

# Chapter 0:

## The Importance of Fiction

Cadell Last

The greatest joys in my life have been related to fictional mediation. In fact, without fictional mediation, what joy is possible in this world? Nietzsche famously remarked, in *Twilight of the Idols*, that without music, life would be a mistake. I feel the same way about fiction. When philosophers reflect on the misery of life, even the absolute negativity of life, the lack in Nature that prevents it from being our true Other, in many ways, they are lamenting a life that lacks a good story or narrative, a fictional mediation. There are many elements that go into good fiction. A good fiction does not just involve flashy imagery, exciting fight sequences, or fantastical creatures (although it can include those things), a good fiction represents a *narrative tension produced by a crack in the real where we can be surprised by the mystery of what we really are or might become*. Such fictional representations produce the best plots and the best characters, where we can really reflect on the paradoxes of our being from a new perspective.

That is why I am so partial to the opening of Slavoj Žižek's *Less Than Nothing*, where he states "beyond the fiction of reality, there is the reality of fiction."<sup>3</sup> The "reality of fiction" is an insanely underthought dimension of modern philosophy, which has far reaching implications related to everything from the truth of theological to scientific speculations, about the artistic nature of the human being. As the great psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan emphasised: "truth has the structure of a fiction." Enter Zarathustra. When we hear about Nietzsche's philosophical career, we

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<sup>3</sup> Žižek, S. 2012. *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. Verso. p. 4.

often find lamentations about the failures and mistakes of the human, all too human man, who was Nietzsche. Indeed, Nietzsche was a limited man with, in many ways, a tragic and lonely life, riddled with health complications and intimate catastrophes. However, he just may have left us with the best fictional contribution to philosophy ever written. Perhaps he knew all too well something about the tension produced by the crack in the real? Perhaps his narrative, embodied by the figure of Zarathustra, is precisely the tension of the deepest and most excessive real repetition of the human becoming qua tightrope-walking-dancing-star to an-other-becoming.

To my mind, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* offers us a space for thoughtful self-reflection, for centuries or (may I dream?) even millennia to come. And yet Zarathustra never really existed. One is tempted to offer the axiom “Zarathustra does not exist,” following Lacan’s notoriously misinterpreted axiom related to “Woman,” universality and the logic of the non-All. While Nietzsche is the really existing flesh and blood man that can be represented as the universal “All-hammer” smashing civilisational values rotting after the “Death of God,” Zarathustra is the space or gap in the All, where a particular fictional representation dying into his singularity, can offer us a true myth opening the space for a new genuine multiplicity. What I will try to develop along the lines of an “other becoming.” In this way we can think about the character of Zarathustra as less than nothing, or, why not, “more than something.” Zarathustra is a character that is larger than life within life. Zarathustra does not represent this or that human being, but rather the point within the human being which drives the limits of the human being in the most profound dimensions of existence. This does not involve pushing the imaginary of our technological possibilities, but rather pushing the imaginary of our existential, ethical, spiritual, and dramatic possibilities. Zarathustra does not call you to

model qua mimic his being, he calls you to that indefinable/uncategorizable point that is the *overman's repetition*, the point from which one's difference is perceived as a *lightning strike to the human being*.

Thus, Nietzsche's fiction is the most powerful kind: one that does not split the world into two (our "natural" world vs. a "supernatural" world), but rather *splits one world from within into two offering us true spirit science fiction*. All those secular naturalists and supernatural theists do not know what they speak of when they speak on Nietzsche and his fictional double, Zarathustra. When we are dealing with Nietzsche and Zarathustra we are dealing with one being that splits itself into a not-two, who through his own dedicated repetition, opens an excess that actualises the monstrous potentialities that remain merely virtual for "the 99%." This 99% is not the proletariat, or better, precariat, class of modern capitalism, but rather the rabble who do not see the power of their own repetition and its monstrous potential actualities (or better, choose not to see it). This is what Nietzsche means when he says "become who you are." However, to "become who you are" is a difficult task, the result of a complex web of contradictory wills, the affirmative play of an irreducible tension between negativity and positivity that is never totally reconciled, but rather affirms a play in the crack of the real as such.

Now it must be stressed, the difference and the distance between Christianity and Nietzsche, often reflected upon in the following anthology by a multiplicity of voices, has something to do with this difference and distance between Jesus and Zarathustra. Whereas Christianity seems to place Jesus as *the* eternal or transhistorical universal figure, who carried the cross for us, and who inspires us to walk with him (or even fly qua rise with him); Nietzsche qua Zarathustra does not seem to be pointing towards this quality of representation. Zarathustra points beyond

himself, so far beyond himself that he wants to disappear. It is almost as if, to borrow a logical trick from our friend Hegel, the quantitative build up of historical civilisation itself, *has opened the conditions of possibility for a new and truer quality of infinity*. To be precise: the fiction of Zarathustra does not offer to carry the load for us. We must engage in our own abyssal mediation, which is heavy, towards flight, which is light. When I speak of an “other becoming” in this anthology, I am thinking of a becoming that can positively differentiate itself from the becoming that Western civilisation has known, that of a becoming under a cross. This “other becoming” is the *becoming of flight*. What might a civilisation look like that sublates the cross for flight? How might such a foundation for civilisation be thought? That seems like a noble job for philosophy, one that could potentially even inspire the next generation of artists, scientists and theologians.

A wise commenter on Nietzsche and Zarathustra, Alenka Zupančič, once said that such a figure does not belong in any space or time, but rather embodies the out-of-jointness of the spirit relative to those categories.<sup>4</sup> Nietzsche and his spectral double qua minimal difference are the not-two as permanent and inherent tension of becoming. Perhaps that means that the overman points towards a reality where the categories of space and time no longer make sense: *a flight and an other becoming*. As we know from the phenomenological positive result of Zarathustra’s journey, “there is *no time on earth*” for the type of love that is possible on earth. A strange fiction, to be sure. But then again, at one point in history, a certain formalisation of space and time, were themselves strange fictions, with dramatic ethical and spiritual consequences. Perhaps that

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<sup>4</sup> Zupančič, A. 2003. *The Shortest Shadow: Nietzsche’s Philosophy of the Two*. The MIT Press.

is why the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan said in an obscure interview.<sup>5</sup>

“For me the only true science worth following is science fiction. The other, official science with its altars in the laboratories gropes its way forward without reaching any happy medium. And it has even begun to fear its own shadow.”

To play with Lacan a bit, the Philosophy Portal project focuses on serious science, which I take to be the project development of the actual “philosophical sciences,” pioneered by Hegel, which can not only work with substance, but also subject. Thus, I would say something like:

“For me the only true science fiction worth following is serious science. The other, official fiction with its altars in ordinary consciousness reaches its way forward without reaching any happy medium. And it has even begun to fear its own shadow.”

*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* represents just such a “serious science” because it is a “true science fiction,” a science fiction that works with the subjective spirit and its logic.

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<sup>5</sup> See: ‘There can be no crisis of psychoanalysis’ Jacques Lacan interviewed in 1974. Verso.  
<https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/1668-there-can-be-no-crisis-of-psychoanalysis-jacques-lacan-interviewed-in-1974>