

WOLFGANG MIEDER

“MY TONGUE – IS OF THE PEOPLE”: THE PROVERBIAL  
LANGUAGE OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE’S *THUS SPOKE  
ZARATHUSTRA*

**Abstract:** Friedrich Nietzsche repeatedly relies on elements of preformulated folk speech to add a certain metaphorical expressiveness to his thoughts and arguments, no matter whether they appear in aphorisms, fragments, poems, letters, essays or entire books. It is then surprising that the considerable secondary literature on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has been almost completely silent on its obvious proverbiality, and this even though Nietzsche occasionally refers with distinct introductory formulas to Bible and folk proverbs employed by him. This might well be due to the fact that Nietzsche seldom cites proverbs in their traditional wording since they would be far too didactic and moralistic for his insistence on the reevaluation of all values. Thus he parodies, manipulates, alienates, and contradicts proverbs by changing them into innovative anti-proverbs while at the same time also creating his own pseudo-proverbs to argue for a life free of antiquated rules and regulations. Often he merely alludes to proverbs using their metaphors merely to enhance his expressive style without any agreement with their wisdom. After all, Nietzsche wants to show how everything is something becoming and not an end, and that the positive struggle with fate has to be undertaken in eternal return (repetition) without rigid guidelines as proverbs would be. In any case, proverbial matters accompany Zarathustra on his path towards self-recognition and the acceptance of life. The numerous proverbial expressions with their metaphors add much to the poetic style of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, while the usually varied Bible and folk proverbs are used to underscore the break with God and Christianity. There is no doubt that the message of this literary and philosophical work is to a considerable degree informed by the multifaceted nuances of its proverbial language.

**Keywords:** Allusion, alteration, anti-feminism, anti-proverb, aphorism, Bible, folk speech, German, God, language, literature, metaphor, misogyny, morality, mutation, Friedrich Nietzsche, philosophy, proverb, proverbial expression, pseudo-proverb, religion, reevaluation of all values, semantics, somatism, structure, style, wisdom.

In the lyrical prelude to Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882, *The Gay Science*) appears a short verse whose title serves as an indication that proverbial matters play an important role in this early work and also in his entire writings. Typically for Nietzsche's proverbial and Biblical language and style its five lines allude to the two Bible proverbs "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" / "Seid klug wie die Schlangen und ohne Falsch wie die Tauben" (Matthew 10:16) and "Unto the pure (clean) all things are pure" / "Den Reinen ist alles rein" (Titus 1:15):

*The Proverb Speaks*

Sharp and mild, rough and fine,  
 Strange and familiar, impure and clean,  
 A place where fool and sage convene:  
 All this I am and wish to mean,  
 Dove as well as snake and swine.<sup>1</sup>

*Das Sprüchwort spricht.*

Scharf und milde, grob und fein,  
 Vertraut und seltsam, schmutzig und rein,  
 Der Narren und Weisen Stelldichein:  
 Dieses Alles bin ich, will ich sein,  
 Taube zugleich, Schlange und Schwein! (KSA3, 355)<sup>2</sup>

This could well be considered as a poetic proverb definition, but Nietzsche hardly had a theoretical deliberation about folk and Bible proverbs in mind. To be sure, it is the proverb that is speaking, but one would hardly go wrong if one take the lyrical "I" to be Nietzsche himself, whose differentiated linguistic nuances and stylistic levels contain all the aspects referred to in the poem. That this interpretation is somewhat justified can be seen from a verse of three rhymed lines that Nietzsche had deleted from *The Gay Science* before its publication. Here it is clearly Nietzsche who is speaking:

Wise and foolish, rough and fine,  
 Sharp and mild, water and wine:  
 All of this my proverb shall be.<sup>3</sup>

Weis und närrisch, grob und fein,  
 Scharf und milde, Wasser und Wein:  
 Dies alles soll mein Sprüchwort sein! (KSA14, 234)

Here Nietzsche summarizes quite clearly what his proverbial intention will be, namely to appear intermittently as a sage, fool, roughian or gentleman and to pour questionable water (nonsense) or pure wine (wisdom) into his readers' glasses. Indirectly Nietzsche speaks of his linguistic and philosophical desire to express his cultural and moralistic criticism by way of all registers of language available to him. He is concerned about a philosophical and poetic penetration of human, all-too-human conditions. Wordplay with traditional formulas is part of this very conscious linguistic and stylistic endeavor, and it is part of Nietzsche's image as a magisterial "linguistic innovator" / "Sprachschöpfer" with a great "linguistic imagination" / "Sprachphantasie" and "linguistic potency" / "Sprachmächtigkeit".<sup>4</sup> The at times somewhat colloquial metaphors of folk speech are most certainly part of Nietzsche's creative thoughts and linguistic formulations. A quotation from *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883-1885; *Thus spoke Zarathustra*), written about two years later, makes all of this quite clear and is most likely an allusion to the animal reference of the poem brought about by the rhyme "rein-Schwein": "'To the clean all is clean,' the people say. But I say unto you, 'To the mean [swine] all becomes mean'" (204) / "'Dem [sic] Reinen ist alles rein' – so spricht das Volk. Ich aber sage euch: den Schweinen wird Alles Schwein" (KSA4, 256).<sup>5</sup> Since the construction of the world includes the clean (pure) that has been drawn into the mire, Nietzsche feels compelled to expose antiquated moral attitudes and human falsehoods. It follows that Nietzsche's argumentative leit-motif of the revaluation of all values also confronts so-called virtuous and timeless Bible and folk proverbs that rather appropriately play a considerable role not only in his prophetic masterwork *Thus spoke Zarathustra* but also in his literary, philosophical, and epistolary oeuvre as such.

It is then surprising that the considerable secondary literature on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* has been almost completely silent on its obvious proverbiality, and this even though Nietzsche occasionally refers with distinct introductory formulas to Bible and folk proverbs employed by him. To be sure, Hans Morowa deals with Biblical

archaisms that Nietzsche took over from Luther's Bible language, but he failed to recognize the many phraseological units in his study on the language and style of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.<sup>6</sup> Joachim Goth and Marie Hed Kaulhausen mention at least a few proverbial expressions and proverbs from this work, but they say nothing about their rhetorical and semantic significance.<sup>7</sup> However, Siegfried Vitens' comments are noteworthy, since he refers to Nietzsche's inclination of parodistically negating and reversing fixed formulas, quotations, and proverbs, while also citing the altered Biblical expression "Not a few who wanted to drive out their devil have themselves entered into swine" (55) / "Nicht wenige, die ihren Teufel austreiben wollten, fuhren dabei selber in die Säue" (KSA4, 70; see Matthew 8:31) as well as the secularized anti-proverb "The prince proposes, but the shopkeeper disposes" (177) / "Der Fürst denkt, aber der Krämer – lenkt!" (KSA4, 223) as examples from *Zarathustra*.<sup>8</sup> Mention should also be made of Ludger Lütkehaus' anthology "Stehlen ist oft seliger als nehmen". *Nietzsche zum Vergnügen* (2000) whose title cites Nietzsche's shocking perversion of the Bible proverb "It is more blessed to give than to receive" / "Geben ist seliger als nehmen" (Acts 20:25).<sup>9</sup> In the short formulation "Stealing is often more blessed than receiving" / "Stehlen ist oft seliger als nehmen" (KSA10, 395) this anti-proverb is included in a collection of aphoristic fragments entitled by Nietzsche as "Böse Weisheit." *Sprüche und Sprüchwörtliches* (1883; KSA10, 383-413), but in a slightly expanded form this "new" piece of wisdom appears twice in the second and third part of *Zarathustra* (1883 und 1884): "I do not know the happiness of those who receive; and I have often dreamed that even stealing must be more blessed than receiving" (106) / "Ich kenne das Glück des Nehmenden nicht; und oft träumte mir davon, dass Stehlen noch seliger sein müsse, als Nehmen" (KSA4, 136) and "until finally you [Zarathustra] sat thirsty among drunks and complained by night, 'Is it not more blessed to receive than to give, and to steal still more blessed than to receive?' – then you were forsaken!" (184) / "– bis du [Zarathustra] endlich durstig und allein unter Trunkenen sassest und nächtlich klagtest 'ist Nehmen nicht seliger als Geben? Und Stehlen noch seliger als Nehmen?' – Das war Verlassenheit!" (KSA4, 232).

These texts and more than five thousand other proverbial references are cited in their contexts in the index of proverbs and proverbial expressions in Andreas Nolte's and my book "Zu

*meiner Hölle will ich den Weg mit guten Sprüchen pflastern*". *Friedrich Nietzsches sprichwörtliche Sprache* (2012). This voluminous study includes several chapters about the differentiated use and function of proverbial materials in Nietzsche's works. It is shown how he repeatedly relies on elements of preformulated folk speech to add a certain metaphorical expressiveness to his thoughts and arguments, no matter whether they appear in aphorisms, fragments, poems, letters, essays or entire books.<sup>10</sup> Quite appropriately, if perhaps a bit surprisingly for many Nietzsche scholars, the following programmatic statement appears in *Zarathustra*: "My tongue – is of the people: I speak too crudely and heartily for Angora rabbits. And my speech sounds even stranger to all ink-fish and pen-hacks" (191) / "Mein Mundwerk – ist des Volks: zu grob und herzlich rede ich für die Seidenhasen. Und noch fremder klingt mein Wort allen Tinten-Fischen und Feder-Füchsen" (KSA4, 241). The many variants of the German proverbial expression "to have an evil (quick, audacious, ungodly, rough, big, good, loose, unwashed) glib tongue" / "ein böses [flinkes, freches, gottloses, grobes, großes, gutes, loses, ungewaschenes] Mundwerk haben"<sup>11</sup> might well be looked at as a colloquial self-characterization of Nietzsche's multifaceted use of language. It must, however, be said that our study does not include a detailed interpretation of the proverbiality of individual books by Nietzsche. This essay then represents an attempt to show how Nietzsche's major work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is informed to a considerable extent by the innovative use of proverbial language that adds much to his powerful style and his intended message.

Even though *Zarathustra* is generally considered to be Nietzsche's most prominent work, there is still much uncertainty about what exactly this controversial philosopher or literary author had wanted to say with it. Partially at fault about this open question is his aphoristic, esoteric, and poetic style that often is based on analogies and metaphors. The result are opaque and contradictory proclamations that are immediately put into question in an equally encoded way.<sup>12</sup> Thus readers are often not sure whether the prophet Zarathustra speaks for Nietzsche, whether either one envisions a clear goal for humanity, and what the call for a new and elevated humankind actually entails. The seemingly unconnected short chapters with their own open questions are part of this mystification, but altogether Nietzsche is expressing his idea of

the revaluation of all values beyond the old concepts of good and evil that will lead to an acceptance of human life as an eternal return (repetition) without any definite goal. This process demands that humankind abolishes God and religion as well as antiquated concepts of morality, thus going beyond Christian limitations. All of this entails a destruction of the traditional world order and a change or overcoming of humankind as it exists. In this regard Nietzsche's at times rather elitist and provocative concept of the overman must therefore be understood as a call for human beings to go beyond their present limited state. This has in fact nothing to do with a pathological overhuman will to power, as all of this was manipulatively interpreted by Adolf Hitler and other National Socialists.<sup>13</sup> There is a sententious leitmotif in *Zarathustra* that summarizes all of this, taking on, as do other such formulaic statements, "the character of true proverbs" / "das Gepräge von echten Sprichwörtern").<sup>14</sup> A better term would probably be "pseudo-proverb", and as such it appears for the first time right at the beginning of *Zarathustra* as an incredibly informative statement revealing the intended meaning and purpose of the entire book:

I teach you the overman. Man is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? (12)  
 Ich lehre euch den Übermenschen. Der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden soll. Was habt ihr gethan, ihn zu überwinden? (KSA4, 14)

When the pseudo-proverb "Man is something that must be overcome" is cited for a second time some thirty pages later, it appears in a typically contradictory context of which the meaning becomes clear only after careful deliberation. Apparently humankind must sink very low, symbolically perish or "die", so that a liberating renunciation of traditional concepts of virtue can take place:

Alas, my brother, have you never yet seen a virtue deny and stab herself?  
 Man is something that must be overcome; and therefore you shall love your virtues, for you will perish of them. (37)  
 Ach, mein Bruder, sahst du noch nie eine Tugend sich selber verleumden und erstechen?

Der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden muss: und darum sollst du deine Tugenden lieben, – denn du wirst an ihnen zu Grunde gehn. – (KSA4, 44)

It takes this symbolic death in order to bring about the rebirth of a new and liberated humankind as argued by Zarathustra and Nietzsche. This basic idea reappears numerous times as a pseudo-proverbial leitmotif in *Zarathustra*, providing this complex work with its philosophical red thread (roter Faden):

Your highest thought, however, you should receive as a command from me – and it is: man is something that shall be overcome. (48)

Euren höchsten Gedanken aber sollt ihr euch von mir befehlen lassen – und er lautet: der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden soll. (KSA4, 60)

O my friend, man is something that must be overcome. (57)

Oh, mein Freund, der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden muss. (KSA4, 72)

There it was too that I picked up the word “overman” by the way, and that man is something that must be overcome. (198)

Dort war's auch, wo ich das Wort “Übermensch” vom Wege auflos, und dass der Mensch Etwas sei, das überwunden werden müsse. (KSA4, 248)

Thus my great love of the farthest demands it: do not spare your neighbor! Man is something that must be overcome. (199)

Also heischt es meine grosse Liebe zu den Fernsten: schone deinen Nächsten nicht! Der Mensch ist Etwas, das überwunden werden muss. (KSA4, 249)

“I love the great despisers. Man, however, is something that must be overcome.” (267)

Ich liebe die grossen Verachtenden. Der Mensch aber ist Etwas, das überwunden werden muss. – – (KSA4, 332)

In the fourth part of *Zarathustra* (1885) the pseudo-proverb is cited one more time, albeit in dissolved form, in the chapter “On the

Higher Man”, who is well on his way to the new but not clearly definable overman:

The most concerned ask today: “How is man to be preserved?” But Zarathustra is the first and only one to ask: “How is man to be overcome?”

I have the overman at heart, that is my first and only concern – and not man: not the neighbor, not the poorest, not the most ailing, not the best.

[...]

You higher men, overcome the small virtues, the small prudences, the grain-of-sand consideration, the ants’ ruff-raff, the wretched contentment, the “happiness of the greatest number”! And rather despair than surrender. And verily, I love you for not knowing how to live today, you higher men! For thus you live best. (287-288)

Die Sorglichstn fragen heute: “wie bleibt der Mensch erhalten?” Zarathustra aber fragt als der Einzige und Ernste: “wie wird der Mensch überwunden”?

Der Übermensch liegt mir am Herzen, der ist mein Erstes und Einziges, – und nicht der Mensch: nicht der Nächste, nicht der Ärmste, nicht der Leidendste, nicht der Beste –

[...]

Überwindet mir, ihr höheren Menschen, die kleinen Tugenden, die kleinen Klugheiten, die Sandkorn-Rücksichten, den Ameisen-Kribbelkram, das erbärmliche Behagen, das “Glück der Meisten” –!

Und lieber verzweifelt, als dass ihr euch ergebt. Und, wahrlich, ich liebe euch dafür, dass ihr heute nicht zu leben wisst, ihr höheren Menschen! So nämlich lebt ihr – am Besten! (KSA4, 357-358)

That is no plan or prescription but “a reflective process [...] of free play, of oscillation between the text-immanent and text-external aspect” that includes “the irrational, the indecipherable and the arbitrarily interpretable” / “ein Reflexionsprozeß [...] des freien Spiels, des Oszillierens zwischen textimmanenter und textäußerer Seite”, der “Irrationales, Unentzifferbares oder beliebig zu Interpretierendes” einschließt.<sup>15</sup> Even “Zarathustra does not reach a final state of wisdom” or “a resting place”,<sup>16</sup> but by serious struggle he reaches the conviction, perhaps somewhat surprising for the



alleged nay-sayer Nietzsche, the “world-affirming ideal that expresses itself in self-affirmation” and “the celebration of life in eternal return [repetition].”<sup>17</sup> Thus one finds right at the beginning of *Zarathustra* the affirmative declaration:

Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! (13)  
 Seht, ich lehre euch den Übermenschen!  
 Der Übermensch ist der Sinn der Erde. Euer Wille sage:  
 der Übermensch sei der Sinn der Erde! (KSA4, 14)

The same thought reappears more poetically expressed a few pages later, where Nietzsche once again leaves his idea of a new humankind somewhat in the dark:

I will teach men the meaning of their existence – the overman, the lightning out of the dark cloud of man. But I am still far from them, and my sense does not speak to their senses. To men I am still the mean between a fool and a corpse.  
 Dark is the night, dark are Zarathustra’s ways. (20-21)  
 Ich will die Menschen den Sinn ihres Seins lehren:  
 welcher ist der Übermensch, der Blitz aus der dunklen Wolke Mensch.  
 Aber noch bin ich ihnen ferne, und mein Sinn redet nicht zu ihren Sinnen. Eine Mitte bin ich noch den Menschen zwischen einem Narren und einem Leichnam.  
 Dunkel ist die Nacht, dunkel sind die Wege Zarathustra’s.  
 (KSA4, 23)

There is no doubt that Nietzsche walks on dark and challenging paths to convince humankind “To assume the right to new values” (27) / “Recht sich nehmen [sollen] zu neuen Werthen” (KSA4, 30), because “Around the inventors of new values the world revolves” (52) / “um die Erfinder von neuen Werthen dreht sich die Welt” (KSA4, 65). Humankind lies, as Nietzsche expresses it proverbially, “in fetters of false values and delusive words” (91) / “in Banden falscher Werthe und Wahn-Worte!” (KSA4, 117). Nietzsche also employs the somatic expression “to have one’s hands free” / “die Hände frei haben” in order to emphasize the messianic task of his Zarathustra as a life-confirming prophet: “I have be-

come one who blesses and says Yes; and I fought long for that and was a fighter that I might one day get my hands free to bless” (165) / “Zum Segnenden bin ich [Zarathustra] worden und zum Ja-sagenden: und dazu rang ich lange und war ein Ringer, dass ich einst die Hände frei bekäme zum Segnen” (KSA4, 209). But even if life is likened to a wrestling match, Zarathustra freely admits that “life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was” (227) / “war mir das Leben lieber, als je alle meine Weisheit” (KSA4, 285). But the problem remains, of course, that even Nietzsche’s chosen fellow human beings are not yet ready to follow Zarathustra on his novel path:

Well then, they still sleep, these higher men, while I [Zarathustra] am awake; these are not my proper companions. It is not for them that I wait here in my mountains. I want to go to my work, to my day; but they do not understand the signs of my morning; my stride is for them no summons to awaken. (325)

Wohlan! sie schlafen noch, diese höheren Menschen, während ich [Zarathustra] wach bin: das sind nicht meine rechten Gefährten! Nicht auf sie warte ich hier in meinen Bergen.

Zu meinem Werke will ich, zu meinem Tage: aber sie verstehen nicht, was die Zeichen meines Morgens sind, mein Schritt – ist für sie kein Weckruf. (KSA4, 405)

One could certainly observe that Zarathustra has given a hopeful wake-up call, making it possible for him to leave his spiritual mountain-top and to make his way confidently to the people at the end of this semiotic work. From darkness to light, from divine disempowerment to free development, as Markus Meckel has expressed it so well in his anthropologically oriented essay “Der Weg Zarathustras als der Weg des Menschen” (1980, “Zarathustra’s Path as the Path of Humankind”):

God is dead. Man alone is the topic. [...] “Death of God” is thought of as the task of man to comply with his manhood. The talk about God thus becomes the talk about man. In this way the differentiated use of the word “God” by Nietzsche always reveals anthropological statements. But the background for all statements is the turning away

for God, the rejection of the Christian, metaphysical God. [...] Man for Nietzsche is body and belongs to this earth; he cannot free himself for that. Man and world [that is the here and not the beyond] belong closely together. [...] Thus the turn to the earth as the place for man and the death of God depend on each other.

Gott ist tot. Der Mensch allein ist Thema. [...] "Tod Gottes" wird gedacht als die Aufgabe des Menschen, seinem Mensch-Sein zu entsprechen. Rede von Gott wird damit Rede vom Menschen. So eröffnet der recht unterschiedliche Gebrauch des Wortes "Gott" bei Nietzsche immer anthropologische Aussagen. Hintergrund aller Aussagen aber ist die Abwendung von Gott, die Ablehnung des christlichen, des metaphysischen Gottes. [...] Der Mensch ist für Nietzsche Leib und gehört zu dieser Erde; davon kann er sich nicht freimachen. Mensch und Welt [also das Diesseits und nicht das Jenseits] gehören eng zusammen. [...] So gehört Hinwendung zur Welt (=Erde) zum Grundbestand der Lehre Zarathustras. [...] Hinwendung zur Erde als Ort des Menschen und Tod Gottes bedingen einander.<sup>18</sup>

After this intriguing analysis Meckel cites the following reference from *Zarathustra*, but it is surprising that even as an anthropologist he ignores the ancient proverbial expression originating from the ostrich sticking his head into the sand. After all, this traditional phrase is such a clear indication for the fact that Nietzsche relies on folk language for some of his most fundamental statements:

It learns to speak ever more honestly, this ego: and the more it learns, the more words and honors it finds for body and earth.

A new pride my ego taught me, and this I teach men: no longer to bury one's head in the sand of heavenly things, but to bear it freely, an earthly head, which creates a meaning for the earth. (32)

Immer redlicher lernt es reden, das Ich: und je mehr es lernt, um so mehr findet es Worte und Ehren für Leib und Erde.

Einen neuen Stolz lehrte mich mein Ich, den lehre ich die Menschen: nicht mehr den Kopf in den Sand der

himmlischen Dinge zu stecken, sondern frei ihn zu tragen,  
 einen Erden-Kopf, der der Erde Sinn schafft!  
 Einen neuen Willen lehre ich die Menschen. [KSA4, 36-  
 37)<sup>19</sup>

Many pages later Nietzsche returns one more time to this proverbial expression in order to emphasize metaphorically that man has to liberate himself from his ostrich perspective:

He who will one day teach men to fly will have moved all boundary stones; the boundary stones themselves will fly into the air before him, and he will rebaptize the earth – “the light one.”

The ostrich runs faster than the fastest horse, but even he buries his head gravely in the grave earth; even so, the man who has not yet learned to fly. Earth and life seem grave to him; and thus the spirit of gravity wants it. But whoever would become light and a bird must love himself: thus I teach. (192)

Wer die Menschen einst fliegen lehrt, der hat alle Grenzsteine verrückt; alle Grenzsteine selber werden ihm in die Luft fliegen, die Erde wird er neu taufen – als “die Leichte.”

Der Vogel Strauß läuft schneller als das schnellste Pferd, aber auch er steckt noch den Kopf schwer in schwere Erde: also der Mensch, der noch nicht fliegen kann.

Schwer heisst ihm Erde und Leben; und so will es der Geist der Schwere! Wer aber leicht werden will und ein Vogel, der muss sich selber lieben: – also lehre ich. (KSA4, 242)

An explosive, winged self-liberation is necessary so that people can find their preordained purpose for a secular life. That liberating path, however, is filled with contradictions, and they hit a person in a proverbial way “in front of the head” in the sense of being stunned or dumbfounded: “They contradict each other, these paths; they offend each other face to face [hit each other in front of the head]; and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is inscribed above: ‘Moment’” (157-158) / “Sie widersprechen sich, diese Wege; sie stossen sich gerade vor den Kopf: – und hier, an diesem Thorwege, ist es, wo sie zusammen kommen. Der Name des Thorwegs steht oben

geschrieben: 'Augenblick'" (KSA4, 199-200). Nietzsche as the "player" with thoughts is quick to rely on at times difficult to translate somatic expressions based on "head" / "Kopf" in order to show how momentary insights hit people into the head and how concepts literally need to be turned on their head so that new truths can come to light:

Too often, verily, did I follow close on the heels of truth: so she kicked me in the face [kicked me in the head]. Sometimes I thought I was lying, and behold, only then did I hit the truth. (274)

Zu oft, wahrlich, folgte ich der Wahrheit dicht auf dem Fusse: da trat sie mir vor den Kopf. Manchmal meinte ich zu lügen, und siehe! da erst traf ich – die Wahrheit. (KSA4, 340)

Lift up your hearts, my brothers, high, higher! And do not forget your legs either. Lift up your legs too, you good dancers; and better yet, stand on your heads! (294)

Erhebt eure Herzen, meine Brüder, hoch! höher! Und vergesst mir auch die Beine nicht! Erhebt auch eure Beine, ihr guten Tänzer, und besser noch: ihr steht auch auf dem Kopf! (KSA4, 366)

What? he [Zarathustra] cried. What did I hear just now? Verily, it seems to me that you [a scientist] are a fool, or that I am one myself; and your "truth" I simply reverse [stand on its head]. (302-303)

Wie! rief er [Zarathustra], was hörte ich da eben? Wahrlich, mich dünkt, du [ein Wissenschaftler] bist ein Narr oder ich selber bin's: und deine "Wahrheit" stelle ich rucks und flugs auf den Kopf. (KSA4, 377)

Such somatic expressions appear again and again in *Zarathustra* and add to its emotionally charged metaphorical expressiveness. Even though such textual references are normally intended seriously, a few humorous observations do appear as well. This play between seriousness and humor is yet another example of Nietzsche's contradictory thought and work process, as can be seen from the following somatic examples:

I have long known that the devil would trip me [by putting his leg in my way]. (20)

Ich wusste es lange, dass mir der Teufel ein Bein stellen werde. (KSA4, 22)

You shall build over and beyond yourself, but first you must be built yourself, perpendicular in body and soul. (69)

Über dich sollst du hinausbauen. Aber erst musst du mir selber gebaut sein, rechtwinklig an Leib und Seele. (KSA4, 90)

And when I talked in confidence [under four eyes] with my wisdom she said to me in anger [...]. (108)

Und als ich unter vier Augen mit meiner wilden Weisheit redete, sagte sie mir zornig [...]. (KSA4, 140)

And even if you are right – should that be said to my face? (109)

Und wenn du Recht hättest, – sagt man das mir so in's Gesicht! (KSA4, 141)

They watch each other closely [look each other on the fingers] and mistrustfully. (125)

Sie sehen einander gut auf die Finger und trauen sich nicht zum Besten. (KSA4, 161)

Eventually his own tongue was loosened as he listened, and the ice of his heart broke. (155)

Zuletzt wurde ihm im Zuhören die eigne Zunge gelöst, und das Eis seines Herzens brach. (KSA4, 197)

I walk among this people and I keep my eyes open. (168, 169)

Ich gehe durch diess Volk und halte meine (die) Augen offen. (KSA4, 212, 213)

You know it well: your cowardly devil within you, who would like to fold his hands and rest his hands in his lap and be more comfortable [...]. (180)

Du weißt es wohl: dein feiger Teufel in dir, der gerne Hände-falten und Hände-in-den-Schoss-legen und es bequemer haben möchte [...]. (KSA4, 227-228)

With lashes one should make your legs sprightly again,  
(207)

Mit Ruthenstreichen soll man euch wieder muntre Beine  
machen. (KSA4, 259)

Verily, you will yet have to drag him by the hair into his  
heaven. (207-208)

Wahrlich, ihr werdet ihn an den Haaren in seinen Himmel  
ziehen müssen. (KSA4, 260)

With his tongue hanging from lasciviousness [out of his  
throat]. But he calls it his "pity." (218)

Die Zunge hängt ihm aus dem Halse vor Lüsternheit. Er  
aber heisst es sein "Mitleiden." (KSA4, 273)

Immediately Zarathustra, who had opened his ears and  
eyes wide at this talk, rose from his hiding-place. (246)

Sofort erhob sich Zarathustra, der zu diesen Reden Ohren  
und Augen aufgesperrt hatte, aus seinem Schlupfwinkel.  
(KSA4, 306)

"Speaking in the confidence of three eyes," the old pope  
said cheerfully (for he was blind in one eye), "in what  
pertains to God, I am – and have the right to be – more  
enlightened than Zarathustra himself." (260-261)

"Unter drei Augen gesprochen, sagte erheitert der alte  
Papst (denn er war auf Einem Auge blind), in Dingen  
Gottes bin ich aufgeklärter als Zarathustra selber – und  
darf es sein." (KSA4, 323)

They unburden their hearts, good hours come back to  
them, they celebrate and chew the cud: they become  
grateful. (311)

Sie schütten ihr Herz aus, gute Stunden kehren ihnen  
zurück, sie feiern und kauen wieder, – sie werden  
dankbar. (KSA4, 387)

Of interest is also how Nietzsche connects the somatic expression  
"to have a cloven foot" / "einen Pferdefuß haben" with two twin  
formulas and an additional "devil" / "Teufel" phrase: "My foot is  
a cloven foot; with it I trample and trot over sticks and stones,  
crisscross, and I am happy as the devil while running so fast"  
(192) / "Mein Fuss – ist ein Pferdefuss; damit trapple und trabe ich

über Stock und Stein, kreuz- und quersfeld-ein und bin des Teufels vor Lust bei allem schnellen Laufen" (KSA4, 241). Forty pages later Nietzsche returns to the medieval twin formula "over sticks and stones" / "über Stock und Stein" in his prophetic description of the path to enlightenment: "That is a dance up high and down low [over sticks and stones]: I am the hunter; would you be my dog or my doe?" (225) / "Das ist ein Tanz über Stock und Stein: ich bin der Jäger, – willst du mein Hund oder meine Gemse sein?" (KSA4, 283). In one of his letters of November 19, 1886, to his friend Heinrich Köselitz, Nietzsche once mentioned that in his *Zarathustra* he uses "folk speech with all sincerity and delight just like a mother tongue" / "mit aller Herzlichkeit und Lust die 'Volkssprache', ganz wie eine Muttersprache" (KSB7, 284). Precisely, for elements of folk speech, even the simplest twin formulas, can be found everywhere. But Nietzsche, of course, integrates them in innovative ways into his philosophical context where they add much to a metaphorical expressiveness.

And here is yet one more somatic reference in which Zarathustra without any doubt employs an enlightening allusion to the proverb "If you offer someone the little finger, he will take the whole hand" / "Wenn man einem den kleinen Finger bietet (reicht), so nimmt er die ganze Hand". Zarathustra does not use this wisdom as a reproach but rather as an offer to help the "higher" men on their path: "[The offer], however, is my little finger. And once you have that, by all means take the whole hand; well, and my heart too!" (280) / "[Das Angebot] aber ist: mein kleiner Finger. Und habt ihr den erst. so nehmt nur noch die ganze Hand, wohlan! und das Herz dazu!" (KSA4, 348). What becomes clear here is that Nietzsche usually does not use folk proverbs in their known wording to be followed as pieces of wisdom. Instead he varies their vocabulary and breaks up their original structure so that they take on new semantic functions. Often such proverb alterations are mere generalized observations without any intended didacticism. In fact, one could say that such dissolved proverbs are to be understood merely as expressive metaphors, showing Nietzsche's keen interest in the images of folk speech. The following examples, first citing the original proverb in italics in each case, are ample proof of this:



*The drowning man will clutch at a straw.*

*Der Ertrinkende klammert sich an einen Strohhalm  
(auch: jeden Strohhalm ergreifen)*

They [the preachers of death] reach for sweets while mocking their own childishness; they clutch the straw of their life and mock that they still clutch a straw. Their wisdom says, "A fool who stays alive – but such fools are we. And this is surely the most foolish thing about life." (45)

Sie [Prediger des Todes] greifen nach Zuckerwerk und spotten ihrer Kinderei dabei: sie hängen an ihrem Strohhalm Leben und spotten, dass sie noch an einem Strohhalm hängen.

Ihre Weisheit lautet: "ein Thor, der leben bleibt, aber so sehr sind wir Thoren! Und das eben ist das Thörichste am Leben!" – (KSA4, 56)

*A steady drop makes a hole in the stone.*

*Steter Tropfen höhlt den Stein.*

You are no stone, but you have already become hollow from many drops. You will yet burst from many drops. (53)

Du bist kein Stein, aber schon wurdest du hohl von vielen Tropfen. Zerbrechen und zerbersten wirst du mir noch von vielen Tropfen. (KSA4, 66-67)

*When the eating tastes the best, one should stop.*

*Wenn das Essen am besten schmeckt, soll man aufhören.*

One must cease letting oneself be eaten when one tastes best: that is known to those who want to be loved long. (72)

Man muss aufhören, sich essen zu lassen, wenn man am besten schmeckt: das wissen Die, welche lange geliebt werden wollen. (KSA4, 94)

*Virtue is its own reward.*

*Tugend ist selbst ihr bester Lohn.*

You who are virtuous still want to be paid! Do you want rewards for virtue, and heaven for earth, and the eternal for your today?

And now you are angry with me because I teach that there is no reward and paymaster? And verily, I do not even teach that virtue is its own reward. (93)

Ihr wollt noch bezahlt sein, ihr Tugendhaften! Wollt Lohn für Tugend und Himmel für Erden und Ewiges für euer Heute haben?

Und nun zürnt ihr mir, dass ich lehre, es giebt keinen Lohn- und Zahlmeister? Und wahrlich, ich lehre nicht einmal, dass Tugend ihr eigener Lohn ist. (KSA4, 120)

*Fools' hands scribble on tables and walls.*

*Narrenhände beschmieren Tisch und Wände.*

My hand is a fool's hand: beware, all tables and walls and whatever else still offer room for foolish frill or scribbling skill. (192)

Meine Hand – ist eine Narrenhand: wehe allen Tischen und Wänden, und was noch Platz hat für Narren-Zierath, Narren-Schmierath! (KSA4, 241)

*Water has no planks.*

*Wasser hat keine Balken.*

When the water is spanned by planks, when bridges and railings leap over the river, verily, those are not believed who say, "Everything is in flux." (201)

Wenn das Wasser Balken hat, wenn Stege und Geländer über den Fluss springen: wahrlich, da findet Keiner Glauben, der da spricht: "Alles ist im Fluss." (KSA4, 252)<sup>20</sup>

*All that glitters is not gold.*

*Es ist nicht alles Gold, was glänzt.*

Let the shopkeeper rule where all that still glitters is – shopkeepers' gold. The time of kings is past: what calls itself a people today deserves no kings. (210)

Mag da der Krämer herrschen, wo Alles, was noch glänzt – Krämer-Gold ist! Es ist die Zeit der Könige nicht mehr: was sich heute Volk heisst, verdient keine Könige. (KSA4, 262-263)

*The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse.*

*Der Berg kreißte und gebar ein Mäuslein.*

Well then, you higher men! Only now is the mountain of man's future in labor. God died: now we want the overman to live. (287)

Wohlan! Wohlauf! Ihr höheren Menschen! Nun erst kreisst der Berg der Menschen-Zukunft. Gott starb: nun wollen wir, – dass der Übermensch lebe. (KSA4, 357)

The last reference by the classical philologist Friedrich Nietzsche is a colossal and semantically significant variation of the Latin proverbs “Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus”,<sup>21</sup> where the mountain is now bringing forth the overman instead of the mouse and God as the creator is of no import any longer. It is utterly surprising that the secondary literature has not commented on this blasphemous reference and other such proverb manipulations in that they so obviously are key statements for the meaning and understanding of *Zarathustra*.

The declaration of the death of God and the turning of man to the world doubtlessly comprise the basis of the lyrical and yet proverbial philosophical treatise, as one might call Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Of course, Nietzsche's blasphemous claim that “God is dead” / “Gott ist tot” was at first neither poetic nor proverbial, but as a sententious remark it has long taken on a proverbial nature albeit with the distinct loss of Nietzsche's philosophically founded reasoning.

Actually Nietzsche had declared God dead already one year earlier in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882, *The Gay Science*), and it is this first reference that remains the best known: “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him”<sup>22</sup> / “Gott ist todt! Gott bleibt todt! Und wir haben ihn getötet” (KSA3, 481). Other occurrences from this book are above all “The greatest recent event – that ‘God is dead,’ that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe”<sup>23</sup> / “Das grösste neuere Ereignis, – dass ‘Gott todt ist’, dass der Glaube an den christlichen Gott unglaubwürdig geworden ist – beginnt bereits seine ersten Schatten über Europa zu werfen” (KSA3, 573) and “Indeed, we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel, when we hear the news that ‘the old God is dead,’ as if a new dawn shone on us”<sup>24</sup> / “In der That, wir Philosophen und ‘freien Geister’ fühlen uns bei der Nachricht, dass der ‘alte Gott todt’ ist, wie von einer neuen Morgenröthe angestrahlt” (KSA3,

574). Of greatest interest is, however, what Nietzsche expresses shortly afterwards with seemingly considerable more humility in the second part of his *Zarathustra* (1883). But here again it is of utmost importance, as always with Nietzsche, that one considers the context carefully, for it is not Zarathustra who is speaking in this case but rather the devil: “Thus spoke the devil to me once: ‘God too has his hell: that is his love of man.’ And most recently I heard him say this: ‘God is dead; God died of his pity for man.’” (90) / “Also sprach der Teufel einst zu mir: ‘auch Gott hat seine Hölle: das ist seine Liebe zu den Menschen.’ Und jüngst hörte ich ihn diess Wort sagen: ‘Gott ist todt; an seinem Mitleiden mit den Menschen ist Gott gestorben’ –” (KSA4, 115). That is for Nietzsche himself a devilish interpretation in contrast to his own liberating deed of annihilating the Biblical God, something that he later in *Zarathustra* repeats very directly in all its shortness and without any compassion: “For this old God lives no more: he is thoroughly dead. Thus spoke Zarathustra” (263) / “Dieser alte Gott nämlich lebt nicht mehr: der ist gründlich todt. – Also sprach Zarathustra” (KSA4, 326). Nietzsche’s claim caught on, and here are at least two of the numerous aphoristic reactions to Nietzsche’s infamous declaration of God’s death that refer directly to Nietzsche’s proverbial slogan:

God is dead, Nietzsche is dead – and I feel also pretty bad already.

Gott ist tot, Nietzsche ist tot – und mir ist auch schon ganz schlecht.

Anonymous (1982)<sup>25</sup>

*Short Sunday Sermon*

God has – according to Nietzsche – died,  
but as a multi-purpose weapon  
is still useful  
and traded worldwide  
because not protected by copyright.

*Kurze Sonntagspredigt*

Gott ist – laut Nietzsche – verstorben,  
doch als Mehrzweckwaffe  
immer noch tauglich  
und weltweit im Handel,

weil urheberrechtlich nicht geschützt.  
Günter Grass (1997)<sup>26</sup>

One wonders how Nietzsche might have reacted to such modern reactions to his claim that “God is dead” / “Gott ist tot”? He would hardly have been pleased to learn that his entire oeuvre prevails primarily in folk parlance by way of the three (un)winged words “God is dead”!<sup>27</sup>

The higher men, who possess the courageous insight that God would stand in their way to new values and a life-confirming existence could very well have been labeled as exceptional human beings by Nietzsche. They are those who will not submit to the will of God: “Against this submission, against this God stands the ‘I will’ of Zarathustra, the creating and loving one, who constructs himself and his living space by going beyond himself. In this going beyond oneself that is the essence of man is implied that men are different, differently advanced on their path to the overman” / “Gegen diese Ergebung, gegen diesen Gott steht das ‘ich will’ Zarathustras, des Schaffenden und Liebenden, der sich selbst und seinen Lebensraum im Über-sich-hinaus-gehen schafft. In diesem Über-sich-hinaus-gehen, das das Wesen des Menschen ausmacht, ist impliziert, daß die Menschen verschieden sind, verschieden weit auf ihrem Wege zum Übermenschen”.<sup>28</sup> It is then no surprise that Nietzsche had to deal quite critically with the two related democratic proverbs “All men are equal” / “Alle Menschen sind gleich” and “Before God all men are equal” / “Vor Gott sind alle Menschen gleich”. After all, his “higher men” / “höhere Menschen” are unique and elitist individuals, as is repeatedly pointed out: “I am Zarathustra the godless: where shall I find my equal? And all those are my equals who give themselves their own will and reject all resignation” (171) / “Ich bin Zarathustra, der Gottlose: wo finde ich Meines-Gleichen? Und alle Die sind Meines-Gleichen, die sich selber ihren Willen geben und alle Ergebung von sich abthun” (KSA4, 215). Consequently Zarathustra repeatedly contradicts the proverbial claim that all men are equal:

I do not wish to be mixed up and confused with these preachers of equality. For, to me justice speaks thus: “Men are not equal.” (101)

Mit diesen Predigern der Gleichheit will ich nicht vermischt und verwechselt sein. Denn so redet mir die Gerechtigkeit: “die Menschen sind nicht gleich.” (KSA4, 130)

For men are not equal: thus speaks justice. And what I want, they would have no right to want!

Thus spoke Zarathustra. (126)

Denn die Menschen sind nicht gleich: so spricht die Gerechtigkeit. Und was ich will, dürften sie nicht wollen!

Also sprach Zarathustra. (KSA4, 162)

You higher men, learn this from me: in the market place nobody believes the higher men. And if you want to speak there, very well! But the mob blinks: “We are all equal.”

“You higher men” – thus blinks the mob – “there are no higher men, we are all equal, man is man; before God we are all equal.”

Before God! But now this God has died. And before the mob we do not want to be equal. You higher men, go away from the market place!

Before God! But now this God has died. You higher men, this God was your greatest danger. It is only since he lies in his tomb that you have been resurrected. Only now the great noon comes; only now the higher man becomes – lord. (286)

Ihr höheren Menschen. Diess lernt von mir: auf dem Markt glaubt Niemand an höhere Menschen. Und wollt ihr dort reden, wohlan! Der Pöbel aber blinzelt “wir sind Alle gleich.”

“Ihr höheren Menschen, – so blinzelt der Pöbel – es giebt keine höheren Menschen, wir sind Alle gleich, Mensch ist Mensch, vor Gott – sind wir Alle gleich!”<sup>29</sup>

Vor Gott! – Nun aber starb dieser Gott. Vor dem Pöbel aber wollen wir nicht gleich sein. Ihr höheren Menschen, geht weg vom Markt!

Vor Gott! – Nun aber starb dieser Gott! Ihr höheren Menschen, dieser Gott war eure grösste Gefahr.

Seit er im Grabe liegt, seid ihr erst wieder auferstanden. Nun erst kommt der grosse Mittag, nun erst wird der höhere Mensch – Herr! (KSA4, 356-357)

Additional arguments also employ proverbs against the claimed equality of men, as for example in the case of the restricted behavior “of the little people: there one says ‘birds of a feather’ and ‘one hand washes the other.’ They have neither the right nor the strength for your egoism.” (291) / “der kleinen Leute: da heisst es ‘gleich und gleich’ und ‘Hand wäscht Hand’: – sie haben nicht das Recht noch Kraft zu eurem Eigennutz!” (KSA4, 362). Obviously Zarathustra is well aware of the extensive general knowledge of these two folk proverbs so that he does not need to cite them in their entirety. Egotistical or elitist is of course also his employment of the cautionary proverb “Trust, watch, whom” / “Trau, schau, wem” that is quickly changed into an aggressive anti-proverb in regard to the courageous higher men: “I love the valiant; but it is not enough to wield a broadsword, one must also know against whom [strike, watch, whom].” (209) / “Ich liebe die Tapferen: aber es ist nicht genug, Hau-Degen sein, – man muss auch wissen Hau-schau-Wen!” (KSA4, 262).<sup>30</sup> At least Zarathustra accepts a quotation by Pindar long turned proverb in the following self-characterization:

For that is what I am through and through: reeling, reeling in, raising up, raising, a raiser, cultivator, and disciplinarian, who once counseled himself, not for nothing: Become who you are! (239)

Der nämlich bin ich von Grund und Anbeginn, ziehend, heranziehend, hinaufziehend, aufziehend, ein Zieher, Züchter und Zuchtmeister, der sich nicht umsonst einstmals zusprach: “Werde, der du bist!” (KSA4, 297)

In this case Nietzsche shows himself as so often as a true philologist in his convincing and skillful use of various terms belonging to the word-field of “pull” / “ziehen”. They enable him to express Zarathustra’s difficult task to educate (pull along) at least some chosen people on their path from an expanded self-knowledge to a free life.

Part of this process, as has already been mentioned, is a definitive rejection of Christianity with its virtuous lessons of morality that are current among the folk in the form of uncritically accepted Bible proverbs. In the revealing chapter “On Old and New Tablets” / “Von alten und neuen Tafeln” of *Zarathustra* Nietzsche’s anti-Christian prophet thus demands very blatantly: “Break, break, O my brothers, these old tablets of the pious. Break the maxims of

those who slander the world” (205) / “Zerbrecht, zerbrecht mir, oh meine Brüder, diese alten Tafeln der Frommen! Zersprecht mir die Sprüche der Welt-Verleumder!” (KSA4, 257). From a paremiological point of view the word invention “zersprechen” / “to break by speaking” could be regarded as a linguistic description of the alienation of Biblical proverbs into secularized anti-proverbs. The language of the Bible forms the poetic-prophetic basis of this book, not the least because Nietzsche as the son of a minister and former student of theology had a special predilection for the powerful language of Luther’s Bible translation.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Nietzsche succeeds with this consciously employed religious and yet secularized style is in part at least due to the fact that he usually limits himself to well known Bible references, with proverbs and proverbial expressions from the Bible long ago having been accepted into colloquial speech.<sup>32</sup> In this regard it even happens once that Nietzsche cites a Bible proverb with just a small shortening as a repeated leitmotif. It is the proverb “He that has ears to hear, let him hear” / “Wer Ohren hat zu hören, der höre” (Matthew 11:15)<sup>33</sup> that Zarathustra takes almost verbatim from Jesus in order to convince his fellow human beings to listen to his message concerning the path to a higher existence:

Courage, however, is the best slayer [...]. In such words, however, there is much playing and brass. He that has ears to hear, let him hear! (157)

Muth aber ist der beste Todtschläger [...]. In solchem Spruche aber ist viel klingendes Spiel. Wer Ohren hat, der höre. – (KSA4, 199)

And then all the gods laughed and rocked on their chairs and cried, “Is not just this godlike that there are gods but no God?”

He that has ears to hear, let him hear! (182)

Und alle Götter lachten damals und wackelten auf ihren Stühlen und riefen: “Ist das nicht eben Göttlichkeit, dass es Götter, aber keinen Gott giebt?”

Wer Ohren hat, der höre. – (KSA4, 230)

And you shall first learn from me how to learn – how to learn well. He that has ears to hear, let him hear! (206)



Und auch das Lernen sollt ihr erst von mir lernen, das  
Gut-Lernen! – Wer Ohren hat, der höre! (KSA4, 258)

To this are added proverbial expressions that relate to the topic of listening well, as for example “Open your ears to me, for now I shall speak to you about the death of peoples” (48). / “Jetzt thut mir die Ohren auf, denn jetzt sage ich euch mein Wort vom Tode der Völker” (KSA4, 61); “that whoever pricks up his ears as he lies in the grass or on lonely slopes will find out something about those things that are between heaven and earth” (127) / “dass wer im Grase oder an einsamen Gehängen liegend die Ohren spitze, Etwas von den Dingen erfahre, die zwischen Himmel und Erde sind” (KSA4, 164); and “but it is precisely into their ears that I like to shout, “Yes, I am Zarathustra the godless!” (171) / “aber gerade ihnen liebe ich’s, in das Ohr zu schreien: Ja! Ich bin Zarathustra, der Gottlose!” (KSA4, 215). To be sure, Zarathustra, this new type of prophet, always has to be conscious of whether people are hearing and understanding him properly: “As yet my words have not moved mountains, and what I said did not reach men. Indeed, I have gone to men, but as yet I have not arrived” (146). / “Noch versetzte mein Wort keine Berge, und was ich redete, erreichte die Menschen nicht. Ich gieng wohl zu den Menschen, aber noch langte ich nicht bei ihnen an” (KSA4, 188). No wonder then that Zarathustra even picks up the folk expression “to speak German with someone” / “deutsch mit jdm. reden” in order to get the proper attention by speaking very directly (in German!) to them: “My guests, you higher men, let me speak to you in plain and clear German” (282). / “Meine Gäste, ihr höheren Menschen, ich will deutsch und deutlich mit euch reden” (KSA4, 350).

Zarathustra’s presumptuous claim that his words might some day move mountains is clearly an allusion to the Bible proverb “Faith can remove mountains” / “Der Glaube kann Berge versetzen” (1. Corinthians 13:2). But when he next uses the Bible proverb “Faith makes blessed” / “Der Glaube macht selig” (Mark 16:16) there is no arrogance involved. He simply wants to point out to his “disciples” / “Jüngern” that he is no fanatical leader but rather someone who explains and interprets and who points out a better way for life without any presumptuous didacticism:

The disciple answered, “I believe in Zarathustra.” But Zarathustra shook his head and smiled.

Faith does not make me blessed, he said, especially not faith in me. (127)

Der Jünger antwortete: "ich glaube an Zarathustra." Aber Zarathustra schüttelte den Kopf und lächelte.

Der Glaube macht mich nicht selig, zumal nicht der Glaube an mich. (KSA4, 163-164)

As the possible founder of a new religion he would most likely be very interested in this faith, but Zarathustra has no ready solutions at hand, as the negated proverb points out. He only wants to point out constellations and possibilities in an often symbolic and contradictory fashion that might just lead to a life affirming existence without God and religion. But as an existentialist atheist he most certainly does not want to be the founder of a new religion!

Doubtlessly Nietzsche has a predilection for Bible references that have entered folk speech, but he cites such proverbs and proverbial expressions in his own free way and interprets them in an innovative fashion. They are rarely quoted in their original wording but are instead distorted or negated in ever changing mutations. Sometimes it suffices simply to allude to a Bible reference with the original piece of wisdom adding much to the intended intertextual irony. The following chronologically arranged examples from *Zarathustra* should show with what virtuosity Nietzsche is able to deal with proverbs from the Old and New Testaments:

*Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6*: "Whom the Lord (God) loves he chastises" / "Wen der Herr (Gott) lieb hat, den züchtigt er".

I love him who chastises his God because he loves his God: for he must perish of the wrath of his God. (16)

Ich liebe Den, welcher seinen Gott züchtigt, weil er seinen Gott liebt: denn er muss am Zorne seines Gottes zu Grunde gehen. (KSA4, 18)

*3. Moses 19:18; Galatians 5:14*: "Love your neighbor as yourself" / "Liebe deinen Nächsten wie dich selbst".

My brothers, love of the neighbor I do not recommend to you: I recommend to you love of the farthest.

Thus spoke Zarathustra. (62)

Meine Brüder, zur Nächstenliebe rathe ich euch nicht: ich rathe euch zur Fernsten-Liebe. Also sprach Zarathustra. (KSA4, 79)

“Do love your neighbor as yourself, but first be such as love themselves” – (172)

“Liebt immerhin euren Nächsten gleich euch, – aber seid mir erst Solche, die sich selber lieben” – (KSA4, 216)

*Matthew 7:7*: “Seek, and you shall find” / “Suchet, so werdet ihr finden”.

Is it your wish, my brother, to go into solitude? Is it your wish to seek the way to yourself? Then linger a moment, and listen to me.

“He who seeks, easily gets lost. All Loneliness is guilt” – thus speaks the herd. And you have long belonged to the herd. (62)

Willst du, mein Bruder, in die Vereinsamung gehen? Willst du den Weg zu dir selber suchen? Zaudere noch ein Wenig und höre mich.

“Wer sucht, der geht leicht selber verloren. Alle Vereinsamung ist Schuld”: also spricht die Heerde. Und du gehörtest lange zur Heerde”. (KSA4, 80)

*Matthew 12:34*: “Out of the abundance the mouth speaketh” / “Wes das Herz voll ist, des geht der Mund über”, i.e., Whose heart is full will have his mouth overflow.<sup>34</sup>

Verily, you fill your mouth with noble words; and are we to believe that your heart is overflowing, you liars? (123)

Wahrlich, ihr nehmt den Mund voll mit edlen Worten: und wir sollen glauben, dass euch das Herz übergehe, ihr Lügenbolde? (KSA4, 158)

2. *Moses 3:8*: “Land flowing with milk and honey” / “Land, darin Milch und Honig fließt”.

He who has always spared himself much will in the end become sickly of so much consideration. Praised be what hardens! I do not praise the land where butter and honey flow. (153)

Wer sich stets viel geschont hat, der kränkelt zuletzt an seiner vielen Schonung. Gelobt sei, was hart macht! Ich

lobe das Land nicht, wo Butter und Honig – fließt!  
(KSA4, 194)

*Mark 16:16*: “Faith makes blessed” / “Der Glaube macht selig”.

“Sure! Sure! Faith makes him blessed, faith in him. That is the way of old people. We are no different ourselves.”  
(182)

“Ja! Ja! Der Glaube macht ihn selig, der Glaube an ihn. Das ist so die Art alter Leute! So geht’s uns auch!” –  
(KSA4, 229)

*Ecclesiastes 1,2*: “All is vanity (vain)” / “Es ist alles ganz eitel”.

It [self-enjoyment] also despises all wisdom that wallows in grief; for verily, there is also wisdom that blooms in the dark, a nightshade wisdom, which always sighs: all is vain. (190)

Sie [Selbstsucht] verachtet auch alle wehselige Weisheit: denn, wahrlich, es giebt auch eine Weisheit, die im Dunklen blüht, eine Nachtschatten-Weisheit: als welche immer seufzt: “Alles ist eitel!” (KSA4, 239)

*Revelation 1,8*: “I am the alpha and omega, saith the Lord” / “Ich bin das A und das O, spricht Gott der Herr”.

And if this is my alpha and omega, that all that is heavy and grave should become light; all that is body, dancer; all that is spirit, bird – and verily, that is my alpha and omega. (230)

Und wenn Das mein A und O ist, dass alles Schwere leicht, aller Leib Tänzer, aller Geist Vogel werde: und wahrlich, Das ist mein A und O! – (KSA4, 290)

5. *Moses 8,3; Matthew 4,4*: “Man does not love by bread alone” / “Der Mensch lebt nicht vom Brot allein”.<sup>35</sup>

“Bread?” countered Zarathustra, and he laughed. “Bread is one thing hermits do not have. But man does not live by bread alone, but also of the meat of good lambs, of which I have two. (284-285)

“Brod? entgegnete Zarathustra und lachte dazu. Nur gerade Brod haben Einsiedler nicht. Aber der Mensch lebt

nicht vom Brod allein, sondern auch vom Fleische guter Lämmer, deren ich zwei habe." (KSA4, 354)

From these very truncated contexts it becomes clear that these more or less independently appearing texts reflect Nietzsche's preoccupation with the revaluation of all values and his definite break with Christianity.<sup>36</sup> In order to illustrate this in a bit more detail, the following longer text from the chapter "On New and Old Tablets" / "Von alten und neuen Tafeln" is cited where Nietzsche proves his fascination with Bible and folk proverbs in a unique collage:

"Why live? All is vanity! Living – that is threshing straw; living – that is consuming oneself in flames without becoming warm." Such antiquarian babbling is still considered "wisdom"; it is honored all the more for being old and musty. Mustiness too ennobles.

Children might speak thus: they fear the fire before [i.e., because] it burned them. There is much childishness in the old books of wisdom. And why should those who always "thresh straw" be allowed to blaspheme threshing? Such oxen [i.e., fools] should be muzzled after all.

Such men sit down to the table and bring nothing along, not even a good appetite; and then they blaspheme: "All is vanity." But eating and drinking well, O my brothers, is verily no vain art. Break, break the old tablets of the never gay! (204)

"Wozu leben? Alles ist eitel! Leben – das ist Stroh dreschen; Leben – das ist sich verbrennen und doch nicht warm werden." –

Solch alterthümliches Geschwätz gilt immer noch als "Weisheit"; dass es aber alt ist und dumpfig riecht, darum wird es besser geehrt. Auch der Moder adelt. –

Kinder durften so reden: die scheuen das Feuer, weil es sie brannte! Es ist viel Kinderei in den alten Büchern der Weisheit.

Und wer immer "Stroh drischt", wie sollte der auf das Dreschen lästern dürfen! Solchen Narren müsste man doch das Maul verbinden!

Solche setzen sich zu Tisch und bringen Nichts mit, selbst den guten Hunger nicht: – und nun lästern sie “Alles ist eitel!”

Aber gut essen und trinken, oh meine Brüder, ist wahrlich keine eitle Kunst! Zerbrecht, zerbrecht mir die Tafeln der Nimmer-Frohen! (KSA4, 256)

That is most certainly not idle proverbial gibberish! This passage could hardly be more proverbial, and yet, it is just possible that Nietzsche has Karl Simrock's since 1846 repeatedly reissued proverb collection *Die deutschen Sprichwörter* with its 12,396 proverbs in mind, when he observes that “There is much childishness in the old books of wisdom” / “Es ist viel Kinderei in den alten Büchern der Weisheit”.<sup>37</sup> Be that as it may, the Bible proverbs “All is vanity” / “Es ist alles ganz eitel” (Ecclesiastes 1:2) and “You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn” / “Du sollst dem Ochsen, der da drischt, nicht das Maul verbinden” (5. Moses 25:4) as well as the folk proverbs “Work (also: virtue) ennobles” / “Arbeit [auch: Tugend] adelt” and “A burnt child dreads the fire” / “Gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer” are mixed together in the form of repetitions, allusions, and anti-proverbs. The result is a passage that contains an important basic idea of *Zarathustra*, namely that it is “high time” / “höchste Zeit” that stone tablets with antiquated wisdom chiseled onto them must finally be broken so that the path for a new type of existence beyond old moral rules becomes free. No wonder that the phraseologism “It is high time” (see 130, 162, 242) / “Es ist höchste Zeit” (see KSA4, 167, 204, 301) reappears as a verbal sign for the extreme urgency of this fundamental change. However, typical for Nietzsche in the case of such calls for radical change, a precise description of the path is lacking. Thus all that remains is a questioning scream for certainty:

“What shall I think of that?” said Zarathustra; “am I a ghost then? But it must have been my shadow. [...]

And once more Zarathustra shook his head and wondered. “What shall I think of that?” he said once more. “Why did the ghost cry, ‘It is time! It is high time!’ High time for what?”

Thus spoke Zarathustra. (133)

“Was soll ich davon denken! sagte Zarathustra. Bin ich denn ein Gespenst?”

Aber es wird mein Schatten gewesen sein." [...]  
 Und nochmals schüttelte Zarathustra den Kopf und wunderte sich. "Was soll ich davon denken!" sagte er nochmals.  
 "Warum schrie denn das Gespenst: es ist Zeit! Es ist die höchste Zeit!  
 Wozu ist es denn – höchste Zeit?" –  
 Also sprach Zarathustra. (KSA4, 171)

But does Zarathustra really not know the answer? Or does he not want to elevate his own thoughts or his individual path to the sole way of life for all? A hidden proverbial statement offers a helpful hint: "And if a man goes through fire for his doctrine – what does that prove? Verily, it is more if your own doctrine comes out of your own fire." (93) / "Und wenn Einer durch's Feuer geht für seine Lehre, – was beweist diess! Mehr ist's wahrlich, dass aus eignem Brande die eigne Lehre kommt!" (KSA4, 119). This appears to say that Zarathustra as the spokesperson for Nietzsche does not want to offer a definitive doctrine. After all, human existence in a modern world without God depends on individuals who know how to find their own path after they have demolished the old world. Seen in this way, Nietzsche's obscure use of the classical but today in light of its use on concentration camps problematic proverb "To each his own" / "Jeden das Seine" starts making sense: "But how could I think of being just through and through? How can I give each his own? Let this be sufficient for me: I give each my own." (69) / "Aber wie wollte ich gerecht sein von Grund aus! Wie kann ich Jedem das Seine geben! Diess sei mir genug: ich gebe Jedem das Meine" (KSA4, 88).<sup>38</sup> Thus Zarathustra shows himself not as a prophet of established doctrines but rather as a companion and an adviser to equally free spirits on their path to earthly self-fulfillment.

There are then no ready-made lessons or directions given by Zarathustra since he himself is learning and developing. Certain insights come to him only by and by that lighten up his own path to liberation from old moral concepts: "The annihilator of morals, the good and just call me: my story is immoral." (68) / "Den Vernichter der Moral heissen mich die Guten und Gerechten: meine Geschichte ist unmoralisch" (KSA4, 87). When Nietzsche at the beginning of *Zarathustra* describes how Zarathustra wakes

up from a long sleep and how his prophetic task takes on a clearer meaning, he couches this new insight in an illuminating way into a twofold use of the proverbial expression “a light (insight) comes to someone” / “jdm. geht ein Licht auf”:

For a long time Zarathustra slept, and not only dawn passed over his face but the morning too. At last, however, his eyes opened: amazed, Zarathustra looked into the woods and the silence; amazed, he looked into himself. Then he rose quickly, like a seafarer who suddenly sees land, and jubilated, for he saw a new truth. And thus he spoke to his heart:

An insight has come to me: companions I need, living ones – not dead companions and corpses whom I carry with myself wherever I want to. Living companions I need, who follow me because they want to follow themselves – wherever I want.

An insight has come to me: let Zarathustra speak not to the people but to companions. Zarathustra shall not become the shepherd and dog of a herd. (23)

Lange schlief Zarathustra, und nicht nur die Morgenröthe gieng über sein Antlitz, sondern auch der Vormittag. Endlich aber that sein Auge sich auf: verwundert sah Zarathustra in den Wald und die Stille, verwundert sah er in sich hinein. Dann erhob er sich schnell, wie ein Seefahrer, der mit Einem Male Land sieht, und jauchzte: denn er sah eine neue Wahrheit. Und also redete er dann zu seinem Herzen:

Ein Licht gieng mir auf: Gefährten brauche ich und lebendige, – nicht todte Gefährten und Leichname, die ich mit mir trage, wohin ich will.

Sondern lebendige Gefährten brauche ich, die mir folgen, weil sie sich selber folgen wollen – und dorthin, wo ich will.

Ein Licht gieng mir auf: nicht zum Volk rede Zarathustra, sondern zu Gefährten! Nicht soll Zarathustra einer Heerde Hirt und Hund werden! (KSA4, 25)

In addition to repeating that an “insight had come to him“ (30) / “ihm war ein Licht aufgegangen” KSA4, 34), Zarathustra also repeatedly employs the expression “to bring something to light” /



“etwas ans Licht bringen” in order to allude to the fact that all inadequacies and mendacities of life must be put under a scrutinizing light if a break with Christian morality is truly to take place:

But like the boar's snout, my words shall tear open the foundation of your souls [of the supposedly virtuous ones]: a plowshare will I be to you. All the secrets of your foundation shall come to light; and when you lie uprooted and broken in the sun, then will your lies also be separated from your truths. (94)

Aber dem Rüssel des Ebers gleich soll mein Wort den Grund eurer Seelen [der angeblich Tugendhaften] aufreißen; Pflugschar will ich euch heißen.

Alle Heimlichkeiten eures Grundes sollen an's Licht; und wenn ihr aufgewühlt und zerbrochen in der Sonne liegt, wird auch eure Lüge von eurer Wahrheit ausgeschieden sein. (KSA4, 120)

Thus I speak to you in a parable – you who make souls whirl, you preachers of equality. To me you are tarantulas, and secretly vengeful. But I shall bring your secrets to light; therefore I laugh to your faces with my laughter of the heights. (99)

Also rede ich zu euch im Gleichniss, die ihr die Seelen drehend macht, ihr Prediger der Gleichheit! Taranteln seid ihr mir und versteckte Rachsüchtige!

Aber ich will eure Verstecke schon an's Licht bringen: darum lache ich euch in's Antlitz mein Gelächter der Höhe. (KSA4, 128)

For earthquakes bury many wells and leave many languishing, but they also bring to light inner powers and secrets. Earthquakes reveal new wells. In earthquakes that strike ancient peoples, new wells break open. (211)

Das Erdbeben nämlich – das verschüttet viel [*sic*] Brunnen, das schafft viel Verschmachten: das hebt auch innre Kräfte und Heimlichkeiten an's Licht.

Das Erdbeben macht neue Quellen offenbar. Im Erdbeben alter Völker brechen neue Quellen aus. (KSA4, 265)

Despite such sources of light there are also dark spots in *Zarathustra*, especially in regard to Nietzsche's obvious misogyny. Such

proverbial statements as “I should sooner believe in the man in the moon than in the woman” (121) / “eher noch will ich an den Mann im Monde glauben als an das Weib” (KSA4, 156) and “even the most cunning still buys his wife in a poke” (70) / “seine Frau kauft auch der Listigste noch im Sack” (KSA4, 91) are anti-feministic tirades that beg for justified criticism to this day. And surely criticism would also be leveled against Nietzsche by both genders regarding the following statement where Nietzsche by way of a degrading allusion to the proverb “Marriages are made in heaven” / “Ehen werden im Himmel geschlossen” he labels this institution as worthless:

That which the all-too-many, the superfluous, call marriage – alas, what shall I name that? Alas, this poverty of the soul in pair! Alas, this filth of the soul in pair! Alas, this wretched contentment in pair! Marriage they call this; and they say that their marriages are made in heaven. Well, I do not like it, this heaven of the superfluous. No, I do not like them – these animals entangled in the heavenly net. And let the God who limps near to bless what he never joined keep his distance from me! (70)  
 Das, was die Viel-zu-Vielen Ehe nennen, diese Überflüssigen, – ach, wie nenne ich das?  
 Ach, diese Armuth der Seele zu Zweien! Ach, dieser Schmutz der Seele zu Zweien! Ach, diess erbärmliche Behagen zu Zweien!  
 Ehe nennen sie diess Alles; und sie sagen, ihre Ehen seien im Himmel geschlossen.  
 Nun, ich mag ihn nicht, diesen Himmel der Überflüssigen! Nein, ich mag sie nicht, diese im himmlischen Netz verschlungenen Thiere!  
 Ferne bleibe mir auch der Gott, der heranhinkt, zu segnen, was er nicht zusammenfügte!<sup>39</sup> (KSA4, 90-91)

A philosopher or writer who gets carried away to the extent that he refers to married people as animals also would not shy away from the declaration “For man is the cruelest animal” (218) / “Der Mensch nämlich ist das grausamste Thier” (KSA4, 273). People also appear to be proverbial “dumme Esel” / “dumb asses” at times, as can be seen by the comment added to a pseudo-proverb about the challenges of life: “Life is hard to bear; but do not act so

tenderly! We are all of us fair beasts of burden, male and female asses" (41). / "Das Leben ist schwer zu tragen: aber so thut mir doch nicht so zärtlich! Wir sind allesammt hübsche lastbare Esel und Eselinnen" (KSA4, 49). The animal world, seen as representing human existence, appears as eagles, snakes, lions, camels, asses, monkeys, dogs, sheep, etc. throughout *Zarathustra*,<sup>40</sup> with corresponding animal expressions referring more or less indirectly to human behavioral patterns,<sup>41</sup> as for example:

When the fire hound heard this he could no longer bear listening to him [i.e., me]. Shamed, he drew in his tail, in a cowed manner said "bow-wow," and crawled down into his cave. (132)

Als diess der Feuerhund vernahm, hielt er's nicht mehr aus, mir zuzuhören. Beschämt zog er seinen Schwanz ein, sagte auf eine kleinlaute Weise Wau! Wau! und kroch hinab in seine Höhle. – (KSA4, 170)

Stop splashing about that, you raincloud in the morning! Do I not stand here even now, wet from your melancholy and drenched like a dog? (243)

Höre davon auf zu plätschern, du Regenwolke am Vormittag! Stehe ich denn nicht schon da, nass von deiner Trübsal und begossen wie ein Hund? (KSA4, 303)

In the end, a frog which has puffed itself up too long will burst: the wind comes out. To stab a swollen man in the belly, I call that a fine pastime. (258)

Zuletzt platzt ein Frosch, der sich zu lange aufblies: da fährt der Wind heraus. Einem Geschwollnen in den Bauch stechen, das heisse ich eine brave Kurzweil. (KSA4, 320)

And verily, he is the strangest sage who is also clever and no ass. (285)

Und wahrlich, das ist das Seltsamste an einem Weisen, wenn er zu alledem auch noch klug und kein Esel ist. (KSA4, 355)

Has there been anything filthier on earth so far than desert saints? Around them not only was the devil loose, but also the swine. (292)

Gab es Schmutzigeres bisher auf Erden als Wüsten-Heilige? Um die herum war nicht nur der Teufel los, – sondern auch das Schwein. (KSA4, 363)

Women might not be “filthy like desert saints” for Nietzsche, but they certainly are bad as far as he is concerned, to wit his infamous *Zarathustra*-quotation that has become current in folk speech as “When you go to a woman, don’t forget the whip” / “Wenn du zum Weibe gehst, vergiß die Peitsche nicht”.<sup>42</sup> Already in summer/fall 1882 Nietzsche had written down the following note: “You go to women? Don’t forget the whip! In the way how and what one honors, one always draws a distance around oneself” / “Du gehst zu Frauen? Vergiß die Peitsche nicht! In der Art, wie und was man ehrt, zieht man immer eine Distanz um sich” (KSA10, 97-98). This anti-feministic statement then appears in 1883 in the first part of *Zarathustra* in a varied form in the chapter “On Little Old and Young Women” / “Von alten und jungen Weiblein”, but it should be noted that it is actually uttered by a woman:

Then the little old woman answered me [Zarathustra]: “Many fine things has Zarathustra said, especially for those who are young enough for them. It is strange: Zarathustra knows women little, and yet he is right about them. Is this because nothing is impossible with woman? And now, as a token of gratitude, accept a little truth. After all, I am old enough for it. Wrap it up and hold your hand over its mouth: else it will cry overloudly, this little truth,”

Then I said: “Woman, give me your little truth.” And thus spoke the little old woman:

“You are going to women? Do not forget the whip!” (67)

Da entgegnete mir [Zarathustra] das alte Weiblein: “Vieles Artige sagte Zarathustra und sonderlich für Die, welche jung genug dazu sind.

“Seltsam ist’s, Zarathustra kennt wenig die Weiber, und doch hat er über sie Recht! Geschieht diess desshalb, weil beim Weibe kein Ding unmöglich ist?

“Und nimm zum Danke eine kleine Wahrheit! Bin ich doch alt genug für sie!

„Wickle sie ein und halte ihr den Mund: sonst schreit sie überlaut, diese kleine Wahrheit.”

“Gieb mir, Weib, deine kleine Wahrheit!” sagte ich. Und also sprach das alte Weiblein:  
 “Du gehst zu Frauen? Vergiss die Peitsche nicht!” –  
 (KSA4, 86)

As usually happens with a well-known quotation, people have reacted to this quotation in parodistic aphorisms and verses. Jürgen Christen even edited a book with the title *Vergiß die Peitsche nicht. Frauenfeindliche Sprüche* (1991).<sup>43</sup> Here are at least a few examples of such anti-quotations with some of them referring directly to Nietzsche:

As is well known, Nietzsche says: When you go to a woman, don't forget the whip. – Only a hopeless and revengeful weakling could have made such an utterance. Nietzsche sagt bekanntlich: Wenn du zum Weibe gehst, vergiß die Peitsche nicht. – Nur ein hoffnungsloser und rachsüchtiger Schwächling konnte einen solchen Ausspruch tun.

Erich Brock (1975)

*Love advice freely adapted from Nietzsche*

You go to women?  
 Don't forget the flowers!  
 You go to men?  
 Don't forget the pill!

*Liebestip frei nach Nietzsche*

Du geht zu Frauen?  
 Vergiß die Blumen nicht!  
 Du gehst zu Männern?  
 Vergiß die Pille nicht!

Heinrich Schröter (1977)

When you go to a woman, don't forget the dough.  
 Wenn du zum Weibe gehst, vergiß die Piepen nicht.

Anonym (1981)

If you go to a woman, don't forget to really whip yourself up beforehand. (Nietzsche the Elder)

Gehst du zur Frau, vergiß nicht, dich vorher tüchtig aufzupeitschen. (Nietzsche der Ältere)

Winfried Bornemann (1983)

You go to women? Don't forget the rubber [condom]!  
 Du gehst zu Frauen? Vergiß das Gummi nicht!  
 Ulrich Erckenbrecht (1991)<sup>44</sup>

Nietzsche advised men to take the whip along when they go to a woman. Did he not trust the intellectual supremacy of man?

Nietzsche riet den Männern, die Peitsche mitzunehmen, wenn sie zum Weibe gehen. Traute er der geistigen Überlegenheit des Mannes nicht?  
 Walter Rupp (2010)<sup>45</sup>

It must also be stated in addition that in the “whip” / “Peitsche” reference in *Zarathustra* yet another anti-feministic proverb comes into play. It is the Bible proverb “With God all things are possible” / “Bei Gott sind alle Ding möglich” (Matthew 19:26) that Nietzsche had already mutated twice in 1882/1883 into the questionable anti-proverb “With women no thing is impossible” / “Bei Weibern ist kein Ding unmöglich” before it appeared in the singular form of “woman” / “Weib” in *Zarathustra*. The two earlier variants show how such fragmentary texts serve Nietzsche as “preliminary studies” / “Vorstudien” to his larger works.

You do not know the women: how come that occasionally you are right about them? – With women no thing is impossible.

Du kennst die W<eiber> nicht: wie kommt es, daß du bisweilen über sie recht hast? – Bei den W<eibern> ist kein Ding unmöglich. (KSA10, 89)

It is difficult to say something false about a woman: with women no thing is impossible – answered Zarathustra.

Es ist schwer, über das Weib etwas Falsches zu sagen: bei den Weibern ist kein Ding unmöglich – antwortete Zarathustra. (KSA10, 160)

Perhaps Nietzsche also included positive abilities of women here, but more likely these are ironic statements that originate from his blatant anti-feminism. In his defense it might be said that Nietzsche otherwise does not cite traditional proverbs against women in his voluminous writings. He certainly would have had plenty

anti-feministic proverbs at his disposal since such unfortunate texts are current throughout the world.<sup>46</sup>

The formulation of shocking anti-proverbs is part and parcel of Nietzsche's consciously employed style with elements from folk speech. In his fragments from 1882 the short anti-proverb "A wrong shared is half right" / "Getheiltes Unrecht ist halbes Recht", i.e., Shared injustice is half justice (KSA10, 49 and 78) is listed twice, and it probably is based on the proverb "Shared suffering is half joy" / "Geteiltes Leid ist halbe Freud". Half a year later this longer and challenging variant found its way into his *Zarathustra*: "Did you already know this? A wrong shared is half right. And he who is able to bear it should take the wrong upon himself" (68) / "Wusstet ihr diess schon? Getheiltes Unrecht ist halbes Recht. Und der soll das Unrecht auf sich nehmen, der es tragen kann!" (KSA4, 88). Of interest is also Nietzsche's change of the proverb "What does not exist can still be [happen, take place]" / "Was nicht ist, das kann noch werden" into the anti-proverb "For, what does not exist cannot will [want]; but what is in existence, how could that still want existence?" (115) / "Denn: was nicht ist, das kann nicht wollen; was aber im Dasein ist, wie könnte das noch zum Dasein wollen!" (KSA4, 149). And the proverb "Everything has two sides" / "Jedes Ding hat zwei Seiten" ist quickly changed into the life-affirming anti-proverb "That you would learn my wisdom from me: even the worst thing has two good reverse sides" (295) / "So lernt mir doch meine Weisheit ab: auch das schlimmste Ding hat zwei gute Kehrseiten" (KSA4, 367).

Of course, Nietzsche also simply creates his own pseudo-proverbs when he appears to have no traditional proverb at hand to "play" with. But no matter how poetic and even mystical his style in *Zarathustra* might be, he is forever keen to include formulaic structures that add a colloquial and authoritative flavor, as for example:

But even the superfluous still make a fuss about their dying; and even the hollowest nut still wants to be cracked. (71)

Aber auch die Überflüssigen thun noch wichtig mit ihrem Sterben, und auch die hohlste Nuss will noch geknackt sein. (KSA4, 93)

In some, the heart grows old first; in others, the spirit.  
And some are old in their youth: but late youth preserves  
long youth. (72)

Andern altert das Herz zuerst und Andern der Geist. Und  
Einige sind greis in der Jugend: aber spät jung erhält lang  
jung. (KSA4, 94)

Or they spend long evenings watching a cunning,  
ambushing, cross-marked spider, which preaches  
cleverness to the other spiders and teaches thus: "Under  
crosses one can spin well." (181)

Oder sie sehen lange Abende einer listigen lauernden  
Kreuzspinne zu, welche den Spinnen selber Klugheit  
predigt und also lehrt: "unter Kreuzen ist gut spinnen!"  
(KSA4, 228)

And should we sweat, we are told: "Yes, life is a grave  
burden [hard to bear]." (193; see also 41: "Life is hard to  
bear")

Und schwitzen wir, so sagt man uns: "Ja, das Leben ist  
schwer zu tragen!" (KSA4, 243; see also KSA4, 49: "Das  
Leben ist schwer zu tragen")

There is much filth in the world; that much is true. But  
that does not make the world itself a filthy monster. (205)

Es giebt in der Welt viel Koth: so Viel ist wahr! Aber  
darum ist die Welt selber noch kein kothiges Ungeheuer!  
(KSA4, 256)

The higher its type, the more rarely a thing succeeds. You  
higher men here, have you not all failed? (292)

Je höher von Art, je seltener gerät ein Ding. Ihr höheren  
Menschen hier, seid ihr nicht alle – missgerathen? (KSA4,  
364)

Taking the popular proverbial structure "Rather (better) X than Y"  
/ "Lieber (besser) X als Y" as a basis,<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche creates the fol-  
lowing proverb-like statement: "Rather know nothing than half-  
know much! Rather be a fool on one's own than a sage according  
to the opinion of others! (250) / "Lieber Nichts wissen, als Vieles  
halb wissen! Lieber ein Narr sein auf eigne Faust, als ein Weiser  
nach fremdem Gedünken!" (KSA4, 311). The somatic expression



“to do something on one’s own (with one’s own fist)” / “etwas auf eigene Faust machen” is also included, and it is also present in the following text, albeit without the “than” / “als” comparison: “Rather no God, rather make destiny on one’s own, rather be a fool, rather be a God oneself!” (262) / “Lieber keinen Gott, lieber auf eigne Faust Schicksal machen, lieber Narr sein, lieber selber Gott sein!” (KSA4, 325). Both statements are of considerable importance for the actual message of *Zarathustra*, since the overman is supposed to manage his own affairs even if at times he feels like a fool in his affirmation of life. The key issue for Zarathustra is always that man must accept his existential fate without God.

This requires man, according to Nietzsche, to be “hard” / “hart” in committing himself to the revaluation of all values and in standing firm in the eternal struggle against antiquated moral concepts. Regarding this necessary liberation from God and Christianity Nietzsche has formulated a prophetic declaration that he repeated four years later at the end of *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1888, *The Demise of the Gods*) with the title “The Hammer Speaks” / “Der Hammer redet”. But who would have expected him to start this key passage about “become hard!” / “werdet hart!” with the pseudo-wellerism “Why so hard? the kitchen coal once said to the diamond. After all, are we not close kin?” / “Warum so hart! – sprach zum Diamanten einst die Küchen-Kohle; sind wir denn nicht Nah-Verwandte?”<sup>48</sup> This is yet another example that Nietzsche cannot make do without proverbial elements:

“Why so hard?” the kitchen coal once said to the diamond. “After all, are we not close kin?”

Why so soft? O my brothers, thus I ask you: are you not after all my brothers?

Why so soft, so pliant and yielding? Why is there so much denial, self-denial, in your heads? So little destiny in your eyes?

And if you do not want to be destinies and inexorable ones, how can you triumph with me?

And if your hardness does not wish to flash and cut and cut through, how can you one day create with me?

For creators are hard. And it must seem blessedness to you to impress your hand on millennia as on wax.

Blessedness to write on the will of millennia as on bronze  
– harder than bronze, nobler than bronze. Only the noblest  
is altogether hard.

This new tablet, O my brothers, I place over you: become  
hard! (214)

“Warum so hart! – sprach zum Diamanten einst die  
Küchen-Kohle; sind wir denn nicht Nah-Verwandte?” –

Warum so weich? Oh meine Brüder, also frage ich euch:  
seid ihr denn nicht – meine Brüder?

Warum so weich, so weichend und nachgebend? Warum  
ist so viel Leugnung, Verleugnung in eurem Herzen? So  
wenig Schicksal in eurem Blicke?

Und wollt ihr nicht Schicksale sein und Unerbittliche: wie  
könntet ihr mit mir – siegen?

Und wenn eure Härte nicht blitzen und scheiden und  
zerschneiden will: wie könntet ihr einst mit mir –  
schaffen?

Die Schaffenden nämlich sind hart. Und Seligkeit muss es  
euch dünken, eure Hand auf Jahrtausende zu drücken wie  
auf Wachs, –

– Seligkeit, auf dem Willen von Jahrtausenden zu  
schreiben wie auf Erz, – härter als Erz, edler als Erz. Ganz  
hart ist allein das Edelste.

Diese neue Tafel, oh meine Brüder, stelle ich über euch:  
werdet hart! – (KSA4, 268; und KSA6, 161)

Since Nietzsche is full of contradictions, it should not be surpris-  
ing to find a textual reference in *Zarathustra* where hardness is  
replaced by something pleasant. After all, fate offers many possi-  
bilities and man has a free choice! And it is in this regard that Nie-  
tzsche’s very own formulation “One thing is more necessary than  
another” / “Eins ist notwendiger als das andere”, identified by him  
as a proverb, is of special interest.<sup>49</sup> It appears first as an aphorism  
in the fall of 1881 as “One things is always more necessary then  
another” / “Eins ist immer nöthiger als das Andre” (KSA9, 584).  
Four years later it is presented in *Zarathustra* without the word  
“always” / “immer” as Zarathustra’s proverbial wisdom:

But around the hour of noon, when the sun stood straight  
over Zarathustra’s head, he came to an old crooked and  
knotty tree that was embraced, and hidden from itself, by

the rich love of a grapevine; and yellow grapes hung from it in abundance, inviting the wanderer. Then he felt the desire to quench a slight thirst and to break off a grape; but even as he was stretching out his arm to do so, he felt a still greater desire for something else: namely, to lie down beside the tree at the perfect noon hour, and to sleep.

This Zarathustra did; and as soon as he lay on the ground in the stillness and secrecy of the many-hued grass, he forgot his slight thirst and fell asleep. For, as Zarathustra's proverb says, one thing is more necessary than another. Only his eyes remained open: for they did not tire of seeing and praising the tree and the love of the grapevine. (275-276)

Um die Stunde des Mittags aber, als die Sonne gerade über Zarathustra's Haupte stand, kam er an einem alten krummen und knorrichtigen Baume vorbei, der von der reichen Liebe eines Weinstocks rings umarmt und vor sich selber verborgen war: von dem hiengen gelbe Trauben in Fülle dem Wandernden entgegen. Da gelüstete ihn, einen kleinen Durst zu löschen und sich eine Traube abzubrechen; als er aber schon den Arm dazu ausstreckte, da gelüstete ihn etwas Anderes noch mehr: nämlich sich neben den Baum niederzulegen, um die Stunde des vollkommenen Mittags, und zu schlafen.

Diess that Zarathustra; und sobald er auf dem Boden lag, in der Stille und Heimlichkeit des bunten Grases, hatte er auch schon seinen kleinen Durst vergessen und schlief ein. Denn, wie das Sprichwort [*sic*] Zarathustra's sagt: Eins ist nothwendiger als das Andre. Nur das seine Augen offen blieben – sie wurden nämlich nicht satt, den Baum und die Liebe des Weinstocks zu sehn und zu preisen. (KSA4, 342)

Without a reference to the alleged proverbiality of this formulaic statement it reappears twice about ten pages later and the only half-cited proverb "A word at the right time is better than ten at the wrong time" / "Ein Wort zur rechten Zeit ist besser als zehn zur Unzeit" as well as the proverbial expression "not to have time to lose" / "keine Zeit zu verlieren haben" are added to boot:

For it was at this point that the soothsayer interrupted the welcome, pushed forward like one who has no time to lose, seized Zarathustra's hand, and shouted: "But Zarathustra! One thing is more necessary than another: thus you say yourself. Well then, one thing is more necessary to me now than anything else. A word at the right time: did you not invite me to supper? And here are many who have come a long way. Surely, you would not feed us speeches alone? [...]" (284)

An dieser Stelle nämlich unterbrach der Wahrsager die Begrüßung Zarathustra's und seiner Gäste: er drängte sich vor, wie Einer, der keine Zeit zu verlieren hat, fasste die Hand Zarathustra's und rief: "aber Zarathustra!

Eins ist nothwendiger als das Andre, so redest du selber: wohlan, Eins ist mir jetzt nothwendiger als alles Andere.

Ein Wort zur rechten Zeit: hast du mich nicht zum Mahle eingeladen? Und hier sind Viele, die lange Wege machten. Du willst uns doch nicht mit Reden abspeisen? [...]" (KSA4, 353)

After this not at all uncommon accumulation of proverbial texts, Nietzsche's invented proverb appears one more time in a letter of August 8, 1887, to his composer friend Heinrich Köselitz, where he cites it as a little explanatory justification: "But it is to be self-understood a hundred times over that 'One thing is more necessary than the other'; and lastly I would not know any more pleasant events for myself than a timely performance of your splendid work: even supposing, which unfortunately has to be supposed, that I am not present at it" / "Aber es versteht sich hundert Mal von selbst, daß 'Eins nothwendiger ist als das Andre'; und zuletzt wüßte ich für mich selbst wenig angenehmere Ereignisse als eine baldige Aufführung Ihres herrlichen Werks: selbst angenommen, was leider angenommen werden muß, daß ich bei ihr nicht zugegen bin" (KSB8, 121). Since Nietzsche places his own proverb into quotation marks, he points to its apparent currency as a formulaic statement, even though it has not been registered in any reference works, not even in Werner Ross's *Lexikon der Nietzsche-Zitate* (2001). Regarding the comprehensive meaning of *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's intent with his pseudo-proverb appears to be that in view of the eternal return (repetition) of life it makes

not much difference what appears to be more necessary or more pleasant at a certain point in time. The missed opportunity will reappear sometime as long as life itself will be affirmed and returning opportunities will be taken by the forelock.

As an anti-absolutist, for whom everything is something becoming and not an end, Nietzsche developed a “linguistic relativity principle” / “sprachliches Relativitätsprinzip”<sup>50</sup> that makes the description of an open and free worldview possible. The conspicuous contradictoriness of *Zarathustra* is a result of this, for Nietzsche wants to show that the positive struggle with fate has to be undertaken in eternal return (repetition) without “straight” / “gerade” guidelines. Zarathustra says as much in the following comment by way of his semantic alteration of the proverbial expression “to go crooked paths” / “krumme Wege gehen”, where the adjective “crooked” / “krumm” is not to be understood as “bad” / “schlecht” but rather as “bent, imprecise, complicated, etc.” / “verbogen, ungenau, kompliziert, etc.”: “That I must be struggle and a becoming and an end and an opposition to ends – alas, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what crooked paths it must proceed” (115). / “Dass ich Kampf sein muss und Werden und Zweck und der Zwecke Widerspruch: ach, wer meinen Willen erräth, erräth wohl auch, auf welchen krummen Wegen er gehen muss!” (KSA4, 148). Later on there is also this additional reference: “Is not the perfect sage fond of walking on the most crooked ways? The evidence shows this, O Zarathustra – and you are the evidence” (315). / “Geht nicht ein vollkommener Weiser gern auf den krümmsten Wegen? Der Augenschein lehrt es, oh Zarathustra, – dein Augenschein” (KSA4, 392). There is then no prescribed goal in Nietzsche’s worldview but always only repetitive possibilities and situations to be confronted by man as an individual.<sup>51</sup> For this idea Nietzsche has coined yet another pseudo-proverb at the end of the long and hard Zarathustra-path. But it took Nietzsche more than two years until he declared his leitmotif based on the phraseologism “what does it (really) matter” / “was liegt (schon) daran” in the general meaning of “much, little, nothing of avail” / “viel, wenig, nichts auf sich haben”<sup>52</sup> as Zarathustra’s ultimate “proverb” / “Sprichwort” (see the second to the last reference in the following list). One gets the impression from the following references from between 1883 until 1885 that Nietzsche himself only slowly but surely advanced to this insightful point:

Then it spoke to me [Zarathustra] again without voice:  
 “What do you matter? You are not yet humble enough for  
 me. Humility has the toughest hide.” (146)

Da sprach es wieder ohne Stimme zu mir [Zarathustra]:  
 “Was liegt an dir? Du bist mir noch nicht demüthig  
 genug. Die Demuth hat das härteste Fell.” – (KSA4, 188)

But what could we do? Again and again you [Zarathustra]  
 pierced our ears and hearts with your maxims. So we said  
 at last: what difference does it make [what does it matter]  
 how he looks? (247)

Aber was half's! Immer wieder stachst du [Zarathustra]  
 uns in Ohr und Herz mit deinen Sprüchen. Da sprachen  
 wir endlich: was liegt daran, wie er aussieht! (KSA4, 307)

– what does it matter whether it [a reason] be great or  
 small? whether it be called swamp or sky? A hand's  
 breadth of ground suffices me [a scientist], provided it is  
 really ground and foundation. (250)

– was liegt daran, ob er [ein Grund] gross oder klein ist?  
 Ob er Sumpf oder Himmel heisst? Eine Hand breit Grund  
 ist mir [einem Wissenschaftler] genug [*sic*]: wenn er nur  
 wirklich Grund und Boden ist! (KSA4, 311)

A throw had failed you. But, you dice-throwers, what  
 does it matter? You have not learned to gamble and jest as  
 one must gamble and jest. Do we not always sit at a big  
 jesting-and-gaming table? (292)

Ein Wurf missrieth euch. Aber, ihr Würfelspieler, was  
 liegt daran! Ihr lerntet nicht spielen und spotten, wie man  
 spielen und spotten muss! Sitzen wir nicht immer an  
 einem grossen Spott- und Spieltische? (KSA4, 363-364)

Be of good cheer, what does it matter? How much is still  
 possible! Learn to laugh at yourselves as one must laugh!  
 (292)

Seid guten Muths, was liegt daran! Wie Vieles ist noch  
 möglich! Lernt über euch selber lachen, wie man lachen  
 muss! (KSA4, 364)

You higher men, the worst about you is that all of you  
 have not learned to dance as one must dance – dancing

away over yourselves! What does it matter that you are failures? How much is still possible! So learn to laugh away over yourselves! Lift up your hearts, you good dancers, high, higher! And do not forget good laughter. [...] Laughter I have pronounced holy; you higher men, learn to laugh! (295-296)

Ihr höheren Menschen, euer Schlimmstes ist: ihr lerntet alle nicht tanzen, wie man tanzen muss – über euch hinweg tanzen! Was liegt daran, dass ihr missriethet!

Wie Vieles ist noch möglich! So lernt doch über euch hinweg lachen! Erhebt eure Herzen, ihr guten Tänzer, hoch! höher! Und vergesst mir auch das gute Lachen nicht!

[...] Das Lachen sprach ich heilig; ihr höheren Menschen, lernt mir – lachen! (KSA4, 367-368)

They [Zarathustra's guests] are merry, he began again, and, who knows? perhaps at their host's expense. And if they learned to laugh from me, it is still my laughter that they have learned. But what does it matter? They are old people, convalescing in their own way, laughing in their own way; my ears have suffered worse things without becoming grumpy. (310)

Sie [Zarathustras Gäste] sind lustig, begann er wieder, und wer weiss? vielleicht auf ihres Wirthes Unkosten; und lernten sie von mir lachen, so ist es doch nicht mein Lachen, das sie lernten.

Aber was liegt dran! Es sind alte Leute: sie genesen auf ihre Art, sie lachen auf ihre Art; meine Ohren haben schon Schlimmeres erduldet und wurden nicht unwirsch. (KSA4, 386)

There are even some who relate that the ass danced too, and that it had not been for nothing that the ugliest man had given him wine to drink before. Now it may have been so otherwise; and if the ass really did not dance that night, yet greater and stranger wonders occurred than the dancing of an ass would have been. In short, as the proverb of Zarathustra says: "What does it matter?" (318)

Es giebt sogar Solche, die erzählen, das damals der Esel getanzt habe: nicht umsonst nämlich habe ihm der

hässlichste Mensch vorher Wein zu trinken gegeben. Diess mag sich nun so verhalten oder auch anders; und wenn in Wahrheit an jenem Abende der Esel nicht getanzt hat, so geschahen doch damals grössere und seltsamere Wunderdinge als es das Tanzen eines Esels wäre. Kurz, wie das Sprichwort Zarathustra's lautet: "was liegt daran!" (KSA4, 396)

"My suffering and my pity for suffering – what does it matter? Am I concerned with happiness? I am concerned with my work.

[...]

This is my morning, my day is breaking: rise now, rise, thou great noon!"

Thus spoke Zarathustra, and he left his cave [on the mountain], glowing and strong as a morning sun that comes out of dark mountains. (327)

"Mein Leid und mein Mitleiden – was liegt daran! Trachte ich denn nach Glücke? Ich trachte nach meinem Werke!"<sup>53</sup>

[...]

Dies ist mein Morgen, mein Tag hebt an: herauf nun, herauf, du grosser Mittag!" – –

Also sprach Zarathustra und verliess seine Höhle [auf dem Berg], glühend und stark, wie eine Morgensonne, die aus dunklen Bergen kommt. (KSA4, 408)

With this last excerpt *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* comes to its conclusion, and hopefully the case has now been made that Zarathustra's "proverb" / "Sprichwort" should no longer be ignored in the interpretation and comprehension of this work of world literature. But it also needs to be emphasized that Nietzsche would have done better to have labeled his "What does it matter!" / "Was liegt daran!" as a proverbial expression instead of a proverb. Regarding this matter, the following two English translations are quite informative:

In short, as the proverb of Zarathustra says: "What does it matter?" (318)<sup>54</sup>

In short, as Zarathustra's saying has it: "What does it matter!"<sup>55</sup>



In the case of the first translation the question mark is inappropriate because Nietzsche does not mean it as an interrogative but rather as an indicative as it is common with proverbs altogether. The second translator did well by employing the term “saying” which carries with it the connotation of proverbial expression. But be that as it may, Nietzsche has no intention to express a piece of proverbial wisdom but rather the conviction that there are many possibilities and paths to master life. Men are “dice throwers” (292) / “Würfelspieler” (KSA4, 363), who can deal with their fate by dancing and laughing, and the one who can do exactly that will, proverbially speaking, “jump over his shadow – and verily, into his sun” (117). / “über seinen eignen Schatten springen – und, wahrlich! hinein in seine Sonne” (KSA4, 151). One might even venture the guess that Nietzsche thought of his earlier proverbial statement “They (men) simply want to be the smiths [architects] of their own fortunes and misfortunes” / “Sie [die Menschen] wollen nun einmal ihres Glückes und Unglückes eigene Schmiede sein” (KSA2, 285)<sup>56</sup> from his *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1878, *Human, All Too Human*). Surely all of this is part of Nietzsche’s thought, but Zarathustra is not searching for fortune as such. He understands his calling as worthwhile work towards the renewal of humankind and the world as such. That means struggle, as it is announced proverbially already at the beginning of *Zarathustra*: “to crash through these ultimate walls with its [i.e., the] head, and not only with its [i.e., the] head – over there to ‘that world’” (31-32) / “mit dem Kopfe durch die letzten Wände, und nicht nur mit dem Kopfe – hinüber zu ‘jener Welt’” (KSA4, 36).

To be sure, Sisyphus does not appear in this work, but some of this conjures up the existentialist philosophy of Albert Camus, who knew and treasured his Nietzsche well. In his book *Le mythe de Sisyphe* (1942) he states existentially and life-confirmingly: “La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d’homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.”<sup>57</sup> And there is a passage in *Zarathustra* that permits the assumption that Nietzsche and Camus had similar thoughts, even though Camus is less elitist and more humane. And sure enough, there is a significant “stone image” / “Steinbild” passage in *Zarathustra* that is reminiscent of the myth of Sisyphus. As is typical for such key statements in Nietzsche’s works, it is based on the leitmotif-like allusions to the proverb “Who throws the stone (high) above himself will have it

fall on his head” / “Wer den Stein [hoch] über sich wirft, dem fällt er auf den Kopf” and the proverbial expression “to search for the philosophers’ stone (stone of the wise)” / “den Stein der Weisen suchen”. But, as expected, the proverb is negated by Nietzsche, because the falling stone most certainly will not rob Zarathustra of his courage to confront the struggle of life:

A path that ascended defiantly through stones, malicious, lonely, not cheered by herb or shrub – a mountain path crunched under the defiance of my foot. Striding silently over the mocking clatter of pebbles, crushing the rock that made it slip, my foot forced its way upward. Upward – defying the spirit that drew it downward toward the abyss, the spirit of gravity, my devil and archenemy. Upward – although he sat on me, half dwarf, half mole, lame, making lame, dripping lead into my ear, leaden thoughts into my brain.

“O Zarathustra,” he [a dwarf] whispered mockingly, syllable by syllable; “you philosopher’s stone [stone of the wise], you slingstone, you star-crusher! You threw yourself up high; but every stone that is thrown must fall. Sentenced to yourself and to your own stoning – O Zarathustra, far indeed have you thrown the stone, but it will fall back on yourself.”

Then the dwarf fell silent, and that lasted a long time. His silence, however, oppressed me; and such twosomeness is surely more lonesome than being alone. I climbed, I climbed, I dreamed, I thought; but everything oppressed me. I was like one sick whom his wicked torture makes weary, and who as he falls asleep is awakened by a still more wicked dream. But there is something in me that I call courage; that has so far slain my every discouragement. This courage finally bade me stand still and speak: “Dwarf! It is you or I!”

For courage is the best slayer, courage which attacks; for in every attack there is playing and brass.

[...]

Courage, however, is the best slayer – courage which attacks: which slays even death itself, for it says, “Was that life? Well then! Once more!”

In such words, however, there is much playing and brass.  
He that has ears to hear, let him hear! (156-157)

Ein Pfad, der trotzig durch Geröll stieg, ein boshafter,  
einsamer, dem nicht Kraut, nicht Strauch mehr zusprach:  
ein Berg-Pfad knirschte unter dem Trotz meines Fusses.

Stumm über höhnischem Geklirr von Kieselsteinen schreitend,  
den Stein zertretend, der ihn gleiten liess: also zwang  
mein Fuss sich aufwärts.

Aufwärts: – dem Geiste zum Trotz, der ihn abwärts zog,  
abgrundwärts zog, dem Geiste der Schwere, meinem  
Teufel und Erzfeinde.

Aufwärts: – obwohl er auf mir sass, halb Zwerg, halb  
Maulwurf; lahm; lähmend; Blei durch mein Ohr, Blei-  
tropfen-Gedanken in mein Hirn träufelnd.

“Oh Zarathustra, raunte er [ein Zwerg] höhnisch Silb’ um  
Silbe, du Stein der Weisheit! Du warfst dich hoch, aber  
jeder geworfene Stein muss – fallen!

Oh Zarathustra, du Stein der Weisheit, du Schleuderstein,  
du Stern-Zertrümmerer! Dich selber warfst du so hoch, -  
aber jeder geworfene Stein – muss fallen!

Verurtheilt zu dir selber und zur eignen Steinigung: oh  
Zarathustra, weit warfst du ja den Stein, - aber auf dich  
wird er zurückfallen!”

Drauf schieg der Zwerg; und das wahrte lange. Sein  
Schweigen aber drückte mich; und solchermassen zu  
Zweien ist man wahrlich einsamer als zu Einem!

Ich stieg, ich stieg, ich träumte, ich dachte, – aber Alles  
drückte mich. Einem Kranken glich ich, den seine  
schlimme Marter müde macht, und den wieder ein  
schlimmerer Traum aus dem Einschlafen weckt. –

Aber es giebt Etwas in mir, das ich Muth heisse: das  
schlug bisher mir jeden Unmuth todt. Dieser Muth hiess  
mich endlich stille stehn und sprechen: “Zwerg! Du! Oder  
ich!” –

Muth nämlich ist der beste Todtschläger, – Muth, welcher  
angreift: denn in jedem Angriffe ist klingendes Spiel.

[...]

Muth aber ist der beste Todtschläger, Muth, der angreift:  
der schlägt noch den Tod todt, denn er spricht: War das  
das Leben? Wohlan! Noch Ein Mal!”

In solchem Spruche aber ist viel klingendes Spiel. Wer  
Ohren hat, der höre. – (KSA4, 198-199)

Zarathustra, like Sisyphus condemned to himself, carries on by accepting and confirming the eternal return (repetition) of life. At the end Zarathustra dances, sings, and laughs and despite his hard existence is happy like Sisyphus. With enthusiastic joy he steps towards the morning sun, ready to accept the dynamics of life anew every day:

All anew, all eternally, all entangled, ensnared, enamored  
– oh, then you loved the world. Eternal ones, love it  
eternally and evermore; and to woe too, you say: go, but  
return! For all joy wants – eternity. (323)  
– Alles von neuem, Alles ewig, Alles verkettet, verfädelt,  
verliebt, oh so liebtet ihr die Welt, –  
– ihr Ewigen, liebt sie ewig und allezeit: und auch zum  
Weh sprecht ihr: vergeh, aber komm zurück! Denn alle  
Lust will – Ewigkeit! (KSA4, 402)

Proverbial matters have accompanied Zarathustra on his path towards self-recognition and the acceptance of life. The numerous proverbial expressions with their metaphors add much to the poetic style of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, while the usually varied Bible and folk proverbs are used to underscore Nietzsche's break with God and Christianity. Anti-proverbs and pseudo-proverbs also do their part to emphasize Nietzsche's call for the revaluation of all values. Liberated men need no proverbial rule system and do not "run against open doors" / "offene Türen einrennen", as a proverbial expression would have it. Zarathustra's higher men (overmen) maintain self-assured and anti-proverbially: "We do not question each other, we do not complain to each other, we often [i.e., openly] walk together through open doors" (184). / "Wir fragen einander nicht, wir klagen einander nicht, wir gehen offen mit einander durch offene Türen" (KSA4, 232). Naturally the often repeated phrase "Thus spoke Zarathustra" / "Also sprach Zarathustra" has long become proverbial, but it would certainly be of great benefit, if modern men in their ever more absurd world would occasionally remind themselves what Friedrich Nietzsche actually said and meant with his not at all didactic *Zarathustra*.

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Translated, with Commentary, by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> All German references are from the 23 volumes of the *Kritische Studienausgabe (Sämtliche Werke, vols. 1-15 "KSA" and Sämtliche Briefe, vols. 1-8 "KSB")*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980 and 1986).

<sup>3</sup> All translations of primary and secondary sources that are not otherwise identified are my own.

<sup>4</sup> For these three concepts see Walter Linden, "Friedrich Nietzsche als Meister der deutschen Sprache," *Muttersprache*, 48 (1933), cols. 65-71 (here col. 65); Marie Hed Kaulhausen, *Nietzsches Sprachstil. Gedeutet aus seinem Lebensgefühl und Weltverständnis* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1977), p. 106; and Hans-Martin Gauger, "Nietzsches Stil am Beispiel von *Ecce homo*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 13 (1984), pp. 332-355 (here p. 335).

<sup>5</sup> The English texts are taken from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated with a Preface by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978 [first 1954]). This reference is also cited in Lutz Röhrich, *Das große Lexikon der sprichwörtlichen Redensarten* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991-1992), vol. 3, p. 1444.

<sup>6</sup> See Hans Morowa, *Sprache und Stil von Nietzsches "Zarathustra"*. Ein Beitrag zur Erkenntnis seines geistig-seelischen Ausdrucksgehalts (Diss. Berlin, 1958), pp. 65-67.

<sup>7</sup> See Joachim Goth, *Nietzsche und die Rhetorik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1970), pp. 97-98; and Marie Hed Kaulhausen, *Nietzsches Sprachstil*, p. 122.

<sup>8</sup> Siegfried Vitens, *Die Sprachkunst Friedrich Nietzsches in "Also sprach Zarathustra"* (Bremen-Horn: Walter Dorn, 1951), p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Ludger Lütkehaus (ed.), "*Stehlen ist oft seliger als nehmen*." *Nietzsche zum Vergnügen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2000), pp. 79, 82 and 87.

<sup>10</sup> See Andreas Nolte and Wolfgang Mieder, "*Zu meiner Hölle will ich den Weg mit guten Sprüchen pflastern*." *Friedrich Nietzsches sprichwörtliche Sprache* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Hans Schemann, *Deutsche Idiomatik. Die deutschen Redewendungen im Kontext* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1993), p. 557.

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Perkins, "Analogistic Strategies in *Zarathustra*," in David Goicoechea (ed.), *The Great Year of Zarathustra (1881-1981)* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 316-338 (here pp. 321-323).

<sup>13</sup> See Theodore Ziolkowski, "Zarathustra's Reincarnations: Literary Responses to Nietzsche's Work," *Modern Language Review*, 107 (2012), pp. 211-229 (here pp. 214-216).

<sup>14</sup> Vitens, *Die Sprachkunst Friedrich Nietzsches*, p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Naumann, "Nietzsches Sprache 'Aus der Natur'. Ansätze zu einer Sprachtheorie in den frühen Schriften und ihre metaphorische Einlösung in *Also sprach Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 14 (1985), pp. 126-163 (here p. 126 and pp. 162-163).

<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), p. 231.

<sup>17</sup> Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching. An Interpretation of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra"* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 308.

<sup>18</sup> Markus Meckel, "Der Weg Zarathustras als der Weg des Menschen. Zur Anthropologie Nietzsches im Kontext der Rede von Gott im *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 9 (1980), pp. 174-208 (here pp. 174-175).

<sup>19</sup> The lines in the middle are also cited by Meckel, "Der Weg Zarathustras," p. 176.

<sup>20</sup> See Margot Paronis, "Also sprach Zarathustra". *Die Ironie Nietzsches als Gestaltungsprinzip* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1976), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> See Franz Harder, "'Parturient [*sic*] montes, nascetur ridiculus mus,'" *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, 35-36 (1925-1926), pp. 278-280.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 181.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 279.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 280.

<sup>25</sup> Oliver Thomas Domzalski (ed.), *Das goldene Album der Sponti-Sprüche* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2006), without page reference. See the additional references in Wolfgang Mieder (ed.), *Verkehrte Worte. Antizitate aus Literatur und Medien* (Wiesbaden: Quelle & Meyer, 1997), p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> Günter Grass, *Fundsachen für Nichtleser* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1997), p. 111.

<sup>27</sup> See Georg Büchmann, *Geflügelte Worte. Der klassische Zitatenschatz*, ed. by Winfried Hofmann. 40th ed. (Berlin: Ullstein, 1995), p. 222; and Johann Prossliner, *Licht wird alles, was ich fasse. Das Lexikon der Nietzsche-Zitate* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), pp. 25, 134-135, 137 and 229.

<sup>28</sup> Meckel, "Der Weg Zarathustras," p. 192.

<sup>29</sup> These two lines are also cited by Meckel, "Der Weg Zarathustras," p. 192.

<sup>30</sup> Regarding this reference see also Richard M. Meyer, "Nietzsches Wortbildungen," *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Wortforschung*, 15 (1914), pp. 98-146 (here p. 142, repeated on p. 143).

<sup>31</sup> See Oskar Baumgartner, "Nietzsche und die Bibel," *Wissen und Leben*, 5 (1912), pp. 526-531.

<sup>32</sup> See primarily Carl Schulze, *Die biblischen Sprichwörter der deutschen Sprache* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1860; rpt. ed. by Wolfgang Mieder. Bern: Peter Lang, 1987); Paul Grünberg, *Biblische Redensarten. Eine Studie über den Gebrauch und Missbrauch der Bibel in der deutschen Volks- und Umgangssprache* (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1888); Heinrich Krauss, *Geflügelte Bibelworte. Das Lexikon biblischer Redensarten* (München: C.H. Beck, 1993); Heribert Steger, *333 biblische Redensarten* (Augsburg: Pattloch, 1998); and Hans Schmoldt, *Reclams Lexikon der Bibelzitate* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> See Margot Paronis, *Die Ironie Nietzsches*, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> For this proverb see John G. Kunstmann, "And Yet Again: 'Wes des Herz voll ist, des geht der Mund über'," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 23 (1952), pp. 509-527; Timothy C. Nelson, "'Ex abundantia cordis os loquitur': Ein Beitrag zur Rezeptionsgeschichte eines umstrittenen Sprichworts," *Proverbium*, 3 (1986), pp. 101-123; and Wolfgang Mieder, "Martin Luther und die Geschichte des

Sprichwortes 'Wes das Herz voll ist, des geht der Mund über', in W. Mieder, *Sprichwörtliches und Geflügeltes. Sprachstudien von Martin Luther bis Karl Marx* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1995), pp. 13-22.

<sup>35</sup> See Wolfgang Mieder, "'Der Mensch lebt nicht vom Brot allein': Vom Bibelspruchwort über das Volksspruchwort zum Antispruchwort," in Michail Aleksiejenko and Harry Walter (ed.), *Słowo, tekst, czas. Jednostka frazeologiczna w tradycyjnych i nowych paradygmatach naukowych* (Szczecin: Wydawca Print Group, 2010), pp. 279-300.

<sup>36</sup> See also the comparative list of Bible- and *Zarathustra*-references in Vitens, *Die Sprachkunst Friedrich Nietzsches*, pp. 34-40.

<sup>37</sup> See the introduction to the new edition of Karl Simrock, *Die deutschen Sprichwörter*, ed. by Wolfgang Mieder (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1988), pp. 7-18.

<sup>38</sup> See Karin Doerr, "'To Each His Own' (Jedem das Seine): The Mis-(Use) of German Proverbs in Concentration Camps and Beyond," *Proverbium*, 17 (2000), pp. 71-90.

<sup>39</sup> This last statement is of course an allusion to the Bible reference that is part of the Christian marriage ceremony: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put assunder" (Matthew 19:6; "Was nun Gott zusammengefügt hat, das soll der Mensch nicht scheiden").

<sup>40</sup> See David S. Thatcher, "Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 6 (1977), pp. 240-260.

<sup>41</sup> See Helmut Carl, "Unsere Haustiere in sprichwörtlichen Redensarten," *Muttersprache*, 72 (1962), pp. 333-339; Ulrich M. Meisser, "Tiersprichwörter und Verhaltensforschung. Zur gegenseitigen Erhellung von didaktischer Literatur und Naturwissenschaft," *Studium Generale*, 22 (1969), pp. 861-889; Rudolf Schmidt, *Tierisches in unserer Muttersprache* (Gerabronn-Crailsheim: Hohenloher Druck- und Verlagshaus, 1972); Jochen Sternkopf, "Tierbezeichnungen in phraseologischen Einheiten," *Muttersprache*, 103 (1993), pp. 324-331; and Dmitrij Dobrovol'skij and Elisabeth Piirainen, *Symbole in Sprache und Kultur. Studien zur Phraseologie aus kultursemiotischer Perspektive* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 1996), pp. 157-226.

<sup>42</sup> See R. Hinton Thomas, "Nietzsche, Women and the Whip," *German Life and Letters*, 34 (1980), pp. 117-125.

<sup>43</sup> Jürgen Christen, *Vergiß die Peitsche nicht. Frauenfeindliche Sprüche* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1991). See also Friedemann Spicker, "Der mit der Peitsche geht: Friedrich Nietzsche," in F. Spicker, *Die Welt ist voller Sprüche. Große Aphoristiker im Porträt* (Bochum: Norbert Brockmeyer, 2010), pp. 88-93.

<sup>44</sup> All these references with bibliographical information are included in Wolfgang Mieder (ed.), *Ver-kehrte Worte*, pp. 333-335.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Rupp, *Hieb- und Stichsätze. Aphorismen* (Neckenmarkt: Novum Publishing, 2010), p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> See especially the annotated collections by Mineke Schipper, "*Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet*". *Women in Proverbs from Around the World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2003); and Christa Rittersbacher, *Frau und Mann im Sprichwort. Einblicke in die sprichwörtliche Weltanschauung Großbritanniens und Amerikas* (Heidelberg: Wunderhorn, 2002).

<sup>47</sup> See Gerhard Peukes, *Untersuchungen zum Sprichwort im Deutschen. Semantik, Syntax, Typen* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1977), pp. 145-146.

<sup>48</sup> See the impressive number of 2093 wellerisms that Edmund Hoefler includes in his collection *Wie das Volk spricht. Deutsche Sagwörter* (Stuttgart: Adolph Krabbe, 1855; rpt. of the much expanded 9th edition of 1885 ed. by Wolfgang Mieder. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1995); and see also Wolfgang Mieder, "'Irren ist menschlich, sagte der Igel': Aphoristische Sagwörter aus Literatur und Medien," in W. Mieder, *Aphorismen, Sprichwörter, Zitate. Von Goethe und Schiller bis Victor Klemperer* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 127-158.

<sup>49</sup> See also Higgins, *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra"*, pp. 241-242.

<sup>50</sup> See Jörn Albrecht, "Friedrich Nietzsche und das 'sprachliche Relativitätsprinzip'," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 8 (1979), pp. 225-244 (here p. 226).

<sup>51</sup> See David B. Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), p. 120.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Schemann, *Deutsche Idiomatik*, p. 491.

<sup>53</sup> The last two references, without any indication to their proverbiality, are also cited in Higgins, *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra"*, pp. 216 and 236.

<sup>54</sup> See also the earlier translation "In short, as the proverb of Zarathustra saith: 'What doth it matter!'" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*. Translated by Thomas Common (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967 [first 1909]), p. 355.

<sup>55</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for Everyone and Nobody*. Translated with an Introduction by Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 278. By but one year later the following translation appeared: "In sum, as Zarathustra's saying goes, 'What does it matter!'" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. A Book for All and None*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 259.

<sup>56</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*. Translated by Marion Faber (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 210.

<sup>57</sup> Albert Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe. Essai sur l'absurde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), p. 166. See also Bianca Rosenthal, *Die Idee des Absurden. Friedrich Nietzsche und Albert Camus* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977), pp. 41-51 (here p. 50).

Wolfgang Mieder  
 Department of German and Russian  
 422 Waterman Building  
 University of Vermont  
 85 South Prospect Street  
 Burlington, Vermont 05405  
 USA  
 E-mail: Wolfgang.Mieder@uvm.edu