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Nietzsche's Helmbrecht

Or: How To Philosophise With A Ploughshare

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1. They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. (Isaiah 2.4; Micah 4.3)

2. Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears. (Joel 3.10)

1. Of Swords and Ploughshares

3. The inaugural Bayreuth Festival in the summer of 1876 was a huge disappointment to Nietzsche. At Malwida von Meysenbug's instigation (KGB II/6_1, 361) he left Basel before the end of the university term and arrived in Bayreuth on 23 July, a full three weeks before the first public performance of Wagner's *Ring* was scheduled to begin, in order to attend some of the rehearsals[1]. He might reasonably have expected to be given something of a hero's welcome, for after more than a year's gestation the fourth of his *Untimely Meditations*, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, had finally made its timely appearance two weeks before, sealing his reputation as one of the foremost Wagnerian adjutants in the German-speaking world. Instead, things rapidly went awry: he saw little of Wagner and in general remained on the margins of the event, attending barely a week of rehearsals before making a precipitate escape and vowing not to return.

4. The proximate cause of his departure was ill health, but as several commentators have pointed out, his afflictions — eye trouble, headaches and general lassitude

1. Sources vary on the exact chronology of Nietzsche's movements during this period. R.J. Hollingdale has him arriving in Bayreuth on 24 July (*Nietzsche: The Man and his Philosophy*, 2nd edn (London, Boston and Henley: Ark, 1985), 104), and his arrival is not recorded in Cosima Wagner's diary till that date (see *Nietzsche und Wagner. Stationen einer epochalen Begegnung*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer and Jörg Salaquarda, 2 vols (Frankfurt a.M. and Leipzig: Insel, 1994), II, 1194), although Nietzsche's letter to his sister of 25 July, eKGWB/BVN-1876,544, implies an arrival two days before, and 23 July is the date on which all German biographical sources agree (see Karl Schlechta, *Nietzsche-Chronik. Daten zu Leben und Werk* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1975), 56; Curt Paul Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche. Biographie*, 3 vols (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1978-79), I: 715; Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, "Chronik zu Nietzsches Leben" (KSA 15, 7-210), 69; Horst Althaus, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Frankfurt a.M. and Berlin: Ullstein, 1993), 272). Ronald Hayman (*Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (London: Quartet, 1981), 186f.) gives 23 July as the date of Nietzsche's departure from Basel, and has him arriving in Bayreuth as late as "Monday the 29th", which is clearly a mistake, for not only was 29 July a Saturday, but Hayman himself (Hayman, *Nietzsche*, 187) quotes two of Nietzsche's letters to his sister from Bayreuth, which are correctly dated 25 and 28 July (Elisabeth had conveniently postdated them for her edition).

— were clearly psychosomatic in origin[2]. His pride was no doubt injured at his relatively off-hand treatment by Wagner, but his marginalisation had been largely self-imposed, for his disaffection with the Wagnerian enterprise had already been mounting for some time: in completing *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* he had suppressed the more critical comments on the composer which he had confided to his notebooks, and Bayreuth itself merely vindicated his misgivings. As he himself would later explain in *Ecce Homo*, he was revolted by the air of show-business razzamatazz which surrounded the whole event, by the ringmaster-impresario side to Wagner's character which it brought out, and above all by the fawning and pandering of the (other) Wagnerians (eKGWB/EH-MA-2).

5. "I have had enough of it all!" he wrote to his sister on 1 August, the day after he had been forced to leave a rehearsal of *The Valkyrie* early because he could no longer actually see the singers on stage. "I do not even want to be at the first performance — but somewhere else, anywhere but here, where it is nothing but torment for me. [...] I want to get away into the Fichtelgebirge or some other place"[3]. Shortly afterwards he set off more or less "blindly" out of Bayreuth, but went rather further than the adjacent Fichtelgebirge, travelling over 100 miles to the south-east in search of a place of recuperation. He revisited the Bavarian Forest, an area he had explored with his friend Erwin Rohde on a walking holiday nine years previously — before he had met Wagner or been "converted" to Wagner's music — and ended up at the Gasthaus zum Ludwigsstein in the small village of Klingenbrunn near Regen, a few miles from the Bohemian border[4]. Although Nietzsche did not actually leave Germany, then, he came as close to doing so as he could manage, physically assuming a marginal position where he could turn to reflect on the Germans he had left behind. It is ironic that Nietzsche should have written to his sister "now I am in my element" from Bayreuth (eKGWB/BVN-1876,546), for it is in Klingenbrunn that he evidently found his true element — alone, high up among the woods and mountains, away from the hum of flattery and gossip. Here he wrote to his sister again, on 6 August, commenting: "The place is very good: thick forest and the air of the heights, like in the Jura" (eKGWB/BVN-1876,547).

2. See, for example, Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 3rd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1968), 37; Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, 106; Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, I: 716.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 146f., eKGWB/BVN-1876,546.

4. His diary of the earlier trip, in August 1867 (erroneously predated to August 1866 by Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, 44), is reproduced in Hans Joachim Mette, Karl Schlechta and Carl Koch, ed. *Friedrich Nietzsche. Frühe Schriften*, 5 vols (Munich: Beck, 1994), III: 280-90. Klingenbrunn is not mentioned here, although it is conceivable that Nietzsche and Rohde passed through it, for they did visit the nearby towns of Zwiesel and Regen (Mette, Schlechta and Koch, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, III: 283). In Regen, indeed, Nietzsche's attention was caught by a grotesque emblem bearing the Delphic inscription "nosce te ipsum" ("know thyself"), which he sketched in his notebook at the time (Mette, Schlechta and Koch, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, III: 288), and which could stand as a suitable motto for his 1876 visit.

6. In Bayreuth Nietzsche had been all at sea[5], so it is not surprising that he should have reacted against his experience there by seeking to "ground" himself in this way, retiring into the woods in order to recover his equilibrium like a latter-day "Iron John". And he was certainly successful in this: he stayed in Klingenbrunn for just over a week (before being coaxed back to Bayreuth by his sister in time to attend the whole of the first *Ring* cycle)[6], and during his time there he recovered his health sufficiently to mark his convalescence in the only way he knew, by going on the offensive in writing. In the Preface to *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche would explicitly refer to that later book as a work of "recuperation," describing it as both "a sideways leap into the idleness of a psychologist" and "a great declaration of war", but his recuperation strategy in Klingenbrunn (where he made a literal "sideways leap") was no different. He spent the majority of his time walking in the woods and jotting down notes, laying the groundwork for what would ultimately become *Human, All Too Human* — a radical departure from his previous published works, in which he finally threw off the Wagnerian mantle.

7. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche refers to his "crossing swords" with Wagner on the completion of *Human, All Too Human* in 1878 (eKGWB/EH-MA-5), but what ended up as a sword began life, perhaps surprisingly, as a ploughshare, as *Ecce Homo* also reveals:

8. > At a place deeply buried in the Bohemian Forest, Klingenbrunn, I bore my melancholy and contempt for Germans about with me like an illness — a n d wrote a sentence in my pocket-book from time to time under the general title "The Ploughshare" [*Die Pflugschar*], nothing but h a r d psychologica which can perhaps still be rediscovered in "Human, All Too Human" (eKGWB/EH-MA-2; cf. KSA 14, 490 and 493)[7].

9. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche gives no further indication as to why he should have chosen "The Ploughshare" for his provisional title: not only does he eventually not use it for *Human, All Too Human*, but this is the only reference in his published writings to any plan to call the book by that name — it is not mentioned, for example, in either of the 1886 Prefaces to its second edition — and he does not actually use it for any of his published works. In this *Ecce Homo* passage he explains

5. "It was as if I had been dreaming ... Where was I? I recognised nothing, I hardly recognised Wagner. In vain I scanned my memories. Tribschen — a distant isle of the blessed", eKGWB/EH-MA-2. He would later write of Wagner's music itself as inducing a sensation of "swimming, floating", eKGWB/VM-134; eKGWB/NW-Gefahr-1: see my article "'The Freest Writer': Nietzsche on Sterne", *The Shandean*, 7 (November 1995): 9-29.

6. Again, the exact chronology is difficult to determine: Nietzsche himself writes of having absented himself from Bayreuth "for a couple of weeks", eKGWB/EH-MA-2, but this is clearly too long, since all sources agree that he returned to Bayreuth on 12 August. On the other hand Colli and Montinari's "Chronik" has Nietzsche in Klingenbrunn 6-12 August (KSA 15, 69), which would seem to be too short. Nietzsche's letter to his sister from Klingenbrunn was the only one he wrote there and gives no clear indication of when he arrived; Hollingdale writes of him leaving Bayreuth "[o]n the 2nd or 3rd August" and in Klingenbrunn "for ten days" (Hollingdale, *Nietzsche*, 104); Janz (Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, I: 715) and Hayman (Hayman, *Nietzsche*, 188) have him leaving for Klingenbrunn "on the 3rd or 4th"; Schlechta plumps for 4 August (Schlechta, *Nietzsche-Chronik*, 56).

the choice of title by highlighting the ploughshare's hardness, thus allying it with his other images of hardness such as granite and ice, the hammer of *Twilight* ("*aere perennius*"), and above all the diamond in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, whose motto is "become hard!" (eKGWB/Za-III-Tafeln-29; cf. eKGWB/GD-Alten-Hammer). Yet in another respect the ploughshare would seem an unlikely and highly unpromising image for Nietzsche to adopt, for — in Judaeo-Christian culture, at least — it serves as the symbol of peace *par excellence*, and it would thus seem perverse for Nietzsche to begin wielding it as his preferred implement at precisely the time when he was beginning to make war on his previous beliefs and values. Nietzsche himself evidently considered "Klingenbrunn" to be a major turning-point in his life: in his later accounts it is always cited as the origin of *Human, All Too Human* [8], and the momentousness of the change that took place there — not "just" the genesis of a book, but a break with all that had gone before[9] — is sufficient for the Bavarian/Bohemian Forest[10] to achieve the same status in Nietzsche's personal geographical pantheon as the shore of Lake Silvaplana, the site of his 1881 epiphany which marked the conception, "6,000 feet above Bayreuth" (eKGWB/EH-Weise-4), of his "favourite son" *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this context it would appear all the more puzzling that Nietzsche should initially choose for his radical new work such a low-key title, and one freighted with such unwelcome irenic connotations.

10. My aim in this essay is to explore the derivation and subsequent fate of the ploughshare image in Nietzsche's writings, for although he did not ultimately use "The Ploughshare" as the title for any of his published works, as a projected title it enjoys a surprising longevity in his notebooks and maintains a (suitably) subterranean existence there for several years after 1876, while the ploughshare as motif also surfaces in his published works of this period, up to and including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. An analysis of Nietzsche's use of the term will lead in two directions, for not only does it need to be placed in the context of his other agricultural metaphors, but it will also require us to consider his relation to German

8. The following year (Spring-Summer 1877) he writes a poem reflecting back over the stages of the book's completion, which begins: "In the Bavarian Forest did it begin", eKGWB/NF-1877,22[80], and the account given in *Ecce Homo* is in all essentials identical to that given in a letter Nietzsche wrote to Mathilde Maier on 15 July 1878, shortly after the book's publication, in which he claims to have written "the first sketch, about a third of my book" in Klingenbrunn, eKGWB/BVN-1878,734.

9. In *Ecce Homo*, eKGWB/EH-MA-3, and in the later Prefaces to *Human, All Too Human* itself, Nietzsche presents the book as a memorial to an immense act of self-overcoming which goes far beyond the more local impetus of his falling out with Wagner, and these implications were not lost on him at the time of its composition. In a note from Spring-Summer 1878 he writes: "In the Bohemian Forest I overcame the *phase*" (KSA 8, 498), the "phase" in question being what he refers to in a postcard to Mathilde Maier, 6 August 1878, eKGWB/BVN-1878,742, as the ten-year phase of his early philosophical activity (and especially his involvement with Wagner), now seen as a period of self-alienation.

10. Nietzsche uses "Böhmerwald" and "Bairischer Wald" interchangeably: the former is the name for the large area of elevated woodland which spans the borders between present-day Germany, Austria, Czech Republic and Slovakia; the latter refers to the part included within German territory.

literature. Nietzsche was of course quite intentionally "perverting" Judaeo-Christian culture by adopting the ploughshare image at this time, yet — as his notebooks reveal — it was not the Bible but a medieval German poem that inspired him to choose it.

2. "Farm with the Plough!"

11. Nietzsche's immediate plans on completing *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* had been to continue the *Untimely Meditations* series for which, since 1873, he had been aiming to write (varying sets of) thirteen volumes[11]. The next volume was to have been called "Der Freigeist" ("The Free Spirit" — eKGWB/NF-1876,16[11]), and his notes from the early summer of 1876, pre-Bayreuth, are clearly written with this title in mind (eKGWB/NF-1876,16[25] to 17[105]), as are the notes from October 1876 and beyond (eKGWB/NF-1876,19[66]f.). In between, however, an alternative title emerges for the first time at the very end of notebook U II 5b (Summer 1876): "The Ploughshare: A Guide [*Anleitung*] to Spiritual Liberation" (eKGWB/NF-1876,17[105]), and the following notebook (eKGWB/NF-1876,18) — dictated in the September to Peter Gast in Basel, on Nietzsche's return from Bayreuth — is then simply entitled "The Ploughshare". It begins with a quotation in epigraph, which helps explain the choice of title:

12. "If you would follow me, farm with the plough! Then many will benefit [*geniessen*] by you — the poor man and the rich man will certainly benefit by you; the wolf and the eagle will benefit by you and indeed all creatures will benefit by you". Meier Helmbrecht. (eKGWB/NF-1876,18[1])

13. Meier Helmbrecht is a character in an eponymous narrative poem written *c.* 1260-70, in Middle High German, by an author known simply as Wernher der Gartenære[12]. There is no evidence, however, to suggest that Nietzsche read the poem himself, for this quotation first appears in his writings some seven years earlier, in the Autumn of 1869, when he notes it while reading a long critical essay on motifs in German folk poetry by the Swabian poet, politician and literary historian Ludwig Uhland (1787-1862). Uhland devotes one section of his study to analysing folk songs which represent the country practice of propitiating birds and other animals by sacrificing to them parts of the harvest or kill (an extension of the — biblically sanctioned — practice by which reapers leave a portion of their fields to human gleaners), and it is here that he quotes the *Helmbrecht* passage, as an isolated fragment, by way of illustration, emphasising the words "the wolf and

11. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1979), 162-165, eKGWB/NF-1873,30[38], 29[163], 29[164], 29[229], eKGWB/NF-1874,32[4] , eKGWB/NF-1876,16[10]; 16[11].

12. This dating of the poem is by Charles E. Gough ("Introduction", in Charles E. Gough, ed. *Meier Helmbrecht* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1942), xii). The meaning of "Gartenære" is (also) disputed: although "Gardener" ("Gärtner" in New High German, the modern standard language) would be highly appropriate, Gough (p. xxiii) argues plausibly that it indicates Wernher hailed from the region of Garda ("Garten" in Middle High German).

the eagle will benefit by you" and commenting: "Should this be only a manner of speaking, nevertheless it must originally have been an essential attribute of the man of honour to share his earthly blessings even with the wolf and the eagle"[13]. The *Helmbrecht* quotation was one of only seven passages in Uhland's sizeable work which appealed to Nietzsche enough for him to note it down: it appears in his 1869 notebook prefaced by a paraphrase of Uhland's gloss — "Finest German quotation designating the man of honour" — and slightly banalised by a mistranscription (eKGWB/NF-1869,1[30])[14]. Since the version of the quotation in Nietzsche's 1876 notebook is transcribed correctly, he seems to have gone back to Uhland in order to note it again: why, then, did he return to this passage seven years on?

14. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that certain features of the *Helmbrecht* passage would obviously have appealed to him. The ploughman is traditionally figured as a hard-working, benignly productive figure with a noble lineage dating right back, in ancient Greek myth, to Dionysus himself[15]. As a "Meier", Helmbrecht is no mere peasant but a superior kind of farmer, the steward of a nobleman's estate, so Nietzsche finds no difficulty in following Uhland by emphasising the man's honour: he is the type of integrity and virtue, whose "natural nobility" expresses itself in his acting according to a principle of generosity towards all living creatures which we might perhaps see as a forerunner of the bestowing virtue in *Zarathustra* [16]. Further prefigurations of Zarathustra can be noted *en passant*: Helmbrecht is speaking to a potential `follower` (his son, as Uhland explains in his introduction to the passage), and one of the two animals which the poet specifies will in time become Zarathustra's intimate companion (eKGWB/Za-I-Vorrede-10).

13. A. von Keller, W.L. Holland and F. Pfeiffer, ed. *Uhlands Schriften zur Geschichte der Dichtung und Sage*, 8 vols, III: Ludwig Uhland, *Alte hoch- und niederdeutsche Volkslieder mit Abhandlung und Anmerkungen. Zweiter Band: Abhandlung* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1866), 72.

14. Nietzsche substitutes a second "certainly" ("sicherlich") for the "indeed" ("durchaus") of the final line. It should also be noted that he copies down the passage in Uhland's (archaising) New High German translation, ignoring the Middle High German original given in an endnote (159, n. 103).

15. See J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 510: "there are indications, few but significant, that Dionysus was conceived as a deity of agriculture and the corn. He is spoken of as himself doing the work of a husbandman: he is reported to have been the first to yoke oxen to the plough, which before had been dragged by hand alone [...]. Thus guiding the ploughshare and scattering the seed as he went, Dionysus is said to have eased the labour of the husbandman."

16. The passage's insistence on the word "geniessen" suggests two other aspects potentially appealing to Nietzsche, although they hinge on different interpretations of its meaning. First, in modern (New High) German the word simply means "enjoy", and the passage would thus accord well with the mood of Nietzsche's "Gay/Joyful Science", although Uhland's use of the term as a NHG "translation" of MHG "geniezen" is questionable, for the latter term was more closely related than its modern counterpart to notions of "utility" or "profit" (NHG "Nutzen"). Second, Gough (Gough, *Meier Helmbrecht*, 25 n.) gives "the sense of the passage" as: "Plenty of people will be friendly to you", which would have obvious identificatory appeal to a Nietzsche just beginning to "plough his lonely furrow" and placing increasing emphasis, in his isolation, on the value of friendship (see my article "Proust on Nietzsche: The Question of Friendship", *Modern Language Review*, 88/3 (July 1993): 612624).

15. In a number of other respects, though, this is an odd passage for Nietzsche to alight on. In his introduction to the quotation, Uhland characterises the poem as "a thorough representation of folk life [*des Volkslebens*]" — a subject for which Nietzsche will otherwise have little interest — and despite Helmbrecht's relatively high status among the agrarian classes, the tone of his speech is egalitarian: his principle of generosity is precisely not Zarathustra's, for the (digger-)ploughman is a universal benefactor much more akin to St Francis or St Anthony than to Nietzsche's illustrious mouthpiece in his book "For Everyone and No One"[17]. The broader context in which Uhland quotes the passage (and which Nietzsche fails to note) is a discussion of superstitions in folk poetry, and Helmbrecht's words are quoted as an instance of the persistence of this mode of thinking. In Nietzsche's terms the ploughman is decidedly "this side of good and evil" for, on Uhland's interpretation, he makes a sacrifice to the predatory wolf and eagle because of the evil spirits they embody, and this ill accords with the new style of philosophising Nietzsche will come to advocate in the opening sections of *Human, All Too Human*, his rejection of superstition (cf. e.g. eKGWB/MA-4) and conversion to a philosophy modelled on the natural sciences (eKGWB/MA-1).

16. What is problematic about Nietzsche's use of the *Helmbrecht* passage on a more general level is its "semantic field": the agricultural. Agriculture may connote "closeness to the earth", and thus appropriately represent Nietzsche's reaction against Schopenhauerian metaphysics and (Schopenhauero-)Wagnerian aesthetics, but it also — highly inappropriately — connotes constancy and reliability, the unchanging, unheroic life of the farmer rooted in a "native soil", in other words precisely the kind of domesticated existence which would appeal to a later ideology of "blood and soil", and the very opposite of the liberation Nietzsche wishes it to portray. His self-representations from this point onwards are more characteristically on the move, whether through the air — Prince Vogelfrei, Zarathustra's eagle, Zarathustra himself (eKGWB/Za-II-Bildung) — over uncharted "new seas"[18], or over land, which they roam as wanderers and mountain-climbers, restless, rootless and displaced. Zarathustra's favoured terrain will be mountains and forests[19] — he has a positive dislike for flatlands[20] — and his life of aristocratic idleness will

17. Gough sees Helmbrecht senior as the author's mouthpiece in the poem, and cites this same passage as evidence that Wernher was a member of the Franciscan order, commenting that it is "almost inexplicable, except when uttered by a follower of St. Francis, to whom the wolf, the bird, even fire itself, were Brother Wolf, Sister Bird and Brother Fire" (Gough, *Meier Helmbrecht*, xx).

18. See my article "Nietzsche and the Figure of Columbus", *Nietzsche-Studien*, 24 (1995): 162183.

19. See eKGWB/Za-I-Keuschheit ("I love the forest"); eKGWB/Za-IV-Koenige-1 ("Zarathustra [...] his mountains and forests"); eKGWB/Za-IV-Zauberer-2 ("*my* forests and cliffs").

20. "I am a wanderer and a mountain-climber (he said to his heart), I do not like the plains and it seems I cannot sit still for long", eKGWB/Za-III-Wanderer. See also Nietzsche's later characterisations of Germany as "Europe's flatland", eKGWB/GD-Deutsche-3; eKGWB/EH-Bücher-2; eKGWB/NW-Vorwort, and eKGWB/FW-Vorspiel-6: "Do not stay in the field! / Nor climb out of sight. / The best view of the world / Is from a medium height".

recreate the Edenic existence of "quiet fruitfulness" (eKGWB/MA-240) which p r e c e d e d the Fall into agricultural labour and the Labour Movement ("When Adam delved and Eve span, / Who was then the gentleman?"). When Nietzsche does write of farming life it is predominantly pastoral rather than arable farming that furnishes him with his images — setting aside his frequent references to herd animals, his vision of Arcadia (eKGWB/WS-295) is an Alpine version of Poussin, while in the "Idylls from Messina" and "Songs of Prince Vogelfrei" he reaches back to Theocritus. When he does occasionally use the image of ploughing in the period before 1876, it is in a pejorative context: ploughing is a down-to-earth and "boring" activity, associated with the scholar-ox by contrast with the genius (eKGWB/DS-8; cf. eKGWB/NF-1875,5[17]; eKGWB/NF-1876,21[57).

17. In 1876, then, Nietzsche seems suddenly to revalue the activity of ploughing and the peasant life in general, adopting the words of a moralistic farmer, the traditional exemplar of conformity to tradition, at the very point when he departs from the traditions he himself has hitherto known. These unusual features are only amplified if one examines the poem *Meier Helmbrecht* and the point in the action where this speech occurs. Although he is celebrated in the poem's title, Meier Helmbrecht is in fact only a secondary figure in the poem, which concentrates instead on Helmbrecht junior, the farmer's son. Dissatisfied with his lot, this "stupid fool" (l. 197) gets ideas above his station (symbolised by an impossibly elaborate cap) and heads off to court, but he never arrives there, for he falls in with a band of robbers and takes to the lawless life with enthusiasm, before coming gruesomely unstuck at the end of the tale. As Charles E. Gough writes: "The aim of the poem is to show by the terrible example of young *Helmbrecht* the need of discipline in the home and to teach the growing generation to do its duty in life, however uncongenial this might seem to be"[21]. The words Uhland quotes, and which so captured Nietzsche's imagination, are spoken by Helmbrecht *père* to the wayward son immediately before his departure from the parental farmstead (ll. 544-50), and the point is that these words are precisely i g n o r e d by the antihero son, to his eventual cost. "Spare me the sermon" (l. 561f.) says Helmbrecht junior as he scornfully rejects his father's admonitions and formally renounces the life of the plough (l. 571): the whole poem is a kind of secularised sermon which ensures that the uppity peasant receives his come-uppance, and this is the Oedipal confrontation at its core. A knowledge of the poem only underlines the fact that there is something curiously nostalgic about Nietzsche's use of the particular passage he quotes. Instead of perhaps identifying with the Godless, criminal son who ignores his father's words and abandons his parents, multiply transgressing the medieval moral order, Nietzsche associates himself with Helmbrecht senior; at the point where he is loosing his ties to his own spiritual father, Wagner, he adopts the father's warning as a motto.

18. Let us also, finally, note the circumstances in which the *Helmbrecht* passage first came to Nietzsche's attention. In October 1869 he was in the middle of preparations for his projected essay on "Socrates and Greek Music Drama" (which

21. Gough, *Meier Helmbrecht*, xvi.

would eventually become *The Birth of Tragedy*), and he read Uhland with an eye to parallels and contrasts between German folk poetry and Greek drama — noting the similarity, for example, between the historical St Vitus's dancers and "the orgiastic processions of Dionysus" (eKGWB/NF-1869,1[1]). Uhland's literary history was, however, only one of a number of works on the subject which he read at this time, during his first year in Basel — a period in which he showed a greater interest in German literary history than at any other stage after his schooldays, precisely because of his involvement with the Wagners. Richard Wagner had ransacked with impunity the treasure-house of German(ic) medieval history and legend in order to furnish patriotic plots for the majority of his mature music-dramas[22], and in his own way Nietzsche, too, turned to German literary history with a specific personal purpose in mind. Unlike Wagner, though, who plunged back into the medieval poem *Lohengrin* for his music-drama of that name, or for the *Ring* adapted material from the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*, Old Norse Eddic poems and much else besides, Nietzsche's was quintessentially a scholar's solution: he read secondary works on the subject by writers such as Uhland, Wackernagel and Gervinus[23]. The more or less thinly veiled nationalism of all these works[24] chimed with Nietzsche's own nationalistic sentiments at the time (i.e. before the foundation of the Reich), which had only been reinforced by his contact with the Wagners: his gloss on the *Helmbrecht* passage as the "finest German quotation designating the man of honour" conveniently glosses *over* the fact (which Uhland points out) that Wernher der Gartenære was an Austrian.

19. Not only is the *Helmbrecht* quotation redolent of conservative values, then, not only is it puzzling that Nietzsche should delve back into the past to resurrect as his new motto a quotation from a medieval poem which he had first noted seven years previously, but it would also have reminded him of precisely those aspects of his past which he now wanted to throw off, namely his life as a university professor, his nationalism, and above all his period under Wagner's sway (in his own terms, his existence as a scholarly ox under the Wagnerian yoke). In 1876 he might have been seeking to "plough under" the previous ten years of his intellectual life, but in order to do so he first retrieved his implement from the dung.

22. See Volker Mertens, "Wagner's Middle Ages", trans. Stewart Spencer, in *Wagner Handbook*, ed. Ulrich Müller, Peter Wapnewski and John Deathridge (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 236-268.

23. He borrowed Wilhelm Wackernagel's *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* from Basel University Library in October 1869 (and later acquired for his personal library an 1873 edition of the *Abhandlungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, from which he quotes with approval at UM, II, 8); in November 1869 he borrowed the first volume of Georg Gottfried Gervinus, *Deutsche Dichtung*. See Max Oehler, *Nietzsches Bibliothek* (Weimar: Gesellschaft der Freunde des Nietzsche-Archivs, 1942), 35, 46.

24. See Michael S. Batts, *A History of Histories of German Literature, 1835-1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993). On Wackernagel, for example, Batts comments: "the most remarkable feature of this work is the concept [...] of Germany's role as world leader" (Batts, *A History*, 41f.).

3. Agros as Agon

20. The *Helmbrecht* quotation had some decidedly unpromising credentials from Nietzsche's point of view, but we have yet to examine what he actually made of it: in particular, we have yet to take account of the fact that although he uses the ploughman's speech for the epigraph to his 1876 notebook, the notebook is actually entitled "The Ploughshare", and it is on this image that he focuses from the first, rather than on the ploughman, his oxen or his plough. This focus is already a development away from *Helmbrecht* — Nietzsche is already making the quotation his own, using it for his own purposes — for not only is a ploughshare not mentioned in the quotation Uhland gives, or in his contextualising gloss; the word does not occur in the poem at all.

21. By narrowing down his focus to the ploughshare and "liberating" it from the plough, prising it from the ploughman's grasp, Nietzsche immediately dissociates the image from many of its traditional connotations. Specifically, the ploughman's orderly furrows have a long association in Western culture not only with the "rectilinear" moral rectitude of a Meier Helmbrecht or Piers the Ploughman, but also with writing, from the ox's head of the Semitic aleph and the boustrophedon writing style of the ancient Greeks through to the medieval commonplace of the pen as plough, exemplified most strikingly in Johannes von Tepl's early fifteenth-century dialogue *Der Ackermann aus Böhmen* ("The Ploughman from Bohemia")[25]. Nietzsche has no desire to be "Der Ackermann aus dem Böhmerwald", however — he also refuses to be Wagner's Ackermann/Eckermann[26] — for his wish is to dance with the ploughshare-pen. In his hands, then, the ploughshare begins to acquire a new panoply of associations[27].

22. The ploughshare motif acts as a frame to the "Ploughshare" notebook of September 1876: after the initial quotation from *Helmbrecht*, Nietzsche continues with a wide-ranging series of sixty paragraphs in which the theme of ploughing is left almost entirely behind[28], before returning at the close of the notebook to give an extended gloss on its title:

25. The "ploughman" is in fact a clerk. See the opening of the third chapter: "I am called a ploughman; my plough is of bird's plumage and I live in Bohemia" (Johannes von Tepl, *Der Ackermann und der Tod*, 2nd ed., ed. Felix Genzmer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1984), 6).

26. See Avital Ronell, *Dictations: On Haunted Writing* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 77: "Eckermann, namely, as his name promises, acts not only in his capacity as husbandman or 'Ackermann' whose labor is to break and prepare the ground for receiving the seed — he is not only charged with assuring fertilization — but he is, too (as the etymology of the Ecke suggests), a 'supplementary man,' one eking out an existence by writing".

27. At this stage one should perhaps point out one of the associations denied to Nietzsche in German: whereas the modification of "-shear" to "-share" in the English word "ploughshare" allows it to be easily construed as a "beneficent" ("apportioning") cutting implement, the German word ("Pflugschar") affords no such opportunities.

28. The only exception here is paragraph 18 [29], which muses on the more profound effect art has on one in love than on one in a contemplative state: "It seems as though the will must be ploughed up, as it were, in order to receive the seed of art", eKGWB/NF-1876,18[29].

23. The ploughshare cuts into the hard earth and the soft, it goes beyond high things and low things and brings them close to it. This book is for the good man and the evil one, for the lowly and the mighty. The evil man who reads it will become better, the good man worse, the humble man more powerful, the powerful man more humble. (eKGWB/NF-1876,18[62])

24. It is significant that Nietzsche struck out a continuation of the passage which read "Behind the ploughshare comes the sower" (KSA 14, 590), for it is in this note that his development of the ploughshare motif in isolation from the sower/ploughman and his plough begins. Here we find for the first time the connotation of hardness which he will spell out much later in *Ecce Homo* ("nothing but h a r d psychological"), but it is the ploughshare as c u t t i n g implement which is particularly stressed. The image works precisely against the connotations of safety and homeliness which otherwise emerge from the *Helmbrecht* quotation: Nietzsche turns the ploughman's field into a field of battle, the a g r o s into an a g o n: h e t u r n s t h e p l o u g h s h a r e i n t o a s w o r d f r o m t h e o u t s e t. The "sword" is directed inwards and downwards, though, into the soul-soil[29] — it becomes the scalpel of Nietzsche's new depth physio-psychology, like the knives wielded by the "vivisectionists of the spirit" in the *Genealogy* (eKGWB/GM-III-4)[30]. It is a subversive weapon, an implement for digging down and overturning[31]; its function resembles that of Nietzsche the "solitary mole" in the Preface to *Daybreak*, the "'subterranean man' [...] who tunnels and mines and undermines" (eKGWB/M-Vorrede-1)[32].

25. The ploughshare may work independently of existing configurations of force and value — it is at least embryonically "beyond good and evil" — but with this "Guide to Spiritual Liberation" we are still a fair way from *Daybreak* or *Zarathustra*, for although at this early stage in Nietzsche's development of the image the ploughshare is evidently already a symbol of transcendence ("it goes beyond high things and low things"), nevertheless its effect is to "level up" both high and low (it "brings them close to it"), and indeed in the second half of the passage it simply "levels out" differences. Most notably, it has the power to "improve" "evil" men and humble the

29. See Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chap. 5, "Husbanding the Soul: Vegetal Propagation" (171-203), and the review symposium in *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 12 (Autumn 1996): 82-120, especially Claudia Crawford, "Composing the Soul: An Open Letter to Graham Parkes" (83-92).

30. In this context let us not forget that Wagner was a "fanatical vegetarian" who campaigned against vivisection. See Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, 4 vols (New York, 1937-46), IV: 192 and 601, quoted in Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, 39.

31. See Sarah Kofman, *Explosion II : Les enfants de Nietzsche* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 192: "The ploughshare, as is well known, is the broad, pointed part of the plough which serves to break the surface of the soil and turn over [*renverser*] the earth. Were these notes perhaps Nietzsche's first 'pointed remarks' — cutting, overwhelming [*'pointes' tranchantes et renversantes*] — the correlate of a deep wound from which it was writing, above all, that allowed him to gain some distance?"

32. On Nietzsche's use of the mole metaphor, see the essay David Farrell Krell dedicates to Helmbrecht (Breinig), "*Der Maulwurf* / The Mole: Reading Kant and Hegel (after Nietzsche)", in *Infectious Nietzsche* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 103-24 (especially 113-19).

mighty: it establishes a level growing field. The ploughshare does not (yet) restrict itself to undermining "the prejudices of morality", for whatever system of values one might previously have had, the ploughshare will subvert it; every value-valley, it seems, shall yet be exalted. There are still some disconcerting aspects to this passage, then, and Nietzsche is still conceiving the image of the ploughshare within the context of the *Helmbrecht* quotation, as an agent of universal transformation.

4. Turning it Over

26. He changes tack after September 1876 and returns to "The Free Spirit" as the projected title for his next book, but "The Ploughshare" nevertheless continues to "crop up" in his notebooks periodically thereafter, and he is evidently still turning over in his mind the implications of the image. In late 1876/early 1877, "Ploughshare" is once again fleetingly considered for the projected title of the new work (eKGWB/NF-1876,21[39])[33]; by Winter 1880-81 we find "The Ploughshare: Thoughts on the prejudices of morality" as a projected title for what would become *Daybreak* (eKGWB/NF-1880,9[Titel]); and as late as July-August 1882 Nietzsche is considering publishing a two-volume collected edition of the entire "free spirit trilogy" under the title "The Ploughshare: A Tool [*Werkzeug*] for Liberating the Spirit" (eKGWB/NF-1882,1[14]).

27. In his published works of this period, too, Nietzsche continues to develop the image of the ploughshare, forging it into something more amenable to his purposes. In *Human, All Too Human* itself there are incidental references to ploughs and ploughing (eKGWB/MA-111 and 472), and more significant uses of a related agricultural metaphor, the human character as a farmer's field, as in the paragraphs "Sowing and reaping with one's personal shortcomings" (eKGWB/MA-617; cf. eKGWB/NF-1878,28[36]) or "The fruitful field" (eKGWB/VM-332; cf. eKGWB/NF-1881,11[21]). In a brief aphorism on "Employment of novelties", though (eKGWB/VM-290), Nietzsche focuses for the first time in his published writings on the ploughshare, writing: "Men employ something newly learned or experienced henceforth as a ploughshare, perhaps also as a weapon: but women straightway turn it into an ornament for themselves". The ploughshare (if we did not already suspect it) is revealed as a phallic instrument, a man's tool, and by associating it with a "weapon", Nietzsche is already figuring it as dangerous. In *Daybreak* 146 ("Out beyond our neighbour too") it develops into a sacrificial instrument, for here Nietzsche's "higher and freer viewpoint" acknowledges the necessity "under certain circumstances to pursue more distant goals even at the cost of the suffering of others". One must be cruel to some in order to be kind to all the rest:

33. See also the note from shortly afterwards: "Ploughman. / Both judge and pastor [*Seelsorger*]. / Preface afterwards", eKGWB/NF-1876,21[57].

28. why may a few individuals of the present generation not be sacrificed to coming generations? Their grief, their distress, their despair, their blunders and fears not be deemed necessary, because a new ploughshare is to break up the ground and make it fruitful for all? (eKGWB/M-146)

29. The "Helmbrechtian" theme of "fruitfulness for all" is still present here, and indeed in *Daybreak* 202 Nietzsche finally quotes the *Helmbrecht* passage itself in a published work, rounding off a section entitled "For the promotion of health" ("Zur Pflege der Gesundheit") with the following:

30. nor has there yet been a founder of a state who has wielded the ploughshare in the spirit of that generous and mild-hearted dictum: "if thou wouldst cultivate the land, cultivate it with the plough: then the bird and the wolf who follow behind the plough shall rejoice in thee — all creatures shall rejoice in thee ." (eKGWB/M-202)

31. Given the garbled nature of its reproduction here, Nietzsche is clearly quoting the *Helmbrecht* passage from memory: it makes a stirring conclusion to a paragraph, yet it is clearly being used in a spirit radically at variance to that of Helmbrecht senior's "generous and mild-hearted dictum". The context, a meditation on the criminal mentality, is ironically appropriate for a *Helmbrecht* quotation: the "health" with which this paragraph is concerned is the health of the community, and again Nietzsche's point is that certain individuals (in this case criminals) must be sacrificed for the greater good. This is the only time he uses the ploughshare image in a political context, or in the context of "health"; indeed at first sight the quotation has so little to do with the rest of the passage that one would be justified in considering its inclusion an afterthought, prompted more than anything else by the alliteration of "Pflege" and "Pflug". Its inclusion can only be explained if one recognises the transformation the ploughshare image has undergone since Nietzsche first detached it from its original context, and by setting the image back in its original context he merely demonstrates how absolute the dissociation of ploughshare from ploughman has now become. The ploughshare is now wielded not by a harmless farmer but by a "founder of a state", a legislator with a viewpoint "high" and "free" enough to give ends absolute priority over the means of achieving them and ruthlessly excise the sick parts of society for the benefit of all the rest. Generosity towards those who come after the plough is not an incidental side-effect but the main purpose of the procedure — Nietzsche's misquotation, throwing the emphasis precisely on those "who follow behind the plough", is instructive. The putative legislator's concern for the well-being of the polity leads him to act with a signal absence of compassion, using his ploughshare effectively as a scythe, and Nietzsche rightly comments that "we should nowadays describe [him] as inhuman".

5. "The Ploughshare of Evil"

32. With this uneasy juxtaposition of the *Helmbrecht* passage and Nietzsche's new interpretation of it, it is as though he exorcises the original context of the ploughshare image "for good", for in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* it is his new interpretation alone that holds sway. This is immediately apparent from paragraph 4 of *The Gay Science*, where the ploughshare is finally assigned a

"moral" evaluation of its own and is explicitly associated with "the strongest and most evil spirits":

33. The good men are in all ages those who dig the old thoughts, digging deep and getting them to bear fruit — the farmers of the spirit [*Ackerbauer des Geistes*]. But eventually all land is exploited, and the ploughshare of evil must come again and again. (eKGWB/FW-4)[34]

34. Here Nietzsche's revaluation is completed and the ploughshare and the farmer are finally set at odds: the "wicked" ploughshare (which merely appears "evil" from the impoverished perspective of the "good") is the true benefactor of mankind, while the "farmers of the spirit" are consigned once more to the lowly position they occupied in Nietzsche's writings of the early 1870s — "bores" ploughing the same old furrow as ever, like the "philosophical labourers" of *Beyond Good and Evil* 211 (eKGWB/JGB-211), or the philologists who teach how to "swot up" ("*ochsen*") in *Twilight* (eKGWB/GD-Streifzuege-29). The biblical Adam was banished from Eden and obliged by God "to till the ground from whence he was taken" so as to atone for his primal transgression (Genesis 3.23)[35], but Nietzsche returns to that "work" to revalue it, for it is "the ploughshare of evil" that redeems the "good men" from the barrenness of their labour.

35. It is in this context of the subversion of "virtue" that Zarathustra explicitly identifies with the ploughshare:

36. Alas, this is my sorrow: reward and punishment have been lyingly introduced into the foundation of things — and now even into the foundation of your souls, you virtuous!
37. But my words, like the snout of the boar, shall tear up the foundations of your souls; you shall call me a ploughshare.
38. All the secrets of your heart shall be brought to light; and when you lie, grubbed up and broken, in the sunlight, then your falsehood will be separated from your truth. (eKGWB/Za-II-Tugendhafte ; cf. eKGWB/NF-1883,9[6], 13[1], 13[7], 13[24])

39. Although "The Ploughshare" drops away as a potential title after 1882, then, the image continues to be used up to 1884, in all four books of *Zarathustra* and the notebooks of the period. In *Zarathustra*, though, the ploughshare finds itself assailed by a welter of competing images derived from farming, forestry and the uncultivated natural world of soil, vegetation and fruit. From the outset, Zarathustra is entreating his hearers to "remain true to the earth" (eKGWB/Za-I-Vorrede-3; cf. eKGWB/Za-I-Tugend-2); parodying the New Testament, Nietzsche describes him at the beginning of Part Two as "like a sower who has scattered his seed" (eKGWB/Za-II-Kind; cf. eKGWB/NF-1883,13[3] and 13[20]), while Zarathustra himself urges man to "plant the seed of his highest hope" (eKGWB/Za-I-Vorrede-5) and his followers to "become begetters and cultivators and sowers of the future" (eKGWB/Za-III-Tafeln-12). The scholars are no longer figured here as oxen but as "mills and rammers" grinding down seed-corn into dust (eKGWB/Za-II-Gelehrte);

35. The link between this passage and Genesis 2.7 ("And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground") is made clearer by Luther's German translation of the latter, where man is formed "of earth from the field" ("aus Erde vom Acker").

the ox is what the "sublime man" might yet become — "a white ox, snorting and bellowing as he goes before the plough" (eKGWB/Za-II-Erhabene; cf. eKGWB/NF-1883,9[6] and 13[1]) — while Zarathustra himself looks forward to the advent of a more post-moral version of the same animal: "The thawing wind, an ox that is no ploughing ox — a raging ox, a destroyer that breaks ice with its angry horns! " (eKGWB/Za-III-Tafeln-8). Zarathustra himself is a destroyer (cf. eKGWB/EH-Bücher-1), a breaker of old law-tables, but he presents himself above all as a creator, and although all creators are hard (eKGWB/Za-II-Mitleidige), they no longer use ploughshares but a different set of cutting implements, namely the vine-knife (eKGWB/Za-IV-Nachtwandler-9) and the sickle. For above all creators are h a r v e s t e r s:

40. The creator seeks companions and fellow-harvesters: for with him everything is ripe for harvesting. But he lacks his hundred sickles: so he tears off the ears of corn and is vexed.
41. The creator seeks companions and such as know how to whet their sickles. They will be called destroyers and despisers of good and evil. But they are harvesters and rejoicers.
42. Zarathustra seeks fellow-creators, fellow-harvesters, and fellow-rejoicers. (eKGWB/Za-I-Vorrede-9)

43. This focus on the harvest in *Zarathustra* is the logical extension of Nietzsche's orientating the ploughshare image towards the future — towards those "who follow behind the plough" — in *Daybreak* [36]. Yet in *Zarathustra* the two "moments" of the ploughshare and the autumn of harvest-time are explicitly contrasted (eKGWB/Za-II-Erloesung ; cf. eKGWB/NF-1883,16[48]), the one being a symbol of destruction as it breaks the surface of the earth, the other figuring creation, and the creation of new values above all. Although the one is an indispensable prelude to the other, Nietzsche's increasing emphasis on images of ripeness and harvesting in *Zarathustra* eclipses the ploughshare image to such an extent that it seems Zarathustra can harvest without first either ploughing or sowing, which makes for a strange kind of "immaculate conception"[37]. Zarathustra himself is "the richest and most-to-be-envied man" blessed with "rosy apples fallen from the tree" (eKGWB/Za-II-Grablied); in turn his teachings fall to his disciples like ripe figs in the autumn (eKGWB/Za-II-Inseln). For the majority of the book he himself is not ripe for his own fruits, though, as his "stillest hour" tells him at the end of Part Two (eKGWB/Za-II-Stunde). At the end of the long section "Of Old and New Law-Tables" in Part Three he apostrophises his Will, wishing "That I may one day be ready and ripe in the great noontide: ready and ripe like glowing ore, like cloud heavy with lightning and like swelling milk-udder" (eKGWB/Za-III-Tafeln-30) — one of Nietzsche's few positive images derived from pastoral farming — but it is

36. By derivation, he who "tills" in any case prepares the way to the goal: "till", "telos" and the German "Ziel" ("aim", "goal") are all cognates.

37. See Parkes, *Composing the Soul*, 187: here, in his section on "Sowings of Psychical Seed" (186-93), Parkes quickly "exhausts the seeding imagery in Nietzsche's texts" and is obliged to switch to Plato.

not until Part Four that the moment of Zarathustra's ripeness arrives. Ironically it does n o t arrive in the section "At Noontide", for there Zarathustra is overcome by sleep in the very act of reaching out to pluck himself a grape. In "The Intoxicated Song", the tolling bell announces that his ripeness is (again) at hand (eKGWB/Za-IV-Nachtwandler-6), and at the very end of the book our hero can finally announce: "Zarathustra has become ripe, my hour has come!" (eKGWB/Za-IV-Zeichen).

44. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a kind of *Bildungsroman* which concludes with the hero becoming ripe for his task, but that task remains what it was at the very beginning of the book, the proclamation of the Overman as the ultimate harvest, "the meaning of the earth" (eKGWB/Za-I-Vorrede-3)[38]. Just as Nietzsche himself, in the autumn of 1888, harvests the fruits of his own "ripeness" to clear the way for the "Revaluation of All Values" to come[39], so Zarathustra, transfigured, must yet return to "sow the seeds" — in this sense the structure of the book figures the agricultural cycle. The Overman is a plant that needs to be carefully prepared for and cultivated (cf. eKGWB/WS-189), but he is the t e l o s of the very earth itself, the noblest of all its fruits. Sturdier than any human plant yet produced, his strain will prove resistant to the noxious weed that is Christianity (eKGWB/GD-Verbesserer-4); nor will he be choked off by the "tropical vegetation of concepts" that shoots up from "the moral lie in the mouth of the *decadent*" (eKGWB/GD-Streifzuege-35). He will emerge like the "well-fruited" Dionysus of old[40]: under Nietzsche's ploughshare the earth itself is revalued and turned from the "fare of snakes" (eKGWB/FW-Vorspiel-8) into the birthplace of the transcendent.

6. Conclusion

45. The ploughshare serves Nietzsche as a transitional image, and he passes beyond it in the period after *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, when it disappears from both his notes and published works. In the end he never uses it as a title — perhaps Gast persuaded him it to abandon it as too subdued, just as he later persuaded him to abandon the low-key working title for *Twilight* (KGB III/6, 309f.) — but between 1876 and 1884 Nietzsche continues to explore and extend its range of reference, rejecting the inappropriate connotations of staidness and moral rectitude which attached to it in its original context, refashioning it instead into a potent symbol of "beneficent destruction".

38. On the recursive structure of *Zarathustra*, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986), 310f.

39. See the "Intermezzo" which Nietzsche interleaved between the Foreword and "Why I am So Wise" in *Ecce Homo*: "On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunlight has fallen on to my life", eKGWB/EH-Weise-1. In the Preface to the *Genealogy*, Nietzsche is already describing that work as the "riper fruit" of ideas first expressed in *Human, All Too Human*, and the ten years in between are figured as the successful preparation of "a country of my own, a soil of my own", eKGWB/GM-Vorrede-2 to 3; cf. eKGWB/MA-I-Vorrede-3.

40. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 509.

46. The development of the ploughshare image provides an object lesson in Nietzschean metaphorics, but it also illustrates the cavalier insouciance with which Nietzsche was at times prepared to treat a literary model. He first alighted on the *Helmbrecht* passage in 1869, at a point in his career characterised by an intensity of interest in literary history which would not thereafter be repeated. It is in his notebooks of this period that we find almost all the (handful of) references he will make to German medieval writers and writings, invariably in a Wagnerian context. Wolfram von Eschenbach, author of the Middle High German epic poem *Parzival* on which Wagner had based his *Lohengrin* and would subsequently base his *Parsifal*, is compared in passing to Wagner himself (eKGWB/NF-1870,7[162]); there are further passing references to the Siegfried of the *Nibelungenlied* (eKGWB/NF-1869,3[55]) and to Tannhäuser the medieval *Minnesänger* (eKGWB/NF-1870,7[193]). But most of the renowned German writers of the medieval period — Gottfried von Strassburg, Hartmann von Aue, Heinrich von Morungen, Konrad von Würzburg, Walther von der Vogelweide — are absent from Nietzsche's writings, for the fact remains that he had no real interest in medieval literature *per se*.

47. Had Nietzsche known the poem *Meier Helmbrecht* as a whole, he might have recognised that his treatment of Helmbrecht senior was actually no different from his treatment of the historical Zoroaster, whom he deliberately transformed into his mouthpiece Zarathustra in order to represent "the self-overcoming of the moralist into his opposite — i n t o m e" (eKGWB/EH-Schicksal-3). But he evidently did not know the poem and saw no reason to familiarise himself with it (in 1876 he seems to have returned to Uhland, but not to *Helmbrecht*). Never one to bow to the dictates of scholarly etiquette, even during his period as a scholar (as Wilamowitz-Moellendorf would relish pointing out), he excelled himself on this occasion, simply transcribing initially, indeed, mistranscribing) a fragment quoted out of context, in a New High German translation, in a secondary work.

48. Not that any of this really matters, for the second-hand quotation which Uhland provides for him is all he needs to be going on with when he retrieves it in 1876: he is happy to take his inspiration from literature in only the most tenuous of ways, for his purpose (by this stage, at least) is far removed from literary criticism. His imagination fired by the *Helmbrecht* quotation, he presses it into the service of his own interests from the start; like all the best literary models, it is ultimately no more than a point of departure and prepares the ground for Nietzsche's own fertile philosophical invention to bear fruit[41].

41. My thanks to Thomas Brobjer for his help in the researching of this paper.