive event or thing. Meteorological phenomena - hurricanes for example - would be prime instances. Perhaps something like the calm Ovid envisioned in his account of Alcyone's solstitial breeding on the water actually obtained in his time. We know that the earth's micro-climates are being disrupted and scrambled. If the halcyon days really once prevailed on the Mediterranean, the new image of the Sea as a

perilous crossing for refugees - many spurred by climate change - seems more apt today.

Let's talk about the weather then - a topic of obsessive interest for Nietzsche, who called himself a human barometer and traveled nomadically with the seasons, seeking favorable seasonal climates. The climate is changing, the seas are rising, the probability of increased, more intensive storms is growing. The halcyon days are thought to be an unusual peaceful interlude in a more uncertain seasonal cycle. The conditions allowing humans to spread across the Earth, cultivating the land, pursuing technology, and concentrating themselves in mega-cities are on the verge of a tipping point. If any survivors remain after the feared collapse, they may look back on the 12,000 years or so between the last ice age and the disaster as the Earth's fleeting halcyon days. Some might dream of a recurrence to be repeated when the great hour glass of existence is turned over.

How might we begin to think this juxtaposition of the halcyon motif and the Anthropocene? One of these points to a mythical, cyclical pattern, the other to an irreversible stratum in a temporally linear geological accumulation. One involves conceptual and scientific analysis, the other is literary and imaginative. We might see an analogous contrast in two ways that Nietzsche writes about the Earth, its future and futurity. There is the great halcyonic landscape poem *Zarathustra* and its more prosaic, argumentative, negative version *Beyond Good and Evil*. Tonight I

want to comment on two recent books by different authors that approach the theme in these two ways, one more theoretical, one more imaginative (fortunately each is informed by the other mode). On the scientific side there is Bruno Latour's *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime* (2017). The more explicitly literary and imaginative work is Richard Powers's novel *The Overstory* 2018 (or *Die Wurzeln des Lebens*). I'll attempt to think Nietzsche's "great politics of the Earth" through these books.

Bruno Latour's conception of the Terrestrial is close to what Nietzsche calls the *Menschen-Erde*. Latour's Terrestrial is understood as a political attractor or focus, distinguished from the more conventional but now outdated poles of the Global and the Local. The Global is roughly the goal of neo-liberal policies and practices, as accelerated in recent decades. The aim is to subject as much of the Earth as possible to the regime of the market; resources, including human beings are to be exploited for the sake of maximum growth, with little or no regard for the consequences of generalized exploitation. The Global is the neo-liberal analogue of the *Welt* in Hegel's *Weltgeschichte* or Hartmann's *Weltprozess*. In reaction, many make a stand for the Local, defending regional traditions, customs, political and economic relations. But both Global and Local are impossible today. The Global project runs up against the disastrous consequences of unlimited growth. The Local has ceased to be a viable alternative. It no longer offers a secure refuge, disturbed

as it is by neo-liberal economic incursions and disruptions of land, air, and sea caused by unrestrained industrialism. The Terrestrial is the humanly inhabited Earth in its complexity, an Earth that reacts to human projects in unexpected, unpredictable ways. For Latour it is a question of scale. I quote:

It makes no sense to force the beings animating the struggling territories that constitute the Terrestrial back inside national, regional, ethnic, or identitary boundaries; nor does it make sense to try to withdraw from these territorial struggles so as to "move to the global level" and grasp the Earth "as a whole." The subversion of scales and of temporal and spatial frontiers defines the Terrestrial. This power acts everywhere at once, but it is not unifying. It is political, yes; but it is not statist. It is, literally, *atmospheric* (93; my emphasis).

As I read Nietzsche he develops similar critiques of both globalism and localism. In his second *Unmodern Observation*, he attacks the Global, ridiculing Eduard von Hartmann's notion of the *Weltprozess*, a peculiar amalgam of Hegelian philosophy of history and Schopenhauerian ethics. Hartmann thought that the modern world was humanity's last phase. For him it was powered by the attempt to achieve happiness through science, industry, and commerce. Writing in the 1860s Hartmann thought it likely that this process would be led by American oligarchs, which he called a "republican pyramid" with (doubtless) unconscious proleptic

irony This was the last great cultural and political attempt to achieve earthly happiness - a goal which Hartmann, as a Schopenhauerian, deemed to be impossible. This pessimistic analysis might be mapped onto current discontent with how the internet encourages work and commerce to colonize increasing swaths of daily life, while social media enable mobbing, deception, hysteria, and envious comparison with "friends" or "frenemies." If this is the Global, Nietzsche wants no part of it. In any case the claim that it's inevitable rests on eminently shaky ground. Yet we might say that he at least attended to Hartmann's raising the question of Earth's future direction.

In the same essay Nietzsche exhibits two apparently contrasting attitudes toward the Local. His analysis of the antiquarian mode of history, fixated on the regional and specific, explains how it can, at best, be a form of honoring and preserving a genuine heritage, yet may degenerate into mindlessly clutching the past's useless furniture. Here too Nietzsche explains beautifully how any genuine, original culture requires a nurturing, supportive *atmosphere* to take root and flourish. What happens then when we destroy the atmosphere? In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche deploys withering sarcasm, portraying the "blood and soil" advocates of his day as suffering from *Schollenkleberei*. He observes that European populations are increasingly nomadic as workers become adaptable to diverse employment in various settings - a point easily extended to other continents

and to intercontinental movements, including the migrations of political and climate refugees. Nietzsche deconstructs the binary opposition of Global and Local. Neither fulfills its promise. The way forward is not the glitzy promise of globalizing neo-liberalism or its negative version, the mass suicide envisioned by Hartmann. The Local is no longer what it claims to be and will never regain the aura with which nostalgia adorns it in the age of cascading climate change (so much the American *Hanswurst* president's slogan "Make America Great Again").

I've been suggesting that Latour's geo-ethics and geo-politics represents a latter day version of Nietzsche's great politics of the Earth. In *Nietzsche's Earth* I read Nietzsche in terms of a contrast between *Welt* and *Erde*. *Welt* is the world of world-history, composed of national states, their unity and destiny modeled on theological categories (as Carl Schmitt pointed out later). The *Erde* or *Menschen-Erde* is a plane of immanence, irreducibly plural, involving mobile populations and changing landscapes. To comprehend the contrast and fine tune our loyalty to the Earth, I examine Nietzsche's analytical categories such as the conceptual pairs of masses/multitude, state/nomad, mortgaged time/time of opportunity (*kairos*), garden/wasteland - variations on the contrast of world/earth. These concepts are especially prominent in *Beyond* and *Genealogy*.

Latour's manifesto coheres with this analysis. I'm pairing it with Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, asking you to think of a certain attunement with

Nietzsche's song of the earth, *Zarathustra*, and the halcyon motif. *Zarathustra* poses the opposition between the wasteland proclaimed by the *Wahrsager* and the garden revealed by eagle and serpent as waiting for the convalescent who's been struggling with his abysmal thought.

The Overstory, as the title suggests, operates on multiple levels. [TITLE] Set in the contemporary United States, it assembles a disparate set of men and women, coming from different places and backgrounds. All have life-changing experiences involving trees, and one group is brought together in the 1990s in the effort to save the great forests of America's Pacific Northwest from predatory logging interests. The characters are moved by their sense of the deteriorating natural environment, focusing on deforestation and accompanying ecological degradation. The wasteland here results from devastating tree disease and thoughtless logging; the garden is found in rich old forests with growths of great redwood trees on the Pacific coast. The main characters have in effect pledged their loyalty to the Earth. Some become environmental activists. They live in anarchic forest camps, demonstrate, are beaten and arrested. One pair lives for a year high up in the redwoods, blocking industrial timber pirates from felling them. They discover a surprisingly diverse ecosystem in the forest canopy - an overstory. A few turn to sabotage and arson, accidentally killing one of their group in a bombing. The group disperses knowing they are sought as environmental terrorists. One who lives

almost as a hermit is discovered by a US agent in deep disguise. He makes a problematic judgment to inform on just one of his group of five and that one, spotted by an informer at Occupy Wall Street, chooses life imprisonment rather than reveal any additional names.

One character, Patricia Westerford, is an ungainly young girl, partially deaf, and socially awkward. Her early love of plants is fostered by her father, an agricultural extension agent. When Patricia's fourteen, he gives her a young person's edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and she's transfixed by the first line: "Let me sing to you now, about how people turn into things." Patricia is especially fascinated by the stories of humans changing into trees: Daphne, the Maenads attacking Orpheus, Cyparissus, Myrrha, and especially Baucis and Philemon, "spending the centuries together as oak and linden, their reward for taking in strangers who turned out to be gods" (117). She reads the passage at her father's funeral. Eventually, Patricia becomes a forest botanist and dendrologist. She is a pioneer of a new tree science, a science we learn as we follow her research on the ground. The trees communicate rhizomatically with each other and with their ecological systems. Patricia writes:

Forests mend and shape themselves through subterranean synapses.
And in shaping themselves, they shape, too, the tens of thousands of
other, linked creatures that form it from within. Maybe it's useful to

think of forests as enormous, spreading, branching, underground super-trees. (218)

Nick Hoel grew up on an Iowa farm that's long been in the family. The gem on their land is a magnificent chestnut tree that somehow survives the blight eliminating its species from the continent. Eighty years ago Nick's ancestors began taking monthly photos of the tree. When assembled they form a flip-book condensing its impressive growth into a few minutes. After the rest of the family dies in a terrible accident, Nick turns to making "tree art," depicting trees or incorporating them into sculptures and paintings. In the meantime, on the eastern edge of the continent Olivia, a restless young woman living an aimless life, experiences near-death through electrocution. Now spectral voices summon her to travel West and dedicate herself to the ancient life at risk there. She encounters Nick on her cross-country drive, they join forces and arrive together in the Pacific Northwest as eco-activists.

Given the lecture form's constraints, I share these narrative snippets to provide an elementary sense of this long, sprawling book's complex system of roots and branches. These vignettes probably obscure two crucial dimensions of this imaginative novel of the Anthropocene. One is what we might call *The Overstory's* main character: the collective of trees and forests that enable thriving but threatened eco-systems and act as attractors for the diverse set of human beings

drawn to love and protect them. Nietzsche readers may want to think of these nine men and women as analogous in some ways to the eight Higher Humans who gather by their individual routes at Zarathustra's cave. Both groups are provoked by distress at the current state of the Earth.

A second dimension of *The Overstory* that's likely obscured by reducing it to conventional narrative is the transformation of the sense of time. The women and men intensely drawn to defense of the great trees become increasingly aware of how those forests' time-spans dwarf human lives. Their once predictable biographies and careers are thrown into disarray by threatened ecological disaster. Subtle ecological adjustments occurred over thousands of years. The clever animals' civilization registers as a blip between the last ice age and emerging climate change. The characters in the story begin to de-narrativize themselves, taking their individual lives to be the equivalent of milliseconds in Earth's long history, a history better recorded by geology and tree rings than in the written chronicles of human history. We hear Nietzschean resonances. Think of his contrast between parochial *Weltgeschichte* and the *longue durée* of *Hauptgeschichte* even with respect to the human race. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* enact analogous temporal transformations. Alcyone surrenders her one mortal human span as she becomes a bird species whose annual nesting cycle marks its recurrence. The humans who become trees, like Baucis and Philemon, will enjoy

millennia of contemplation or companionship. The eco-activists are lovers and loyalists of the Earth.

Adam Appich ends up in the anarchic camp as part of his doctoral psychology project. He's intrigued by the "bystander effect," human beings' tendency to recognize a severe problem while assuming someone else (perhaps time's mere passage) will supply a remedy. Why not study the few exceptions, those who don't passively accommodate themselves. Among the exceptional activists, *Adam* - so he's named - is initiated into a great *garden*, and joins a pair living high in the canopy. Life is precarious, dangerous, full of challenging tests and discovery. Simple human functions, like eating, sleeping, sex, and excretion become problematic and challenging. Naturally he is enthralled by the new form of life he experiences with them high in the forest canopy, joins their circle for a while, and after the fatal bomb accident returns to academia to build a satisfying university career and happy personal life. Ten years later the informer identifies him in a staged "chance" encounter at Occupy Wall Street. Sentenced to 140 years in prison, Adam refuses to shorten his sentence by revealing others. "He thinks: seventy plus seventy is nothing. A black willow plus a wild cherry. He was thinking oak. He was thinking Douglas-fir or yew. Seventy plus seventy. With reductions for good behavior he might even finish out the first half of the sentence just in time to die" (471). Earlier, the novel's unidentified narrative voice observes:

...people have no idea what time is. They think it's a line spinning out from three seconds behind them, then vanishing just as fast into the three seconds of fog just ahead. They can't see that time is one spreading ring wrapped around another, outward and outward until the thinnest skin of *Now* depends for its being on the enormous mass of everything that has already died (358).

Nietzsche too was negotiating many different times and speeds, and imagining more, in his years on the human earth. These temporal modes exist alongside the signature concept of eternal recurrence and are not displaced by it. His century's early years had already seen the consolidation of geological and paleontological discoveries of strata and fossils testifying to Earth's deep time. These prepared the way for Darwin's concrete account of evolution. As early as 1865 Nietzsche was wrestling with Hegel's *Weltgeschichte*, which he came to see as pretentious Eurocentric narcissism substituting itself for a fuller, more plural take on the past. Each of the *Unmodern Observations* aims at undercutting modernist metanarrative, whether Strauss's nationalistic triumphalism, Hartmann's bleak picture of modernity's melancholy realization, or the jabbering of journalists and "public intellectuals" who inflate the minor news of the day with gaseous meaning. In the last of this series, Nietzsche shifted to a new way of marking time by "great events," unexpected and unprecedented breaks introducing new eras.

Although he soon abandoned his identification of the latest "great event" with Wagner's supposed consolidation of Western culture, "great events" surface again in *Zarathustra's* eponymous chapter. In Nietzsche's texts we frequently encounter his respect for the slow growth of life and cultures, along with his realization that contemporary industrial society is becoming obsessed with Americanizing speed of growth, productivity, and a narrow efficiency.

Beyond Good and Evil is a prolegomenon to a philosophy of futurity, the *Zukunft*, which offers free spirits critical categories for understanding their present. It reminds them in Machiavellian fashion to vigilantly watch for the *kairos*, the opportune moment that must be seized by the forelock as it rushes by. In the *Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche argues that civilization is made possible by internalizing guilt and debt. To bear guilt that must be repented or debt that must be repaid is to mortgage one's time. Humans continue to be ingenious in devising such amortization schemes, even passing on the debt to successor generations. By the time of the *Genealogy*, and more acutely in *The Antichrist*, Nietzsche is increasingly aware of acceleration. I hazard the suggestion (elaborated elsewhere) that his reading of Dostoevsky, who was responding to Russia's accelerated version of European modernity, was a major factor in this newly hyperbolic sense of speed. As the former theology student and close friend of Franz Overbeck well knew, the Christian thematic of the Antichrist and what Paul enigmatically calls the

restraining force of the *katechon*, all have to do with speeding up and slowing down. Today's Accelerationist movement acknowledges Nietzsche's precedent but would probably be baffled to discover its roots in Russian Orthodoxy. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche spoke metaphorically of earthquakes shaking the cultural and political world; in the Anthropocene we daily observe a cascading series of earthquakes, storms, floods, and fires that constitute an earthly analogue of the Antichrist's coming.

So Nietzsche is no stranger to the time of the long run. His early notes on eternal recurrence propose that those transformed by the thought will now assume the task of teaching it over a period of millennia, a span equivalent to that needed for the growth of a great forest. Zarathustra compares the nurturing of his "children," those he's inspired, to the extended work of cultivating a "living plantation." His children are now "still becoming green for me in their first spring, standing close together and shaken in common by the winds, the trees of my garden and my finest soil." Eventually, he says, each of these tree children can be dug up and replanted "that it might learn solitude and defiance and caution" (III.3). When Zarathustra dreams of weighing the world it's "as if a tree waved to me, broad-branched, strong-willed, bent down like an arm-rest and even like a foot-rest for one weary of the way" (III.10.1). Let us live for the future in a grand tree, Zarathustra calls to his friends: "In the tree called *Zukunft* we build our nests;

eagles shall bring to us lonely ones victuals in their beaks!...like strong winds we would live above [the unclean], neighbors to eagles, neighbors to snow, neighbors to the sun" (II.6). These words evoke an atmosphere like that of the idyllic yet precarious sojourn of the eco-activists in the forest canopy. The free spirit is a "dweller in forests" (II.8). Indeed, *Zarathustra* is a book of trees and gardens planted with the future in mind. The rose-apples that Zarathustra anticipates from the trees he loves materialize in "The Convalescent," fetched by eagle and serpent who tell him that the world awaits him as a garden.

Nietzsche occasionally speculates about remaking some aspects of the Earth - cultivating his garden. An aphorism, in *The Wanderer and his Shadow* projects the possibility of a "great tree of humanity," an Earth organized in terms of "medical geography." Here individuals and groups could find the environments where they might best flourish, given their specific constitutions (WS 188-189). The "great tree" would be a green efflorescence of the planet, a great garden of extensive living space, an amalgam of environmentally conscious construction and reforestation. In *Nietzsche's Earth* I contextualize the thinker's garden ideas in relation to those heterotopias serving as crowning emblems of great civilizations, including dreamy architectural landscapes of Italian princes with vast views of countryside or sea, magnificence constructions like Versailles, or English

picturesque gardens with their intricacy and multiplicity of perspectives. Perhaps the coming garden will be a giant tree canopy over the Earth.

Could the *Übermensch* - the *Sinn der Erde* - be the gardener of Earth's great tree? As I read Nietzsche, we must exclude any Gnostic conception of the *Übermensch*. By a Gnostic conception, I mean one that would see the *Übermensch*, once constituted, as no longer having any necessary, essential involvement with the Earth.

[[One reviewer of *Nietzsche's Earth* says that I have elided or neglected the question of the *Übermensch*. I welcome the opportunity to clarify. To put it first as briefly as I can, I believe (1) that the concept of *Übermensch* is intrinsically open-ended, that it must be thought not simply as a future figure, but as a figure of futurity. (2) Any non-Gnostic conception of the *Übermensch* must articulate its relation to *Erde* and *Menschen-Erde*. It is not unusual for scholars and philosophers to avoid thinking Earth and *Übermensch* together, even though Nietzsche conjoins them in his premier book, an extended landscape poem or song of the earth. All too typically, the author of the article on "The Overman" in the 2013 *Oxford Handbook to Nietzsche* says *in passing* "I will have nothing to say about the overman being 'the meaning of the earth' or of humanity as presently constituted being a 'bridge' to the overman" (462).]]

Nietzsche's radical emphasis on futurity as real, open, and unpredictable is deeply central to his political thought, overshadowing any speculations about eugenics or the overman's specific characteristics. The *Übermensch*, should be understood in terms of Nietzsche's analysis of the limits of the concept of *Mensch*. In his genealogical discussion of promising and the economy of debt [*Schuld*] he derives *Mensch* from Sanskrit *manas*, meaning "measurer," suggesting that humans in the era of civilization (condition of the Anthropocene) have always been involved in mortgaging their future. Like *The Overstory's* eco-activists the *Übermensch* is free from the all too measured time of self-destructive civilization. Zarathustra's speech in the marketplace - and the Global is nothing but a marketplace - describes the last human as the one who makes the Earth small by measuring the immeasurable.

In contrast Zarathustra speaks of "new peoples" who will serve the sense of the Earth. They have comprehended futurity: "Unexhausted are the human and the human earth even now." The Earth itself, Zarathustra prophesies, will yet become a "site of convalescence" (I.22.2). "On Old and New Tablets" pronounces this about the future, using the provocation of the earthquake: "it will not be long before *new peoples* arise and new sources rush downwards into new depths. For the earthquake - that covers many wells with debris, and creates much languishing; but it also brings inner strengths and secrets up to the light. The earthquake makes manifest new sources" (III.12.25). We can read the shaking of the Earth as any

major change or convulsion, events that scramble our situation, confronting us with the precarity of the customary and the unexpected opportunities suddenly revealed.

[[Let's return to the chapter "*Von grosse Ereignisse*" in *Zarathustra*. Alain Badiou says it's the most important in Nietzsche's testament. Zarathustra is rumored to have descended into a perpetually smoking island volcano, on one of those islands that emerge explosively from the sea. The setting is the fiery alternative to, the flipside of the peaceful scene conjured by the halcyon's story. This island is not far from the Blessed Isles, making the contrast even more explicit. This chapter is clearly marked by the Earth's precarity, its permanent possibility of shaking and smoking - thus the local legend that it's the gateway to hell. Zarathustra denies that he was the flying figure seen entering the volcanic cone - eventually he says it must have been his shadow. Badiou does not connect this chapter to Nietzsche's talk elsewhere of a "great event of the earth," but surely the context invites us to. When Zarathustra reappears after mysteriously disappearing for five days, he relates his conversation with the "fire-hound," whom he accuses of bellowing about "great events," that require the confusion of fire and smoke. Yet the fire-hound, a parodic version of the political agitator, is at best the ventriloquist of the earth, pretending to speak for it, as states, kings, and churches pretend to speak "from the belly of things," the order of being while spreading confusion with bellowing and smoke. Zarathustra speaks of another fire-hound one

who "really speaks from the heart of the earth. He exhales gold and golden rain, he laughs rather than bellows, taking all this from the heart of the earth, not its gurgling intestines. The crucial truth to gather from all of this is that "the heart of the Earth is of gold."

Tonight I won't pursue this story's various literary and legendary associations, which would take us to tales of Empedocles on Etna or Nietzsche's boyhood reading of Justus Kerner. I will emphasize rather the contrast Nietzsche draws between the superficiality of the conventional political agitator and the deep Earth, which has the power to overwhelm the bellowing fire-hound and, we can infer, to counteract the human skin disease on its surface. Reading this episode against the parable of the clever animals in "On Truth and Lie," we could take it as a resolute expression of loyalty to the Earth, a trust that if we can see the Earth for what it is, beyond the *Zeitgeschwätz* of parties and newspapers, we will understand that it does indeed have a future beyond states and churches, beyond peoples and fatherlands.]]

Will the overhumans be men and women dwelling in the overstory, in the great tree of humanity? I mean this as an *open* question, not a conclusion. Will there be other metamorphoses beyond the camel, lion, and child that Zarathustra announces? In a late expedition in a Brazilian jungle Patricia Westerford, the

Overstory's pioneering tree scientist encounters a remarkable tree whose bark has mysteriously and naturally assumed a woman's face and form. She thinks of such phenomena as "Memories posted forward from people standing on the shore of the great human departure from everything else that lives" (394). Later we see Patricia, now aged and infirm, at what may be her last lecture. After laying out the coming terrors of climate change, she hesitates before the audience, pondering whether she should conclude by taking fatal poison she's prepared from forest substances. Patricia has completed her work. As Zarathustra says, it's important to die at the right time and that death be celebrated with new festivals. The novel wisely leaves us free to imagine both endings.