



## *Flamme bin ich sicherlich* – Flame am I...: To Eternity

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**Abstract:** Krzysztof Michalski's *The Flame of Eternity: An Interpretation of Nietzsche* although engaging the Nietzschean themes of the body, eros, the soul, life and death, *amor fati* and nihilism, as well as the overhuman, oversprings Nietzsche's readings or scholarship on the same in order instead to institute Michalski's own Christian and literary more than exclusively philosophical account. Where scholars (and believers) like Biser, Birault, Valadier, as well as the late Ernest Fortin and indeed Pierre Hadot, were able to engage Nietzsche's text, Michalski's flame dances in his own light.

**Keywords:** Michalski, Krzysztof; Nietzsche, Friedrich; eternity; nihilism; eternal recurrence; *amor fati*; Overhuman; *Übermensch*.

...Here we stand as the Virgins Seven,  
For our celestial bridegroom yearning;  
Our hearts are lamps forever burning,  
With a steady and unwavering flame,  
Pointing upward, forever the same,  
Steadily upward toward the heaven!  
– Longfellow, *Christus: A Mystery*

*Ecce Homo*  
Ja, ich weiß, woher ich stamme,  
Ungesättigt gleich der Flamme  
Glühe und verzehr' ich mich.  
Licht wird alles was ich fasse,  
Kohle alles, was ich lasse,  
Flamme bin ich sicherlich.  
– Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

Give heed unto the Flame.  
If lamps are burning dim,  
The Bridegroom when he comes,  
Who shall distinguish him?  
– *The Cherubic Wanderer*

Krzysztof Michalski's *The Flame of Eternity* is subtitled *An Interpretation of Nietzsche*.<sup>1</sup> It is an admirable book in

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<sup>1</sup> Krzysztof Michalski, *The Flame of Eternity: An Interpretation of Nietzsche's Thought*, trans. Benjamin Paloff, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. [Henceforth cited as *FE*]

that it has an excellent publisher (someone at Princeton liked it), it is well-translated but it is not quite about Friedrich Nietzsche nor, and this is just as a corollary, does it attempt to contribute to Nietzsche scholarship in the academic sense.

At the same time, Michalski's book highlights the

ongoing challenge of Nietzsche's thought that remains the problem of nihilism today. I mean, and this is patent in Michalski, what we take to be nihilism today – and this we may regard as the true force of positive thinking – is more Norman Vincent Peale style of positive thinking rather than new age, Oprah Winfrey, or Deepak Chopra style; whereby the problem with nihilism is simply that it is negative. This means that a negatively critical (i.e., skeptical) thinker like David Hume disquiets us, while an acknowledgedly critical philosophy, for example in the spirit of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, does not seem quite so disturbing.

Nietzsche famously argues that we go wrong in this regard, and it will do to unpack his claim that with a few the critical exceptions, few scholars have really understood what follows from Kant's writing not only for philosophy but also for the sciences, especially the natural and formal sciences, particularly logic and mathematics. As Nietzsche makes this epistemological point in his notes: "if the sciences are correct, we no longer stand on Kant's foundation yet if Kant is correct, then the sciences are not correct."<sup>2</sup>

Thus Nietzsche writes that:

indeed it seems to me as if Kant really cut to the living core and radically transfigured only the rarest human beings at all. To be sure, as we can read everywhere, the work of this quiet scholar unleashed a revolution in all fields of intellectual inquiry, but I cannot believe it.<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche's earlier point, cited above from his unpublished notes regarding the natural sciences (themselves traditionally taken to be the inspiration for Kant's revolutionary program in philosophy) is that Kant's solution ultimately works at their expense. Here Nietzsche both criticizes and praises Kant to the extent that for Nietzsche, to put science itself in question turns out to be the ultimate challenge of and for critical thinking. Following the Kantian enlightened ideal, one takes nothing – science included, science especially – on authority.

Nietzsche goes on to cite Heinrich von Kleist's description of the moral effects of the Kantian revolution

in epistemology, as Kleist writes in a letter to a friend:

We cannot decide whether what we call truth really is truth, or whether it only appears to us to be such. If the latter is the case, then the truth we collect here is nothing upon our death, and all our efforts to procure a possession that will follow us to the grave are in vain...<sup>4</sup>

Nietzsche's claim here is that very few scholars, apart from a Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi in philosophy or a Kleist in poetry, are as struck in fact as we should be today, given that very literally and on the good authority of science, the sun itself has been unchained from the earth, and the sun and earth and all its other planets spun out into the stars. Whither? Nietzsche asks in his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Have we not really lost all orientation?, any and every sense of direction, along with traditional values of right and wrong, God in his heaven, and a clear sense of the nature of the human being, his end and destiny, along with every sense of up and down?<sup>5</sup>

Nihilism is nothing more than a devaluation of the highest values, a deposing of the sense of the divine as the ultimate origin and purpose of life. But if, as Kleist pointed out, everything that we have valued in this life comes to nothing at the end, we really ought to be appalled, overwhelmed with nausea at the ultimate meaninglessness of it all: Everything, as the poet says, in vain.

The problem is that there is no point either to the will or to willing and yet this pointlessness, news takes time to travel Nietzsche says, has no impact on the human, the unfinished animal, the boundlessly willing animal (enter Blaise Pascal and Krzysztof Michalski, at the ready to tell us, as Maurice Blondel also did, that this our desire for the eternal is also our sure ticket to the same). For Nietzsche, as easily as we can will eternity, the human being would really loathe as not will nothing rather than not will at all. As with science, as with mathematics, as with any logic, it can really go either way.

Karl Jaspers noted roughly at the same time that Martin Heidegger also drew attention to this problem of nihilism precisely as a problem of knowledge, the strange and uncanny guest knocking the door of our modern, precisely rational world, asks us to attend to what Nietzsche would call the ultimate consequences

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, Berlin: de Gruyter 1980. [Henceforth cited as KSA with volume number. All translations of Nietzsche are by the author unless noted otherwise.] Here *Vol. 7, Nachgelassene Fragmente 1869-1874*, 19 [125], p. 459.

<sup>3</sup> *KSA 1, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen III, "Schopenhauer als Erzieher,"* §3, p. 355.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 355-6. See also *KSA 1, Die Geburt der Tragödie*, §15, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> I allude here to Nietzsche's questions as he poses these in his discussion of science and the ascetic ideal in his *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, *KSA 5*, §25, pp. 402ff.

or implications of living in a world; as we have lived in a world not merely since Charles Darwin in Nietzsche's century and Werner Heisenberg in Heidegger's and Jaspers' and indeed Michalski's era of the last century, but of the astronomer and mathematician Nicolaus Copernicus. Thus Nietzsche traces the Kantian implications of Kant's own self-described Copernican revolution in his short history of an illusion.

Today one might be pleased, enlightened as modern societies claim to be, to get beyond Plato, Christianity, even Kant himself, to embrace positivism along with the only religion that matters in our day, namely the religion of science. Ironically, science, like religion, will not tolerate two masters, which is also to say that science will not tolerate any other God than itself. As scientific as society is today, we find ourselves accordingly committed to the rule, the conventions, the assumptions of nothing but scientism. Nonetheless, once we have done with the ideal world of the ancients and certain medieval visions of truth, once we find ourselves beyond the world of the heaven of ideas, beyond even the ideal of heaven itself, Nietzsche reminds us that we are from being able to claim that we have landed safely and solely in the phenomenal world.

Modern as we are, with in all our faith in science, we have forgotten the key supposition Kant never neglected to make with his Copernican revolution or turn: the world as it is apart from us is beyond our ken, beyond any possible claim to know or to resolve. But knowing that what we know is merely phenomenal we have a sure chance of knowing as René Descartes also emphasized and Edmund Husserl would reprise this same point: this is the world *as* it appears to us, the world *as* we are conscious of it. And if it turns out that that is no more than an *apparent* world, no more than a *phenomenal* world, well then, Nietzsche too would say, fine and good—so much the better—it is at the very least and with certainty *the* phenomenal world. But with the loss of the true world with our sacrifice of the metaphysical, the noumenal, Nietzsche reminds us that we have also sacrificed the phenomenal world as well. The two are correlative notions: without the true world, the apparent world does not remain, it, like the "true world," is an illusion.

Nihilism is thus the real problem of our day: the age of reason and science in the age of the death of god. Thus no matter our own personal confidence that we believe (or that we do not believe) what remains after the true world, the philosopher's world, the metaphysician's

world, becomes an illusion, is nothingness. In our time as it was in Jaspers' time and indeed in Heidegger's, this is nothing, and this nothingness is a danger. Such an emphasis is also evident in Michalski's focus on nihilism and value, especially the existential value of the soul's journey on this earth, through the times of a lifetime, through experiences and judgments, perspectives and memories, is also a journey unto death,<sup>6</sup> a journey Kierkegaard called a sickness unto death, as Kierkegaard already had persuaded, indeed a believer's sense of being a stranger in the world, separated from what he took to be his true home in the beyond.

Michalski traces the soul's longing from the start, and this attests to the lyrical existentialism of the book, but he especially attends to this in the final sections of the book, as can be seen in the titles of the antepenultimate and penultimate chapters, *The Flame of Eternity*, *Eternal Love*, and most patently perhaps his final chapter, entitled, *Our Insatiable Desire for More Future: The Eternal Return of the Same*.

To this extent, rather than regretting that he does not engage Nietzsche more, Michalski's readers, even academic readers, will likely find this independence from Nietzsche's thinking and its correlated innocence of the literature—associated with Nietzsche scholarship that has gathered about Nietzsche in the more than a century since his death—a decided strength. Michalski's book might have been better titled *Skirmishes and Arrows of a Religious Reader*. For this study is written in a lyric and protestant spirit—regardless of how dissonant this terminology may appear in connection with such a Catholic thinker, after all, Michalski was, a friend of sorts with the former Pope John Paul II—a spirit that reads, *sola scriptura*, Nietzsche without guiderails or "bannisters" as Hannah Arendt would say, to quote the subtitle of Tracy Strong's recent *Politics without Vision: Thinking Without a Banister*.<sup>7</sup> Where Michalski uses only

<sup>6</sup> I was not acquainted with Krzysztof Michalski (1948–2013) and was unaware of Professor Michalski's illness when reading his *The Flame of Eternity* and yet, just as the text of my commentary suggests, I guessed at something of the kind just from reading. When Tom Rockmore met me at the 2012 Eastern APA in Atlanta as we both walked into an empty basement room that had the silence of the final moments after a farewell concerto, I was sorry if not surprised to learn that Michalski was gravely ill.

<sup>7</sup> Arendt's own reference is patently drawn from Kant's *What is Enlightenment* where he asks us, as he asks his own Prince at the time, to consider what is required for the genuine task of self-government, maturity, as opposed to the "tutelage" one relegates to oneself in its place. Cf. here on Kant in

his own good sensibility as a guide he certainly hopes that the reader will not depend upon his or her own resources but follow his reflections instead. Michalski means to provide others with the guidelines he himself did not require.

More conscientiously than most, Michalski offers us a book representing Michalski's Nietzsche, so that if it was popular to say of Heidegger's interpretations of Kant, or Hegel, or Aristotle, or indeed Nietzsche that these interpretations did not necessarily remain true to Kant, Hegel, Aristotle, or indeed Nietzsche that they were in any case, excellent Heidegger. So too *The Flame of Eternity* proves to be excellent Michalski.

As it turns out, Heidegger in fact is much more of a philological philosopher than his critics claimed, just as Jaspers was (and as Nietzsche would have recommended to each one of us). One can learn a good deal about Kant and even Nietzsche from Heidegger's interpretations, just to stay with the case of Nietzsche (though I would also emphasize that this applies equally to Kant and Descartes, Hegel and Aristotle) and Derrida was among the first to be brave enough to acknowledge that especially in Nietzsche's case, Heidegger's Nietzsche offers insightful explication in addition to advancing his own thought.

To say this is not to say that Michalski does not emphasize a number of authors as he does include discussion of Emil Cioran, D. H. Lawrence, and Leszek Kołakowski and still others albeit fairly more abstemiously. In addition, and although he does not cite him in his text, he does point to the hermeneutic principle *sine qua non*, as my own teacher Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasized this, including his remonstrance that "to understand a given thinker requires one to presuppose that he is right" (*FE xi*).

The presupposition that Michalski himself is right—and this is the working power of Michalski's rhetorical point in using this citation from Gadamer in a text otherwise innocent of Gadamer's influence—is indispensable for anyone who means to read this book with profit. For the most part, this is to say that Michalski writes as a teacher in an existential-confessional mode, and as a spiritual guide. The latter means that Michalski takes the reader along with him on the course of his own reflections, reflections in which he has, however curiously or marvelously drawn upon Nietzsche. I

say curiously or marvelously deliberately for what Michalski does in his book sidesteps Nietzsche's own concerns to raise concerns more appropriate for a his own project of offering a spiritual-religious guide.

Now it is not as if there is any shortage of authors who write on Nietzsche and religion as the concern itself also runs through the work of the philosopher who is also called the "Death of God" philosopher, by which I mean authors even more engaged with Nietzsche and theology (like the priest philosophers such as Eugen Biser or the Jesuit scholar Paul Valadier) more engaged than the American theologian, Tom Altizer who is also known as the Death of God theologian in this spirit but to whose work Nietzsche is even more peripheral than Nietzsche is to Michalski (although some readers will wish to invert that ranking, as Altizer is rigorous enough to think the *deus absconditus* notion to its end, as Nietzsche arguably also does and Michalski himself takes this up without finding anything in this or related themes might change his reading in any way).

For Michalski is charmed by names one otherwise learns only in history books, including certain New England transcendentalists (though these are not cited here either)—and maybe his sojourn in Boston is to account for this, for along the banks of the Charles one is charmed by New England itself. And yet one can read Michalski's reflections on the body, and even the erotic though and unlike Nietzsche, Michalski's reflections on love seem in a tiny hurry to get to the agapic, rather in the spirit of Plato's Sophocles asked about erotic longing, asked as we read in the beginning lines of the Republic if he could still enjoy a woman, [in those days mercifully innocent of Viagra], the poet replied instead that he was only too glad to be free of that same frenzy as a liberation from a brutal master.<sup>8</sup>

It has taken another poet, a woman herself, Anne Carson to underline the extent to which Plato's joke (or for some, Plato's simile) is no throw away. In her *Eros, the Bittersweet*,<sup>9</sup> she reminds us that the Greek *glukopikron*, sweet bitter, conveys the working of erotic passion and that the Greeks regarded it with anxiety: keenly aware that, as Carson puts it, and all-too literally: "eros can split the mind in two" (*EB 3*). Or as she cites Sappho's lyric on this topic

Eros once again limb-loosener whirls me  
sweetbitter, impossible to fight off, creature stealing up

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Frances Macdonald Cornford, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1964, 329c.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. [Henceforth cited as *EB*]

context, Tracy B. Strong, *Politics without Vision: Thinking Without a Banister*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, pp. 24ff and again, with reference to Arendt, p. 325ff.

Or as the Roman love poet, Catullus puts it, encapsulating Carson's affective thesis:

*Odi et amo. quare id faciam. fortas requiris.  
nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.*

I hate and I love. why? you might ask.

I don't know. But I feel it happening and I hurt. [EB 6]

It is one of Nietzsche's favorite poets, Archilochus, the poet as he reminds us in *The Birth of Tragedy* that the Greeks esteemed equal to Homer—an uncanny valuation, and one that for Nietzsche underlines the difference between the Greeks' value-thinking and contemporary Western values—Archilochus, whose poetizing really did "do things with words," as Archilochus scorned by some girls he admired, wrote verse about them of such execrable force that it drove the two sisters and their father to suicide.

Oh comrade, the limb-loosener [λυσιμελες] crushes me: desire.<sup>10</sup>

This crushing, shattering is also what Nietzsche also means when he writes of philosophizing with a hammer. Let us hear Anacreon (Fragment 413):

μεγάλον δὴ τέ μ' Ἔρως ἔκοψεν ἵστε χαλκεύς  
πέλεκτει, χειμεριῶ δ' ἔλουσεν χαράδρον

With his huge hammer, again, Eros knocked me like a blacksmith

And doused me in a wintry ditch. [EB 7]

Unlike Anacreon, Michalski's notion of love and eros and even his distant (and very heteroerotic and arguably masculine) reflection on woman and the body, is much rather a played out eros, an eros that has run its course, closer to Sophocles as Plato quotes him in Cephalus' discourse in *The Republic*. Michalski's emphasis on eternity (and his preoccupation, as it appears, with his own death) illuminates his own subtext and while it falls short of some of Nietzsche's best and most uncanny insights about the body, about women, about men, about sexuality (as I read Nietzsche), Michalski's account shows traces, as I hear it, of what New England transcendentalist sensibilities may have left on his thinking or else via a resonant coincidence with his own sensibilities. Still we do well to quote Robert Browning's *Rabbi ben Ezra*:

To man, propose this test—  
Thy body at its best,

How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

One could argue that Michalski's book offers a prose version of Browning's poem and its emphases, illustrated by the poems' own *incipit* or first lines:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, "A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!"

### Michalski's Nietzsche

Nietzsche's style is inductive and almost all of Nietzsche's readers tend to write, or to wish to write as he does, or in a key that seems to be the same at least as they perceive it. (Nietzsche seemed to have sensed this danger and peppered his writing by saying, as he does in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, but by no means only there: "This — is now MY way, — where is yours?")

Here, in this section from *Zarathustra* entitled *On the Spirit of Gravity*, Nietzsche's emphasis is remonstrative, didactic. He is writing here as he writes throughout *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* for those who do not hear him.

So he begins:

My mouthpiece — is of the people: too harsh and cordially speak I for Angora rabbits. And even more alien sounds my word unto all ink-fishes and pen-foxes.

My hand — is a fool's hand: woe to all tables and walls, and whatever still has a place for fool-scratchings, fool-scrrawlings!<sup>11</sup>

Nietzsche whose *Book for All and None* is constantly compared to the gospels and read as if it were a lost book of the *New Testament*, another relation of the Good News, i.e., the gospel according to Thomas, the gospel, as it were, according to Zoroaster, is however not accidentally named for a prophet whose words predate the words of the savior, and whose words were not heard, are not heard. Indeed, today's Parsis are facing extinction as an ethnic community — not merely as a casualty of the war on raptors which is a side-effect of the modern, industrialized agriculture, as modern technologically adumbrated methods poison pests and a good deal else that does not simply succumb as

<sup>10</sup> EB 8. Here Carson cites Martin Litchfield West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci ante Alexandrum Cantati*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, p. 196.

<sup>11</sup> KSA 4, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, III, "Vom Geist der Schwere," §1, p. 241.

a result of pollution, industrial contaminants, so that vultures, the birds that eat dead animals turn out to be particularly vulnerable—but these same Zoroastrians have been threatened from the start: arguably more heresies may be connected with Zoroastrianism than anything else, which means more persecutions—and all of it with a good conscience to match.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, and in addition to the key question of recurrence and that is the emphasis on sameness, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra teaches this doctrine—and just to this extent Zarathustra is no prophet of eternity—what is missing in large part in Michalski's reading is the spirit of Nietzsche's perspectivalism. Hence although Michalski correctly distinguishes what he calls as conventionally as any reader of Nietzsche, Nietzsche's "perspectivism" from relativism and totalitarian or absolutist thinking—I distinguish both these points a bit more carefully in my book on *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science*—what he does not attend to is the point of Nietzsche's attention to perspective, his perspective, as it were, on perspective:

By divers ways and windings did I arrive at my truth;  
not by one ladder did I mount to the height where  
mine eye rove into my remoteness.

And unwillingly only did I ask my way—that was  
always counter to my taste! Rather did I question and  
test the ways themselves.

A testing and a questioning hath been all my  
travelling:—and verily, one must also LEARN to answer  
such questioning! That, however,—is my taste:

—Neither a good nor a bad taste, but MY taste, of  
which I have no longer either shame or secrecy.

"This—is now MY way,—where is yours?" Thus did I answer  
those who asked me "the way." For THE way—it doth not exist!<sup>13</sup>

### Thus Spake Zarathustra

As Michalski reads Nietzsche the reader takes a tour through Michalski's animadversions—he refers to himself on occasion, an "imitatio Krzysztof" or, I was

speaking quite soberly when I said that this was a lyrical book, a book that, and to use Nietzsche's own definition of the lyrical as he explicates this genre in his book on tragedy, a book that says I and does I at all turns.

What this does not mean in Michalski's case, as Nietzsche once said of Schopenhauer by contrast, is that Michalski writes for himself. Indeed and as this is a book written as a testament, Michalski writes to be read. Thus we read of the author's sense of the differences between men and women rather than reading an analysis of Nietzsche on the same theme (as Nietzsche for his part confounds prejudices), Michalski trots on to cite Franz Kafka who simply "knows" what women think, as Nietzsche would seem also to know what women think or why they marry or why they write literature.

It matters, I should say in order to frame Nietzsche's own point that the "stupid," or "stupidity" is just about Michalski's favorite word in his book. And it is this word that Nietzsche uses not only and significantly, repeated three times for good measure with respect to science, but with reference to his own claims regarding women in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the book following *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which framed as it is between *The Gay Science* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, is thus a kind of sandwich, Nietzsche's gift to us, his Trojan horse.

Michalski pays no attention to this. Instead his reading reads between Nietzsche's texts and contexts without considering that they might have been coordinated by an extraordinary writer, a writer that as Gottfried Benn claimed, and I know this because Gadamer cited it once and it so captivated my attention when he did that I have spent my life as a scholar thinking about it: namely, that Nietzsche's status as an author was at least for some to be ranked alongside Martin Luther and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Let me list the triad: Luther—Goethe—Nietzsche.

A hell of a claim, one might say, and it is worth thinking about in any discussion, but especially with reference to a book like Michalski's as his book is targeted as it is "between" Nietzsche and other literary authors, just because Gottfried Benn's judgment, and accordingly Gadamer's judgment declares that a man who died in 1900, the year Gadamer was born, would also be of the most significant authors of the German language. At the very least, I take this to mean that we do well to pay attention to Nietzsche's writing style and to the order of the books he writes, not least as his own legacy on that matter, his *Ecce homo*, his auto-bibliography would seem to suggest that he himself held this view. For better or for worse and this matters for Michalski given the epigraph

<sup>12</sup> See here See Emil Abegg, "Nietzsches Zarathustra und der Prophet des alten Iran" in *Nietzsche. Conférences prononcées à Genève sous les auspices de la Fondation Marie Gretler*, Erlenbach-Zürich: E. Rentsch 1945, 64-82. See for further discussion on the complex heritage of Zoroastrianism, Babette Babich, "Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Parodic Style: On Lucian's Hyperanthropos and Nietzsche's Übermensch," *Diogenes* 58/4 (November 2011 / March 2013), 58-74.

<sup>13</sup> KSA 4, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, III, "Vom Geist der Schwere," §2, p. 245.

Nietzsche sets to this book as this is a testimony to nothing less than the illumination, the light, the flame, if Michalski wishes, of eternity.

But to return to men and women, to what Nietzsche calls his "unteachable right down deep,"<sup>14</sup> arguing that "anytime a cardinal problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable 'this I am'" (ibid.)—meaning, and Freud would learn much from this observation, that what we say about such cardinal problems is a self-confession, a self-announcement and perhaps as Nietzsche argued, a sign-post to ourselves. Thus Nietzsche writes

about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn but only finish learning—only discover ultimately how this is "sedimented deep within himself." At times we find certain solutions of problems that inspire strong faith in *us*; some call them henceforth *their* "convictions." Later—we see them only as steps to self-knowledge, signposts to the problem we *are*—rather, to the great stupidity we are, to our spiritual fatum, to what is *unteachable* right "down deep." [ibid.]

And what Nietzsche gives with one hand, he takes away with the next:

After this abundant civility that I have just evidenced in relation to myself I shall perhaps be permitted more readily to state a few truths about "woman as such"—assuming that it is now known from the outset how very much these are after all only—*my* truths. [ibid.]

Michalski for his part cites only what Kafka knows, as he "knows" everything about "the young women in the park"—where Kafka, seeing them, sees only their complacency, these young women are Kafka says, and this is not a word of praise, "without envy...." Kafka knows this, sees this, just as Nietzsche sees the "quiet cows" he too describes and knows them too.

Here a comparison with Nietzsche's reflection *actio in distans* in his *Beyond Good and Evil* is in order and I refer the reader to Jacques Derrida's *Eperons/Spurs* and if the reader has the mind for it, I recommend my own reflection on the same question.<sup>15</sup> Notice that the issue here is a matter of reading and I am not here claiming that Derrida or Kafka (or Michalski) are wrong in what they say just as I only offer my own reading as another way to parse such readings.

Thus I point to Michalski's own insistence on the

differences between men and women—Nietzsche will go on to argue that just as men fantasize an *ewig-weibliches*, women make a similar error for their own part with regard to an *ewig-männlichen*, and in his earlier *The Gay Science* he also pointed to a kind of mis-education in matters erotic and the profound consequences for any chances for erotic success in affairs between men and women, especially in marriage, where the success in a bordello would be mediated as most cash exchanges are. In Michalski's case, his emphasis underscores a plain rather than a fine sexism that runs through Michalski as indeed Kafka, and I hardly need to mention Nietzsche on this score.

But who cares about the women?

Indeed women disappear for Michalski as the notion of the erotic disappears into a mystical ecstatic vision of love, the flame in question burns not for this world but for the world beyond, the inflamed soul is alive for his God and it is the essential to notice that the soul is masculine in love, the affect is masculine, the desire masculine and fulfillment a masculine accession. This sentiment is expressed as Juliusz Slowacki writes "He loved nothing, he longed for nothing, / And yet he felt love and longing" (FE 162).

One can perhaps argue here that Michalski intends to address the human condition, but in fact he takes his own perspective which perforce relates woman not as a human being—as he Michalski is a human being—but as a thing for him, for Slowacki, for Kafka too, an object "We need stability, identity, being. A house, a homeland, a woman" (FE 191). And in case you think I am making this emphasis up, Michalski continues with nothing more masculine subject referred, masculine ego referred than: "A bench to sit on" (FE 191).

Thus although woman comes up, she is as Kafka sees her, as Slowacki sees her, as Michalski sees her. And at this point, Nietzsche's reflections on woman begin by contrast to seem strikingly sensitive. Maybe that's why he can count as a writer in line with Goethe and with Luther. For Michalski, the issue is love, desire, burning ... and the burning for the overman is closer to Augustine's longing for God than it is—or could be—to Nietzsche's overhuman.

This matters as this precipitates a powerful misreading of the overman,<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche's *Übermensch* which Michalski reads without humor, without parody,

<sup>14</sup> KSA 5, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §231, p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Babette Babich, "Nietzsche and Eros between the Devil and God's Deep Blue Sea: The Problem of the Artist as Actor—Jew—Woman," *Continental Philosophy Review* 33/2 (2000), 159-88.

<sup>16</sup> See my discussion and further references in Babich, "The Time of Kings: Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Nietzsche's Empedocles" in Horst Hutter and Eli Friedlander, eds., *Nietzsche's Therapeutic Teaching: For Individuals and Culture*, London: Bloomsbury 2013, pp. 157-74.

and hence, so I argue, without any need to understand Nietzsche's Zarathustra. For Michalski much rather than the complex illumination of the overhuman as Nietzsche's Zarathustra comes to announce his advent—and the circumstance could not be more burlesque as Zarathustra makes his first preaching debut in a marketplace, to people assembled to see a tightrope walker, who heard his preaching as nothing less than his cue to the tightrope walker to begin, i.e., to begin to cross over, the same language that Zarathustra was using. In this sense, we have a lesson on metaphors to go with all the rest. But the burlesque, and so it goes with the pathos of such jokes, turns harsh and that is to say that it turns deadly.<sup>17</sup>

Thus Zarathustra begins to speak and as we read the tightrope walker there to perform along with crowd gathered to listen to him, all assume, so Nietzsche tells us, that Zarathustra refers to the literal overman and is accordingly announcing the spectacle of the tightrope walker's act high above the market place. Mistaking his cue as the opening for the acrobat's performance, a doubling of the play or *mis-en-scene*, which both explains the patience of Zarathustra's audience as he begins speaking (an important point as they did not come to hear him) and simultaneously works—literally above and below—to illustrate Zarathustra's talk of the human as "a dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping" (*ibid.*).

The reference to life and death is doubled once again inasmuch as Zarathustra's sermon is all about what Nietzsche calls the "rainbow bridge" of life:

I love those who do not know how to live, except by going under, for they are those who cross over.

I love the great despisers because they are the great reverers and arrows of longing for the other shore.

<sup>17</sup> In this sense, Zarathustra teaches the Übermensch as the above-human or over-human both as transition to and as the eternal recurrence of the same. Speaking of what his posthumous notes from 1887 describe as "ein Hiatus zwischen zwei Nichtsen," Nietzsche's Zarathustra describes the human being as "a rope over an abyss" (*KSA 4, Also Sprach Zarathustra, I, "Zarathustra's Vorrede," §4, p. 16*), and begins with what reads as a sermon delivered against the backdrop of a dynamic tableau of life and death, a living *biblia pauperum* as Gadamer liked to talk about this in his own *Relevance of the Beautiful*, attending to the philological significance of the tableau, the setting, and the hermeneutics of fiction, all useful reflections to bring to the interpretation of Zarathustra's teaching as it is presented against the backdrop of what transpires above and behind him as he speaks.

I love those who do not first seek behind the stars for a reason to go under and be a sacrifice, but who sacrifice themselves for the earth, that the earth some day become the overhuman's.

...

I love him whose soul squanders itself, who wants no thanks and returns none: for he always gives away and does not want to preserve himself. [*op. cit.*, p. 17]

The reference here is commonly taken to echo the Christian teaching of dying to the life of the world or of the body.<sup>18</sup> I have argued that the complex question of the relation between tragedy and parody—or, and to be sure, Menippean satire—spans Nietzsche's works from the *Birth of Tragedy* to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and onward to Nietzsche's veritably ultimate reflections in his *Ecce Homo*: "What I Owe the Ancients."

Nietzsche's "Preface" to the 1886 second edition of *The Gay Science*, composed after the publication of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* but also after addition of the fifth book to *The Gay Science* and following the private circulation in 1885 of the fourth part of Zarathustra, contains the self-referential warning:

"Incipit *tragoedia*"—we read at the end ... Beware! Something downright wicked and malicious is announced here: incipit *parodia*, no doubt...<sup>19</sup>

Here we may recall that comedy, seen from the perspective of Nietzsche's classical antiquity, is an all-too typical word for life itself.<sup>20</sup> But the "desire for the

<sup>18</sup> In this way, the notion of self-overcoming, of going under, conceiving life itself as that which always and inevitably overcomes itself, also teaches what Zarathustra names the great noon. Like the great year of the ancient philosophers, the great noon is the turning to the new associated with fire and with the sun as a consummation: "that is the great noon when man stands in the middle of his way between beast and overhuman and celebrates his way to evening as his highest hope: for it is the way to a new morning" (*KSA 4, Also Sprach Zarathustra, I, "Von der schenkenden Tugend," §3, p. 102*).

<sup>19</sup> *KSA 3, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, §1, p. 346*; see also §342, p. 571.

<sup>20</sup> Thus we read Nietzsche's provocative and wondrous allusion to Aeschylus' "waves of uncountable laughter" together with his reflection that "in the long run every one of those great teachers of a purpose (of existence) was vanquished by laughter, reason, and nature; the short tragedy always gave way again and returned into the eternal comedy of existence" (*KSA 3, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft, §1, p. 372*, see also §36 and §67).



overman" as with the notion of this same burning for the beyond, is more akin to the other authors Michalski reads than it is to Nietzsche himself who always foregrounds laughter and perfect seriousness, which is again the wicked meaning of the parodic.

### On Sameness and Eternity: *Die Ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen*

I conclude, just briefly by reflecting on the question of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same. Michalski for his part and like Augustine and many writers before him, is intrigued with eternity. And why not? As "creatures of a day," as Nietzsche cites Sophocles, who puts this characterization of the human being in the mouth of the tortured satyr-companion to Dionysus, Silenus, we love eternity. We love the sheer idea of time, reflected that is, as Michalski quite rightly titles his final chapter "Our Insatiable Desire for More Future."

But where Michalski fixes on eternity, even as he names it a flame, a flickering and elusive vision of infinite time—this added time,  $n+1$  is the meaning of "more future"—Nietzsche himself emphasizes the same. And it is the same that is the curse that Nietzsche emphasizes in his account of the greatest heavy weight—*das grösste Schwergewicht*—in his *The Gay Science*, as he breaks off the fourth book which he concludes before going on to write his Trojan Horse, his seductive gift to the masses, his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, A Book for All and None*.

For we all recall that the demon does not come to one in one's loneliest loneliness to ask one to consider one's life in the light of eternity, as the Stoic philosophers might have done, as the desert fathers would also do. Much rather the demon foretells a future that is not so much about a further future—this is not the substance of what the demon emphasizes—than about a future prospect that is all about the past just as it is and just as we cannot have done with it.

This is the reference here already to what becomes the concern with the stone fact, the "it was," the musing, brooding preoccupation on the past that is the poison of resentment:

What if some day or night a demon were to steal after you and into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this

moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis here, the eternity here, focuses on the past, indeed a past elevated to an eternity of the past and not merely the generic idea of the past per se. This testifies to vary Michalski's final chapter, to our unbearable horror of more past. Living life once, that was bad enough, we might say, living it eternally [and this is worse than infinity: "once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it" (ibid.)], is far, far worse: "every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence" (ibid.). Who would want that?

The past Nietzsche's demon foretells reliving again and again is not Woody Allen's phantom vision of sitting infinitely bored through an infinite number of seatings at the Ice Capades, this is not a video replay of *Groundhog Day* again and again as one attempts to shatter the monotony of the same, *déjà vu*, but the self-same, not the similar, not the rather like and already seen done drudgery of the been there, lived through that ennui of modern life as we live it, bored as we live our days, but and again: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it..."

This demon does not say as we read in *Revelations*, "Behold, I make all things new."

Nietzsche's emphasis on life, and the revenge that we mean to take on life, is an emphasis on created things, "what can be shaken" (Hebrews 12:27). It is an emphasis on all the things we condemn as philosophers as he rights in *Twilight*, "Death, change, old age, as well as procreation and growth, are to their minds objections—even refutations." Thus Nietzsche's call to us is to love what becomes, what changes, including old age and death, because if one can say yes to one thing, anything at all, everything else is also necessary and nothing can be dispensed with: everything must be blessed

If that is not the flame of eternity as Michalski argues it, it is the *amor fati* that Nietzsche offers us and it is—shaken as we are, to use Heidegger's Parmenidean language—what we are.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> KSA 3, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, §341, p. 570.

<sup>22</sup> The author wishes to thank Helmut Wautischer for helpful editorial remarks.