"Floods of Life" around "Granite of Fate": 
Emerson and Nietzsche as 
Thinkers of Nature

Graham Parkes

He has said the best things about nature that ever were said.
—Emerson, "Goethe; or, The Writer"

We seem nowadays less "[e]mbosomed . . . in nature" than when Emerson published his first book, the "little azure-coloured Nature," in 1836; and if the "floods of life" that "stream around us and through us" do indeed "invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature," we appear to have declined or ignored that invitation (E&L, 7). Instead, we have perpetrated so many ill-proportioned acts on that long-suffering Mother that she becomes ever less able to sustain the floods of life on which the human species depends. The contribution that follows is part of a grander project aligned against this tendency, and thus calls for a preliminary outline.

One of the grounds for slow progress on environmental issues is that the problems tend to be seen, and the debates conducted, within the horizons of a modern world view deriving from Platonic, Christian, and Cartesian-Newtonian philosophies. Such parochial discourses are proving ineffectual in the face of the global predicament that now confronts us: what is required is a radical transformation of perspective. Heeding Marx's injunction to philosophers (in Theses on Feuerbach) to "change the world" rather than merely "interpret it in various ways," let us look to thinkers who interpret the
world in ways that transform our understanding of nature and the place of human beings within it.

Generally speaking, to the extent that nature is experienced as a locus of intrinsic value, a source of wisdom, or a direct manifestation of the divine, there will be a tendency to refrain from inflicting gratuitous harm on the environment. The East Asian traditions are especially rich in philosophies like Daoism and Zen that conduce to such experience and thereby encourage respectful and fulfilling relations with the natural world. But since few Americans or Europeans will be persuaded that ecological salvation lies in the texts of a Daoist sage who flourished some twenty-five hundred years ago, or in a ninth-century thaumaturge from Japan, it makes sense to look for corresponding ways of thinking in our own traditions. And there is, indeed, a side current of Western thought that has run counter to the mainstream all along. Originating in pre-Socratic thought, it appears to some extent in the Stoics and again in Christian mysticism and several Renaissance thinkers, attains full flow with Goethe and the Naturphilosophen in Germany, and eventually issues in figures like Emerson and Thoreau in the United States and Nietzsche in Europe. Insofar as one finds in these thinkers tendencies to view nature as sacred, as a source of wisdom to be respected, and as an indispensable basis for human flourishing, the prospects for developing a more cosmopolitan dialogue on environmental issues appear promising.

While the force of Emerson’s pervasive influence on Nietzsche is finally coming to be appreciated, his specific impact on Nietzsche’s understanding of nature has not been studied, nor have the broader consonances between their ideas about the natural world. Generally, Emerson’s significance as a thinker of nature has been overshadowed by Thoreau’s, whose writings are indeed richer in resources for environmental philosophy (and whose ideas are even closer to Nietzsche’s in this area). Nor have Nietzsche’s powers as a philosopher of nature been adequately appraised; a tendency to exaggerate the role of domination in his idea of will to power has blinded readers to the ecological aspects of his thinking. Guided by the practical considerations outlined above, the following discussion does not engage the debate over whether Emerson is a “nature writer,” and what that means. Its primary concern is with those aspects of his thinking that can transform our experience of the natural world and thereby our understanding of our relations with it. Because both Emerson and Nietzsche shift in their responses to nature, a chronological consideration of the relevant ideas is recommended; having discussed Nietzsche’s later philosophy of nature elsewhere, I shall focus more on his early ideas here, while marking parallels with and divergences from Emerson’s ways of thinking more generally.

A major figure in the background here is Goethe, whose greatness lies in his capacity for raising the level of culture while retaining a profound naturalness—a territory in which Emerson and Nietzsche are also formidable. “[H]undred-handed, Argus-eyed,” Emerson calls Goethe, commending in particular his ability to “pierce” the coats of convention and to “draw his strength from nature, with which he lived in full communion” (“Goethe,” in E&L, 751). Emerson appreciated the writings on nature most of all, and his essay “The Method of Nature” especially resonates with Goethe’s ideas.

Nietzsche was richly introduced to Goethe’s writings as a young boy, thanks to his friendship with Wilhelm Pinder, whose parents were enthusiastic devotees. From the age of seven or so, he enjoyed regular evenings of readings from Goethe’s works at the Pinder residence in Naumburg (Saxony). The Nietzsche family had moved there after the premature death of the father when Nietzsche was only four; before that they had lived in a parsonage at Röcken, a tiny village surrounded by pleasantly undulating and forested countryside. Nietzsche’s early autobiographical sketches, which he titled (following Goethe) “From My Life,” contain several accounts of his father’s death dominated by imagery drawn from natural phenomena. Here is a description of the precipitating illness: “Up to this point happiness and joy had always shone on us, and our
life had flowed by untroubled as a bright summer’s day. But now dark clouds heaped up, lightning flashed and devastating blows fell from the heavens. In September of 1848 my dear father suddenly succumbed to mental illness.” The condition of Nietzsche’s family after the death figures in similar terms: “When a tree is deprived of its crown, it withers and becomes bare, and the birds abandon its branches. Our family had been deprived of its crown, and all joy disappeared from our hearts and was replaced by a profound grieving.” Six months later Nietzsche’s baby brother died. Though he says that “God in heaven” was the family’s only consolation for their loss, he also notes that after the move to the town of Naumburg they “avoided the dark streets and sought the open air, as a bird escapes from its cage” (KGW, 286-87). Emerson lost an elder brother when he was four, and his father four years later, but those deaths—and a series of later losses—do not seem to have prompted him to seek solace, as Nietzsche would, in the natural world.

Right after mentioning “God in heaven,” the thirteen-year-old Nietzsche announces himself as a lover of solitude and the world of nature: “From childhood on I would seek solitude and would feel best when I could abandon myself to myself undisturbed. This usually happened in the open temple of nature, where I would find the truest friends.” His love of natural phenomena is still expressed in conventionally religious terms: “Thunderstorms would always make the most magnificent impression on me; the distant crashing of thunder and the brightly flashing lightning only increased my reverence for God” (KGW, 288). This account seems to be more than mere romanticizing in retrospect, since Pinder apparently made a similar observation about his close friend: “From his earliest childhood [Nietzsche] loved being alone in order to give himself up to his own thoughts; he tended to avoid the society of other people, and sought out places endowed with sublime natural beauty.”

As well as an assiduous autobiographer, the young Nietzsche was a prolific writer of poems, one of the earliest of which (written at age ten) begins with the lines “There on that outcrop of rock / There is my favorite place to sit” (KGW, 6). While about half of the early pieces are on themes from Greek mythology, the rest are lyrical evocations of the beauty of nature. “In the Open Air,” from May of 1858 when Nietzsche was thirteen, begins (in prosaic translation) as follows:

- Go outside and acquaint yourself
- With every aspect of nature’s beauty;
- For if you would name the whole
- You must seek it in the particular.

- See, a book lies open there
- Blessed is he who reads in it;
- Pains and plaints dissolve away
- Where the lord of life appears.

(KGW, 260)

The strong romantic element in Nietzsche’s early poems comes not only from Goethe but also from his avid reading of Byron and Shelley, as well as Hölderlin—a relatively unknown figure at that time. But at seventeen Nietzsche discovered Emerson (in German translation), an event that exerted an epochal influence on his intellectual development. In the Essays he found the voice of what he would later call “a brother soul” and talk of nature that was consonant with his own early intuitions: “Yet nature soothes and sympathizes. In the green solitude [the youth] finds a dearer home than with men” (“Love,” in E&L, 321).7

In his early lectures Emerson clearly acknowledges the superiority of the forces of nature. In “The Uses of Natural History” from 1833, he writes: “Whosoever would gain anything of [nature], must submit to the essential condition of all learning, must go in the spirit of a little child. The naturalist commands nature by obeying her.” And a lecture delivered a few years later (“Art”) offers an equally unequivocal formulation: “The omnipotent agent is Nature; all human acts are satellites to her orb” (EL, 1:20, 2:44).8 But in his first book, published the same year (1836), the power relations are, strangely, reversed.
In the introduction to *Nature*, Emerson seems to propose a co-equality of nature and humankind, asking why we should not "enjoy an original relation to the universe" rather than one mediated by tradition and history (*E&L*, 7). While Nietzsche follows him in lamenting the hypertrophy of the "historical sense" during the modern age, he will later question (as did Emerson himself) whether such a relation is possible at all, since our experience of the world is always conditioned by what we inherit—somatically as well as culturally—from our ancestors. This last idea, which is generally neglected by commentators on Nietzsche, is one of the most important things he learned from his American mentor.9

The power of this first book of Emerson's lies in the way his poetic prose evokes the imaginative union of the human with nature and promotes an organismic sense of the cosmos in opposition to the mechanistic world views that were prevalent at the time. A prefatory remark to the famous "transparent eye-ball" passage conveys a consummately Emersonian idea in images that would have a powerful impact on Nietzsche's thinking: "Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight... from breathless noon to grimmest midnight." Emerson recounts some remarkably Dionysian experiences, of the type described by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, where joyous ecstasy verges on frightening distress: "I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear." Just as what the young Nietzsche calls "the open temple of nature" (*KWH*, 288) will become for him a more pagan site, so Emerson's talk of the "perennial festival [that] is dressed" in the forests as "plantations of God" carries intimations of Dionysus. Nietzsche would have already learned how, as his predecessor observes, "[i]n the woods... a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough" (*E&L*, 10): the sloughing of old skin will become a favored image for the self-renewal consequent on withdrawal from one's fellow humans and dropping of the masks that social intercourse requires.10

The philosophy of nature in the Christian tradition tended to lose sight of Aristotle's discussions of the vegetal soul, especially after Descartes, who denied soul to the animal as well as the vegetal realms. But in the vein of late romantic thinking about the soul of
plants and the vegetal aspects of the human psyche (Herder and Goethe are especially interesting in this regard). Emerson reafirms the connections: "The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown" (E&L, 11). Again the language evinces a power to transform our experience. This feeling of communion with trees, which lies at the basis of so much mythology and ancient religion, is not something accessible only to the Wordsworthian child or the so-called "primitive": it is also an option for the intellectually mature adult. And people who might hesitate to hear the news from a Zen Buddhist priest or a Native American shaman surely will be more comfortable when it flows from the pen of a respectable Unitarian literatus. Nietzsche enjoys similar communion, frequenting different forests: "the pine seems to listen, the fir to be waiting; and both without time" (WS, 176).

Some thirty-five years after the publication of Nature, around the time of Emerson’s third visit to Paris, Nietzsche delivered a series of public lectures in Basel, “On the Future of Our Educational Institutions” (1872). In the fourth lecture, speaking through the persona of “an old philosopher,” he expatiates in quite Emersonian terms upon the role played by relations with nature in the process of imparting culture:

If you want to lead a young person onto the right path of education and culture, be careful not to disturb his naively trustful and personally immediate relationship with nature: forest and cliff, storm and vulture, the single flower, the butterfly, the meadow and the mountainside must speak to him in their own tongues; at the same time he must recognizes himself in them as in countless dispersed reflexes and reflections and in a multicolored whirl of changing appearances; in this way he will unconsciously sympathize with the metaphysical oneness of all things in the great metaphor of nature, and at the same time calm himself with their eternal perseverence and necessity. (KSA, 1:715-16)

This is very much the picture we get from Emerson’s Nature. And Nietzsche retained much of it even during his more skeptical and ironic period after his break with Wagner and disillusionment with romanticism in the late 1870s. An aphorism titled “Being Able to Be Small” reads: “One must be just as close to the flowers, grasses, and butterflies as a child is, who isn’t much taller than they are... Whoever wants to participate in all that is good must also know how to be small at times” (WS, 51). Even though his conception of nature would change somewhat, it was one of Nietzsche’s greatest consolations, after ill health forced him to give up the professorship at Basel and embark on the final, nomadic phase of his career, that he never became cut off from the intimate inhabitation of the natural world that he enjoyed throughout his childhood and youth.

The old philosopher goes on to bemoan the fact that few young people are fortunate enough to enjoy such close and “almost personal” relations with the natural world, since their education teaches “how one subjuguates nature toward one’s own ends.” With the imposition of the scientific attitude, “the instinctive, true and unique understanding of nature” is lost, and “in its place we now have clever calculation and a cunning overcoming of nature” (KSA, 1:716). By contrast, for all his admiration of nature’s beauties and mysteries—“Nature never wears a mean appearance[,] nor does the wisest man extort her secret” (Nature, in E&L, 9)—Emerson at times relegates it to an inferior position and applauds human exploitation of natural resources: “Nature is thoroughly mediate. It is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Saviour rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mould into what is useful” (E&L, 28). Although Emerson emphasizes our close relationships with natural phenomena, the situation here is avowedly anthropocentric: man “is placed in the centre of beings, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him” (E&L, 21). A Kantian influence becomes apparent in the claim that nature embodies a kind of morality: “The moral law lies at the centre of nature and radiates to the circumference.” Some of the implications of this theme for ecology, however, are relatively benign: “All things with which we deal, preach to us. What
is a farm but a mute gospel? The chaff and the wheat, weeds and plants, blight, rain, insects, sun—it is a sacred emblem from the first furrow of spring to the last stack which the snow of winter overtakes in the fields (E&L, 29). A view of the natural world as sacred scripture, which holds that “the moral influence of nature upon every individual is that amount of truth that it illustrates to him,” is likely to promote an attitude of reverential respect for natural phenomena.12

Nietzsche, more readily than Emerson, sheds the pious religiosity that informed his early views of nature, coming to stress precisely its *amorality* and to ascribe any moral law found there to projection on the part of human beings.13 It is not just the residue of Christian theism that prevents Emerson from detaching morality from nature but also his allegiance to the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions, according to which the physical world is the last and lowest level of emanation from divine spirit: “[Nature] always speaks of Spirit. It suggests the absolute. It is a perpetual effect. It is a great shadow pointing always to the sun behind us. ... We learn ... that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present” (E&L, 40–41). The Orphic strains in the Platonic tradition keep the human being from ever feeling at home in that great shadow, since the source of the intellectual soul is above and beyond. “We are as much strangers in nature,” Emerson writes, “as we are aliens from God” (E&L, 42). And if we are to become disestranged, it will not be directly but through redemption in God as the divine source of nature as well as the human soul. A journal entry from 1838 epitomizes Emerson’s striving for a more immediate relation to the natural world: “I cannot tell why I should feel myself such a stranger in nature” (JMN, 7:74). But he continues to hold fast to the Neoplatonic view, as exemplified by this passage from “The Method of Nature” (1841): “In the divine order, intellect is primary; nature, secondary; it is the memory of the mind. That which once existed in intellect as pure law, has now taken body as Nature. It existed already in the mind in solution; now, it has been precipitated, and the bright sediment is the world. We can never be quite strangers or inferiors in nature” (E&L, 118). One is tempted to say that we can never be quite at home in it either, as long as we identify ourselves

with mind rather than body and understand nature as that which “descends always from above,” from a “metaphysical and eternal spring” (E&L, 119).

Nietzsche’s repudiation of the supremacy of intellect leads to a less anthropocentric view of the universe, as expressed in the beginning of an unpublished essay from 1873:

In some out-of-the-way corner of the universe, which is poured out into innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which some clever animals invented knowing.... How aimless and arbitrary an exception the human intellect makes of itself within nature.... Only the possessor and begetter of this intellect takes it so pathetically seriously, as if the axis of the world turned within it. But if we could communicate with the great, we would realize that it flies through the air with a similar seriousness and feels within itself the flying center of the world.14

What eventually provides a philosophical ground for this unanthropocentric view is Nietzsche’s understanding of all life, and even all existence, as will to power: an understanding that was greatly inspired by his reading of Emerson, despite their differences.

In *Nature* Emerson writes that “the exercise of the Will or the lesson of power is taught in every event” (E&L, 28)—an idea prefigured in Schopenhauer, though Emerson did not discover him until much later. In *The World as Will and Representation*, Nietzsche’s other great mentor had characterized will as the “innermost being of the whole of nature,” from animal and plant life to crystallizing minerals and magnetic and gravitational fields.15 Moving away from the more static conceptions of the earlier *Nature*, Emerson emphasizes in “The Method of Nature” the burgeoning dynamism of *physis*: “planet, system, constellation, total nature is growing like a field of maize in July; is becoming somewhat else; is in rapid metamorphosis.” Whereas Schopenhauer tends to emphasize lack and the consequent insatiability of will, Emerson highlights abundance: it seems that nature “does not exist to any one or to any number of particular ends, but to numberless and endless benefit; that there is in it no private will, no rebel leaf or limb, but the whole is oppressed by one superincumbent tendency, obeys that redundancy or excess
of life which in conscious beings we call *ecstasy* (E&L, 121). Such an "excess of life" is central to Nietzsche's understanding of nature, though the power of the overflow flushes out any residue of moral elements: "Think of a being like nature, extravagant beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without intentions or consideration, without mercy or justice, fertile and barren and uncertain all at once, think of indifference itself as power" (BGE, 9). We shall see shortly how Emerson goes on to associate will with power, anticipating Nietzsche's notion of the world as will to power.

3

In the late 1870s, at the beginning of the cooler, more scientific phase of Nietzsche's thinking about nature, he becomes more explicit than Emerson about the great changes that have taken place in the human understanding of nature between the ancient and modern periods:

[For the primitive religious person] the whole of nature is a mass of actions of conscious and willful beings, an enormous complex of *arbitrary willed acts*. . . The human is the *rule* [in the form of law and tradition], nature *irregularity*. . . We moderns feel the exact opposite: the richer the human being now is inwardly, the more polyphonic his subject is, the more powerfully the regularity of nature affects him; with Goethe we all recognize in nature the great means of calming the modern soul. (HII, 1.111)

One of the implications here is that people in ancient times projected onto nature more than in recent eras, and that the chaotic richness of the modern psyche, fed by a larger number of hereditary streams, is at the same time compounded by a withdrawal of such projections. Since Emerson understands the order of nature to be preinscribed in "[t]hat which once existed in intellect," he is less inclined to think in terms of projections onto chaos.

In 1879 Nietzsche resigned from his professorship in Basel and embarked upon ten years of nomadic existence, during which he wandered from the north (the Swiss Alps) to the south (the Mediterranean coast) according to the seasons, in constant search of an environment in which he could write. Seeking a cooler climate in which to spend the summer after leaving Basel, he happened upon the Upper Engadin in Switzerland, which was to become one of his best-loved places on earth. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "But now I am in possession of the Engadin and am in my own element—quite astounding! I am related to *this* very nature." The degree to which he felt immediately at home there is evident from an aphorism titled "The Doppelgängerei of Nature," which captures the ambivalence involved in seeing oneself doubled in nature—and so not one self—an experience that is blissful and disconcerting at the same time: "In many parts of nature we encounter ourselves again, with pleasurable horror. . . . How fortunate is the one who can say: 'There are certainly in nature things much more great and beautiful, but *this* is intimately familiar, related by blood, and even more'" (WS, 338). Nietzsche's letters and notebooks from the period make it clear that he was granted some distinctly mystical experiences of nature in that environment. An aphorism with the richly suggestive title "Et in Arcadia Ego" describes an idyll in an alpine valley above the lakes that link St. Moritz with Sils-Maria and Maloja: "The effect of this consummate beauty was one of terror *[Schauden]* and at the same time mute adoration of the moment of its revelation; involuntarily, as if there could be nothing more natural, one projected into this pure and clear light-world . . . Greek heroes. One felt like Poussin and his students: heroic and idyllic at the same time" (WS, 295). Terror and bliss: the characteristic ambiguity of the Dionysian experience, "perfect exhilaration" that makes one "glad to the brink of fear." As Goethe's Faust says, "*Schauden* is the human's best part," echoing Lucretius's address to his precursor Epicurus: "from all these things a sort of divine delight gets hold upon me and a shuddering, because nature thus by your power has been so manifestly laid open."³

Although Nietzsche's is by and large a musical soul that hears rather than sees (by contrast with the intensely visual Emerson), he couldn't help being impressed, despite his poor eyesight, by the "light-world" he encountered in the Engadin. A passage from the aphorism "At Midday" makes this clear:
In a meadow surrounded by woods [a man] sees great Pan asleep; it seems that all things in nature have fallen asleep with him, an expression of eternity on their faces. He wants nothing, he worries about nothing, his heart stands still, only his eye is alive: it is a death with waking eyes. A man sees many things there that he never saw before, and, for as far as he can see, everything is spun into a net of light and as if buried in it. He feels happy as a result, but it is a heavy, heavy happiness. (IX, 308)

Later, and especially in the autumnal atmosphere of Turin a decade later, Nietzsche would invoke painter Claude Lorrain as the consummate renderer of such experiences of nature. Part of the ambivalence in Nietzsche’s relation to the natural world during his first long sojourn in the Alps stems from the fact that the ecstatic moment cannot last: “The neutrality of great nature (in mountains, ocean, forest, and desert) is pleasing, but only for a short time; we soon become impatient. ‘Won’t these things say anything to us then? Are we not there for them?’ There arises the feeling of a crime against the majesty of the human” (IX, 205). The feeling of kinship can find itself tempered by a sense of indifference on the part of nature, which tends to wound human pride.

Emerson tends to resist the lofty indifference of natural phenomena, preferring to understand them as emanations of spirit refracted through the human mind, even though a journal entry from the time between the two series of Essays (in 1843) betrays some uncertainty: “In Nature the doubt recurs whether the man is the cause or the effect. Are beasts & plants degradations of man? or are these the prophecies & exercises of nature practising herself for her masterpiece in making Man? Culminate we do not: but that point of imperfection which we occupy—is it on the way up, or down?” (JMN, 8:362). Some of his perplexity surely derives from the loss of loved ones: his first wife and two brothers had died during the several years previous, and the death of his five-year-old son in 1842 taxed to the utmost his powers of compassionate comprehension of the cosmos. In the second series of Essays he wonders whether suffering might help us find “reality, sharp peaks and edges of truth,” but concludes bleakly that “souls never touch their objects. An in navigable sea washes with silent waves between us and the things we aim at
and converse with." These natural images expressing estrangement from nature would have struck the young Nietzsche with considerable force. To fail to find solace in nature at such times of loss is the bitterest of failures: "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing," Emerson laments, "nor carry me one step into real nature." This alienation now confounds his best attempts to understand it: "Nature does not like to be observed, and likes that we should be her fools and playmates. . . . Direct strokes she never gave us power to make; all our blows glance, all our hits are accidents" ("Experience," in E&L, 472–73).

But there comes a turning point, it seems, an apogee, where alienation appears universal, or spreads at least throughout the animal realm:

We fancy that we are strangers, and not so intimately domesticated in the planet as the wild man, and the wild beast and bird. But the exclusion reaches them also: reaches the climbing, flying, gliding, feathered and four-footed man. Fox and woodchuck, hawk and snipe, and bittern, when nearly seen, have no more root in the deep world than man, and are just such superficial tenants of the globe. (E&L, 480–81)

Emerson might well have included plants among the ranks of the rootless, insofar as all life, being subject to death, hovers over the abyss of nonbeing—an insight that echoes in numerous passages in Nietzsche's works concerning the abyss (Abgrund): "Is seeing not itself—seeing abysses?" asks Zarathustra (Z, 3.2.1).

The later essay "Nature" contains some of Emerson's finest reflections on the natural world, even though the characteristic ambivalence persists—and is raised to a higher pitch. The initial invocation of a halcyon day on which "the world reaches its perfection" is paralleled by Zarathustra's realization, at the midpoint of another day, that "the world just became perfect . . . round and ripe" (E&L, 541; "At Noon," in Z, 4.10). As in the earlier Nature, trees play an important introductory role, this time helping to ground the soaring transcendentalist in Emerson. Describing his passage through "the gates of the forest" with a companion, he says:
The anciently reported spells of [the woods] creep on us. The stems of pines, hemlocks, and oaks, almost gleam like iron on the excited eye. The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them, and quit our life of solemn trifles. . . .

[Through] [t]hese enchantments ... we come to our own, and make friends with matter, which the ambitious chatter of the schools would persuade us to despise. We can never part with it: the mind loves its old home; as water to our thirst, so is the rock, the ground, to our eyes, and hands, and feet. *(E&L, 541-42)*

Finally the mind comes down to earth, and talk of spirit seems to fall behind. At least insofar as “the day [is] not wholly profane, in which we have given heed to some natural object,” Emerson no longer invokes God, but simply “the most ancient religion” *(E&L, 542-43)*. He appears to have arrived at what he considers a deeper appreciation of the sciences of the earth:

Geology has initiated us into the secularity of nature, and taught us to disuse our dame-school measures, and exchange our Mosaic and Ptolemaic schemes for her large style. We knew nothing rightly, for want of perspective. Now we learn what patient periods must round themselves before the rock is formed, then before the rock is broken, and the first lichen race has disintegrated the thinnest external plate into soil, and opened the door for the remote Flora, Fauna, Ceres, and Pomona, to come in. *(E&L, 546)*

The secularity of nature celebrated here has to do with great spans of time *(saecculae)* and need not exclude the sacred: it reveals rather how restricted is the Old Testament view, and how anthropocentric the views of most premodern cosmologies and astronomies. A more open and expansive mind is called for, one able to transcend the merely human perspective and correspond to the “large style” of nature.

“[W]hat patient periods must round themselves before the rock is formed”—aeons passing before life appears. Nietzsche learned much from Emerson’s reflections on the vast scale of geologic time, and he brings a similar appreciation to human history when he points out how ludicrously small is that fraction of history on which modern philosophers base their theories about “human being,”

“What is needed from now on is historical philosophizing, and with it the virtue of modesty *[Bescheidenung]*, but historical philosophy “can no longer be thought of apart from science of nature.” He defines “true modesty” *(wahrre Bescheidenheit)* as “the recognition that we are not our own work,” being dependent on millennia of natural history for what we have become *(HH, 1.2, 1, 588)*.

At a later point in Emerson’s “Nature” it seems as if the mind may not have come home after all, however, since he remarks that “we are encamped in nature, not domesticated” *(E&L, 552)*. In the earlier *Nature*, he had described the profound sense of participation with which he viewed, from a hilltop near his house, “long slender bars of cloud float[ing] like fishes in the sea of crimson light”: “From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its rapid transformations” *(E&L, 15)*. But he now seems more an observer than a participant, and the “perennial festival” in the forests appears indefinitely deferred:

This disappointment is felt in every landscape. I have seen the softness and beauty of the summer-clouds floating feathery overhead, enjoying, as it seemed, their height and privilege of motion, whilst yet they appeared not so much the drapery of this place and hour, as forelooking to some pavilions and gardens of festivity beyond. It is an odd jealousy: but the poet finds himself not near enough to his object. The pine-tree, the river, the bank of flowers before him, does not seem to be nature. Nature is still elsewhere. (“Nature,” in *E&L, 553*)

The poignancy here is intensified by the consideration that, according to another of the essays in the second series, the poet is capable, thanks to his participation in nature’s flow, of getting close enough to his object. (Nor can the contradiction be resolved, given the sustained splendor of his language, by supposing that Emerson has ceased being a poet himself.) “For, through that better perception,” he asserts, the poet “stands one step nearer to things, and sees the flowing or metamorphosis . . . and, following with his eyes the life, uses the forms which express that life, and so his speech flows with the flowing of nature” (“The Poet,” in *E&L, 456*). One is reminded of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra who, with the muse upon him, exults in his mountaintop retreat: “Mouth have I become through and
through, and the roaring of a stream out of high rocks: downward will I hurl my speech into the valleys” (Z, 2.1).

Not long after his first, transformative summer in the Upper Engadin, Nietzsche seems to vacillate on the question of our ability to withdraw the projections that condition our experience of the natural world (and of the world in general). In *Dawn of Morning* (1881) he returns to the difference between the ancient and modern world views in this respect:

First human beings projected themselves imaginatively [hineingedichtet] into nature: everywhere they saw themselves and things like them, their bad and capricious dispositions, hidden in clouds, thunderstorms, beasts of prey, trees and plants: at that time they invented “evil nature.” Then came a time when they again projected themselves out of nature [hinausdichteten], the time of Rousseau: people were so sick of each other that they wanted above all to have a corner of the world where human beings cannot come with their torment: one invented “good nature.” (DM, 17)

Even though he speaks here of projecting ourselves back out of nature, “good nature” is still something invented rather than simply apprehended—which suggests that an element of projection remains. A seminal aphorism with respect to this kind of projection is “Experiencing and Inventing” (“Erleben und Erdichten,” in *DM*, 119), where Nietzsche argues that by far the largest part of our experience is ineluctably conditioned by deep-level fantasy. The argument (though more thoroughly elaborated) resembles Emerson’s ideas about the role of fantasy in “Illusions”: “We live by our imaginations. . . . [F]ancy enters into all details. . . . The chapter of fascinations is very long. . . . We wake from one dream into another dream” (*E&L*, 1116–17).

Nevertheless, Nietzsche also thinks that under certain extreme conditions we might be able to discover rather than invent something about our relation to the animal realm. In *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874), he had stressed the general continuity between humanity and animality, suggesting that culture concerns itself with the rare exceptions who become truly human, aiming “to promote the generation of the philosopher, the artist, and the saint in us and outside us, and thereby to work at the perfecting of nature” (*SE*, 5). But it later becomes clear that even advanced human beings do not lose their animal natures but merely forget them: “In outbreaks of passion and in the phantasizing of the dream and insanity, the human being rediscovers his own prehistory and that of humanity as a whole: *animality* with its wild grimaces. One’s memory for once reaches sufficiently far back, while one’s civilized state develops out of the forgetting of these primal experiences” (*DM*, 312). Emerson magnificently prefigures this idea in a passage from *The Conduct of Life* (1860), where the view of nature is much grimmer than in the earlier works: “The habit of snake and spider, the snap of the tiger and other leapers and bloody jumpers, the crackle of the bones of his prey in the coil of the anaconda.—these are in the system, and our habits are like theirs. . . . [T]he forms of the shark . . . are hints of ferocity in the interiors of nature” (“Fate,” in *E&L*, 945). For Nietzsche, too, such ferocity is to be found in the interiors of the human animal as well—and is the source for what moralists refer to as the “evil drives” (*BGE*, 23, 197). It is in part a consideration of these drives that leads him to think about their overall “economy” (another idea from Emerson) in terms of will to power.30

Emerson had given clear expression to a philosophical monism in the essay “Nature”: “From the beginning to the end of the universe, [nature] has but one stuff. . . . Compound it how she will: star, sand, fire, water, tree, man, it is still one stuff, and betrays the same properties” (*E&L*, 547). Compounded in various particulars, however, this one stuff naturally tends to conflict with itself (as described in an earlier passage, from “The Method of Nature”): “There is something social and intrusive in the nature of all things: they seek to penetrate and overpower, each the nature of every other creature, and itself alone in all modes and throughout space and spirit to prevail and possess” (*E&L*, 126). While these ideas anticipate Nietzsche’s notion of will to power, a divergence comes with Emerson’s later qualification to the effect that the whole somehow
reconciles conflicting elements: "For nature wishes every thing to remain itself; and, whilst every individual strives to grow and exclude, and to exclude and grow, to the extremities of the universe, and to impose the law of its being on every other creature, Nature steadily aims to protect each against every other" ("Uses of Great Men" [1850], in E&L, 628). While Emerson thinks nature embodies "pure law" that formerly "existed in intellect," Nietzsche by contrast claims that the so-called "lawfulness of nature" is wishful thinking on the part of sentimental believers in democracy who see "everywhere equality before the law." He argues that will to power manifests itself in nature as the "ruthlessly tyrannical and relentless enforcement of claims of power" on the part of every particular, adding that even the term "tyranny" is a weak anthropomorphism in this context (BGE, 22).

It is in the essay "Power," which we know Nietzsche read carefully and often, that Emerson explicitly introduces into his monism the connection between power and will:

Life is a search after power; and this is an element with which the world is so saturated,—there is no chink or crevice in which it is not lodged. . . . A cultivated man, wise to know and bold to perform, is the end to which nature works, and the education of the will is the flowering and result of all this geology and astronomy. . . . All power is of one kind, a sharing of the nature of the world. The mind that is parallel with the laws of nature will be in the current of events, and strong with their strength. (E&L, 971, 972)

Nietzsche's Zarathustra undertakes a thorough investigation of life and announces with Emersonian resonance, "Where I found the living, there I found will to power" (Z, 2.12). The Übermensch as portrayed in Zarathustra is a paradigm of human existence in the current of natural processes and thus "strong with their strength." As Zarathustra proclaims to his first audience: "The overman is the sense of the earth . . . the ocean in which your great contempt can be submerged . . . the lightning that will lick you with its tongue. . . . I love him who prepares earth, animal, and plant for the overman" (Z, "Prologue," 3, 4). Emerson's idea that the human being becomes great by "educating the will" in such a way as to align it with the larger forces of the cosmos is central to Nietzsche's project of self-cultivation.22

Emerson's later espousal of a radical monism grounded in something less ethereal than spirit—"the universe [as] one stuff"—might be expected to diminish his anthropocentrism, and there are signs that it does. (Not that anthropocentrism is always to be deprecated, but the present focus is on resources for ecological thinking.) In the essay "Fate" (1860), nature is seen, perhaps from the perspective of the fallen human condition, as superior, insofar as "the right use of Fate is to bring up our conduct to the loftiness of nature" (E&L, 951). And in "Wealth" (1860), though there is still talk of "the conquest of this and that piece of nature" and of "the elements offer[ing] their service" (E&L, 991), a less domineering and more receptive attitude has supervened.

The rule is not to dictate, nor to insist on carrying out each of your schemes by ignorant willfulness, but to learn practically the secret spoken from all nature, that things themselves refuse to be mismanaged, and will show to the watchful their own law. . . . Nature has her own best mode of doing each thing, and she has somewhere told it plainly, if we will keep our eyes and ears open. (E&L, 1007-8)

As we learn from Nietzsche's chapter "On Self-Overcoming," Zarathustra becomes eager to learn this "secret spoken from all nature," beginning with the phenomenon of life: "I pursued the living, following the greatest and the smallest ways, so that I might learn its nature. With a hundredfold mirror I still caught its look when its mouth was closed, so that its eye would speak to me." What that look speaks is that all life is "will to power." Indeed it is a figure named "Life" that itself imparts to Zarathustra its "secret": "I am that which must always overcome itself" (Z, 2.12). This revelation echoes "that law of Nature" of which Emerson speaks, "whereby everything climbs to higher platforms" and exemplifies "the organic effort of Nature to mount and meliorate" ("Wealth." in E&L, 1010; "Culture," in E&L, 1033).

Nietzsche goes on to expand the notion of will to power to cover not just all life but all existence: corresponding to Emerson's con-
ception of the universe as “one stuff” that is completely “saturated” with power, we now have Nietzsche’s idea of “the world as will to power” (BGE, 36). The question of our relationship to the natural world can now be reframed in terms of the relations between the configuration of forces that constitute the human being and the overall configuration of the greater powers of nature. We saw the early Emerson vacillate on the question of the superiority of nature over humanity; but by the time of the late essay “Civilization” (1870), he strikes a nice balance between human submission and domination.

Everything good in man leans on what is higher. . . . Thus all our strength and success in the work of our hands depend on our borrowing the aid of the elements. [When a carpenter works wood beneath his hands,] not his feeble muscles but the force of gravity brings down the axe; that is to say, the planet itself splits his stick. . . .

. . . That is the way we are strong, by borrowing the might of the elements. . . .

. . . We cannot bring the heavenly powers to us, but if we will only choose our jobs in directions in which they travel, they will undertake them with the greatest pleasure. (W, 7:27–29)

This is not any kind of “Buddhistic submission to fate” but rather a practice akin to the Daoists’  wu wei, a nondisruptive activity that allows us to learn from and harmonize with the “way of heaven,” or the forces of nature. It also prefigures Nietzsche’s appreciation of the flourishing that is possible when the drives that constitute the human being are aligned with the larger patterns of will to power in the cosmos.

Nietzsche may well not have reached his final position vis-à-vis the natural world without the stimulus of Emerson, but from an ecological point of view, he ultimately goes beyond that mentor’s conception. When he envisions life itself (not just human life) imparting its “secret” will to power to Zarathustra directly, Nietzsche signifies a development in his thinking, since in The Joyous Science he was still grappling with the question of whether nature can ever be experienced without human projections. At times it seems that the best we can do is become aware of our projections onto nature, wake up to the fact that we are constantly “dreaming”—or being dreamed by—“the primal age and past of all sentient being,” it being impossible to withdraw the archaic “phantasm and the entire human contribution” from any particular experience of a cloud or a mountain (JS, 54, 57). In a brief historical excursion Nietzsche describes the response of the “worshiper of God” to the advances in astronomy, geology, and physics that call into question the Christian accounts of the nature of the universe: “He veiled nature and mechanics from himself as well as he could and lived in a dream. Oh how those men of old knew how to dream—without even having to go to sleep first!” Nor are we moderns, we “artists” and “veilers of naturalness,” any less susceptible to such oneiric veiling (JS, 59). Simply by virtue of being human we are all inevitably artists in this sense, and the best we can do (and must do, if we are to flourish) is to acknowledge—and celebrate—our participation in this fantastic dance (JS, 54).

But then comes a passage that suggests at least some withdrawal of projections may be possible after all, thanks to the discipline of science: “The total character of the world is to all eternity chaos, not in the sense of lacking necessity but lacking order, articulation, form, beauty, wisdom and whatever else our human aestheticizings call it . . . When shall we have completely de-divinized nature! When shall we be able to start to naturalize ourselves with pure, new-found, newly redeemed nature!” (JS, 109). This “chaos” seems to refer to what is left when the projections that customarily divinize abysmal indeterminacy, by giving it order and form, are withdrawn. The question then arises of how one can experience this “total character of the world,” since Nietzsche usually denies the possibility of “perspectiveless” seeing. The method involves broadening our perspectives beyond restricted human viewpoints, in such a way that we attain a genuinely “trans-anthropocentric” way of looking at the world. Later in The Joyous Science Nietzsche says explicitly, “As a
researcher into nature, one should come out of one's human corner” (Z, 349).

There is a rather mystical evocation of this condition in the chapter “Before Sunrise” in Zarathustra, where the protagonist, after an all-night vigil, greets the heavens before the sun rises over the sea (Z, 3.4). The clear predawn sky—“You abyss of light,” Zarathustra calls it—precludes association with Platonic or Christian heavens. Serenely superior to all considerations of “compulsion, purpose, and guilt,” the sky before sunrise illumines all things evenly; it is only after the sun rises (Plato’s idea of the Good), that there is bias and slant in the projection of rays, and shadows are cast from a single direction. Zarathustra reviles drifting clouds for inhibiting the heaven’s vast and boundless Ja- und Amen-sagen, its blessed affirmation, and no doubt also for casting shadows of their own, entailing more discriminations between light and dark, good and bad. Following what the Daoists call the “way of heaven,” Zarathustra strives to “redeem all things from their bondage under purpose,” from the restrictions imposed by some divine providence, or by scientific or utilitarian projections on the part of human beings. “But this is my blessing,” he declares,

to stand over every thing as its own heaven, as its round roof; its azure bell and eternal security: and blissful is the one who blesses thus!

For all things are baptized in the well of eternity and are beyond good and evil; for good and evil themselves are merely intermediate shadows and damp afflictions and drifting clouds.

Truly it is a blessing and no blasphemy when I teach: “Over all things stands the heaven Accident, the heaven Innocence, the heaven Chance, the heaven Exuberance.” (Z, 3.4)

Zarathustra participates in the open sky’s blessing of all things under the heavens, as an individual celebrating each particular in itself. In this boundless affirmation of what Nietzsche elsewhere calls “the innocence of becoming,” there is a hint that although all things constantly arise and perish, they do so from (and back into) the well of eternity—and are thus eternally justified exactly as they are.

The “well of eternity” reappears in the complementary chapter in part 4, “At Noon,” in an explicitly Dionysian natural setting where Zarathustra lies down by a tree entwined with a flourishing vine (Z, 4.10). In a state of mystical trance he experiences the world as having “become perfect.” As if in response to his own injunction to “stay loyal to the earth,” feeling his soul stretch out he rests “close to the earth, loyal, trusting, waiting,” at the noon hour sacred to Pan. With the sun at its zenith, noon is also the time of the shortest shadows. Zarathustra’s happiness finds consummation in the moment, the Augen-Blick, when his soul seems to “fall into the well of eternity.” He addresses the “heaven above,” as he had done before sunrise:

When will you drink this drop of dew that has fallen on all earthly things—when will you drink this wonderful soul—

When, well of eternity! you serene and dreadful abyss of noon! when will you drink my soul back into yourself?

In a countermovement to the natural baptizing of all things as they arise from the well of eternity, Zarathustra’s expansile soul has fallen like dew on all things of the earth, as the human complement to the cosmic blessing. In a classic coincidentia oppositorum, the well of eternity is now above him instead of beneath, as Zarathustra anticipates his soul’s reentering the grand circulation of moisture in death. The final reprise of this theme, in which “midnight too is noon” (Z, 4.19.10), echoes Emerson’s lesson that “every hour and season yields its tribute of delight . . . from breathless noon to grimmest midnight.”

Nor is Emerson a stranger to the variety of experience that takes Nietzsche beyond the biocentric perspective. He records a kind of death experience in his 1838 journal, describing his walking out of the house into a night lit by the full moon: “In the instant you leave far behind all human relations . . . & live only with the savages—water, air, light, carbon, lime, & granite. . . . I become a moist cold element. ‘Nature grows over me.’ . . . I have died out of the human world & come to feel a strange cold, aqueous, terraqueous, aerial, ethereal sympathy & existence” (JMN, 5:496–97). With Nietzsche, for whom such experiences enable our participation in the “dead”
world of the inorganic, granting access to the mineral as well as the animal and vegetal realms, the emphasis is on the “terraqueous” and the mood more festive. Reflection on the fact that “we are three-quarters water” and full of “anorganic minerals” prompts him to exclaim: “To be released from life and become dead nature again can be experienced as a festival—of the one who wants to die. To love nature! Again to revere what is dead!” Here Nietzsche goes beyond the biocentric viewpoint to a kind of panpsychism (the world as will to power understood as interpretation) that allows for a Dionysian, pantheistic affirmation of the totality—the living.

The difficult thing, after nature has been appropriately “de-divinized,” is to avoid falling back into “divinizing this monster of an unknown world again in the old way” (JS, 374). But it is clear that, for Nietzsche, there are circumstances in which the world presents itself, naturally, as divine—and this opens up a “new way.” It is from such a Dionysian, trans-anthropocentric standpoint that he delivers his sharpest criticism of modern arrogance toward the natural world: “Our whole attitude towards nature today is hubris, our raping of nature by means of machines and the inconsiderately employed inventions of technology and engineering” (GM, 3.9).

In sum, then, Nietzsche’s understanding of nature, while owing much to Emerson’s, appears to have developed into something more radical. Ambivalent throughout, Emerson’s attitude remains more spirit oriented, and he seems never to break completely free of the influence of Platonic and Neoplatonic conceptions of nature. His nature-mystical experiences were apparently more Plotinian, while Nietzsche’s Dionysian raptures are more reminiscent of figures like Johannes Eckhart and Goethe. Nietzsche of course had the benefit of access to more advanced science than did Emerson, but his natural philosophy also seems to involve an element of fate—the topic of his first writings to show Emerson’s influence (“Fatum und Geschichte” and “Willensfreiheit und Fatum,” both from 1862). It is the kind of fate that Nietzsche in 1886 calls “some granite of spiritual Fatum,” that “unteachable something . . . in our ground, deep down inside” (BGE, 231). Nietzsche would have noted Emerson’s fondness for geological metaphors in connection with the soul, but this idea comes more directly from Schopenhauer, who insists on the unalterability of the deepest layers of the psyche, and perhaps also from Goethe in his short essay “On Granite.” Goethe recalls sitting on an exposed piece of granite on top of a mountain and reflecting on the ancient discovery that granite is both “the highest and the deepest,” “the solid ground of our earth, and of the serene tranquility afforded by that solitary, mute nearness of great, soft-voiced nature. In contrast to the fertile valleys, the granite peaks have never generated anything nor devoured anything living: they exist prior to and superior to all life.” It is a provocative move for Nietzsche to make—to suggest that at the ground of the human soul, generally understood as a principle of life, there is a datum, something given, a fatum that is the absolute other to life. It is on this basis, and by the ancient principle (espoused by Goethe, Emerson, and Nietzsche) that “like is known by like,” that we can appreciate the whole of nature and not just its living elements.

Having invoked the “patient periods [that] must round themselves before the rock is formed” in the essay “Nature,” Emerson writes, “It is a long way from granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato, and the preaching of the immortality of the soul” (E&I, 547). And a long way, too, from that preaching to the teaching concerning the granite of fate at the base of the psyche, which allows it to participate in the deathlessness as well as the mortality of the natural world.

University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Notes

1 For discussions of relevant Buddhist ideas in this context, see the essays in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Williams, eds., Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997), including my treatment of some features of medieval Japanese Buddhism in “Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and a Deeper Ecology,” 111-28.

2 On the topic of Emerson as a nature writer, I have found the following especially helpful: Joel Porte, “Nature as Symbol: Emerson’s Noble Doubt,” chap. 3 in Emerson and Thoreau: Transcendentalists in Conflict (Mid

Rüdiger Els draws numerous parallels between Emerson’s ideas and Goethe’s fragment “Die Natur” in Ralph Waldo Emerson and “Die Natur” in Goethe’s Werken: Parallelen von Nature (1836) and “Nature” (1844) mit dem Prosahymnus “Die Natur” und sein möglicher Einfluß (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1977). In the most comprehensive study of Emerson’s philosophy of nature I have encountered, Thomas Krusche affirms the parallels but argues, reasonably, that the evidence for Emerson’s familiarity with that particular fragment is still inconclusive. See R. W. Emrons Naturaufassung und ihre philosophischen Ursprünge: Eine Interpretation des Emersonischen Denkens aus dem Blickwinkel des deutschen Idealismus (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1987), esp. 202–15.

Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pt. 1, vol. 1, 284–85; this volume is hereafter cited as KGW, followed by page numbers only. A version of Nietzsche’s recollection written three years later employs similar imagery: “The clear skies that had up till now smiled upon me were suddenly darkened by black clouds pregnant with doom” (Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke in drei Bänden, ed. Karl Schlechta [Munich: Hanser, 1966], 3:92). Other works of Nietzsche’s will be referred to by the following abbreviations:

BGE Beyond Good and Evil
DM Dawn of Morning
GM Toward the Genealogy of Morals
HH Human, All Too Human
JS The Joyous Science
KSA Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studiausgabe, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Berlin: DTV/Walter de Gruyter, 1980); cited by volume and page numbers, or (when bracketed references are appended) by volume, notebook, and section numbers.

SE Schopenhauer as Educator

WN The Wanderer and His Shadow (in vol. 2 of HH)
Z Thus Spake Zarathustra

In the interest of preserving the precision of the imagery, I use my own translations (unless otherwise noted) from Nietzsche’s German as published in KSA, referring to most passages by part, chapter, section and/or aphorism number so that they can be found easily in any edition or translation.


It is interesting that Nietzsche understands will to power as a matter of commanding and obeying (Z, 2:12; BGE, 19).

For Nietzsche’s exposition of the dangers of being carried away by the historical sense, see the second Unmitte Meditations, On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life (1874), in vol. I of KSA. In “Illusions” (1869) Emerson warns that “[o]ur conversation with Nature is not just what it seems,” since all our dealings are permeated by illusion (E&L, 1116). For Emerson’s influence on Nietzsche’s view of archaic inheritance, see Graham Parkes, Compassing the Soul: Reaches of Nietzsche’s Psychology (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. chap. 9, “Archaic Casts and Psychical Regimes,” 319–62. The idea, so crucial in Nietzsche, that the individual is the fruit of countless previous generations and recapitulates the past comes from Emerson: “An individual man is a fruit which it cost all the foregoing ages to form and ripen. The history of the genesis or the old mythology repeats itself in the experience of every child” (“The Method of Nature,” in E&L, 122).

For examples of sloughing imagery, see SE, 1; DM, 573; and JS, 371.

A certain degree of anthropocentrism is, of course, “natural” and necessary for survival; but Nietzsche likely would think that Emerson takes his “doctrine of use” (ably expounded by Lopez in chap. 2 of Emerson and Power) further than necessary. It is probably because Nietzsche witnessed more and greater effects of technological domination than did Emerson that his attitude is less sanguine. Emerson himself came to adopt a less aggressive stance in his later writing.

There is a magnificent characterization of nature as (secular) inscription at the beginning of Emerson’s essay on Goethe: “All things are
engaged in writing their history. The planet, the pebble, goes attended by its shadow. The rolling rock leaves its scratches on the mountain; the river its channel in the soil; the animal its bones in the stratum; the fern and leaf their modest epitaph in the coal. The falling drop makes its sculpture in the sand or the stone. . . . The ground is all memoranda and signatures, and every object covered over with hints which speak to the intelligent" (E&I, 7-16). The idea of nature as sacred scripture is central to Japanese Buddhism; see Parkes, "Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers," 115–18.

13 The locus classicus is BGE, 9; we shall consider earlier examples shortly.

14 Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in the Extramoral Sense," in KSA, 1:875; English translation in Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks from the Early 1870s, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1979). Compare a remark from several years later that militates against even bio-centrism: "The astronomers . . . give us to understand that the drop of life in the cosmos is quite meaningless with respect to the overall character of the enormous ocean of becoming and perishing" (WS, 14).

15 Schopenhauer writes: "The reader will recognize that same will not only in those phenomena that are quite similar to his own, in human beings and animals, as their innermost nature; but continued reflection would lead him to recognize the force that drives and vegetates in the plant, indeed the force by which the crystal is formed, the force that turns the magnet to the North Pole . . . and finally even gravitation, which acts so powerfully in all matter, pulling the stone to the earth and the earth to the sun; all these he will recognize as being different only in the phenomenon, but the same according to their inner nature [and] as that which is immediately known to him . . . as will" (The World as Will and Representation, vol. 1, sec. 21; see also secs. 12 and 23). The translation is mine.

16 Nietzsche to Frank Overbeck, 23 June 1879, in Sämtliche Briefe, 5:420. There are numerous expressions of appreciation for the landscape and the air around St. Moritz, and of his feelings of kinship with them, in other letters, as well as in unpublished notes of that period (KSA 8:41[8]–45[6]).


18 This is the prototype for the even more mystical chapter titled "At Noon," in Z, 4.10.

19 The word for “ripe,” reif, also means “ring” (an allusion to the ring of eternal recurrence)—a favorite image of Emerson’s for perfection. Gary Shapiro has discussed Nietzsche’s halcyon imagery, with illuminating reference to Emerson, in Aryan Nietzsche on Gifts, Noise, and Women (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991). An excellent discussion of Nietzsche and Emerson, of which I was sadly unaware, came to my attention after I had finished writing this essay: Vivetta Vivarelli, “Nietzsche und Emerson: Eubner einige Pfade in Zarathustras metaphorischer Landschaft,” Nietzsche-Studien 16 (1987): 227–63. Vivarelli’s comparison is broader in scope, but her second section, "Die symbolischen Stätten," insightfully treats landscape imagery in the two writers.

20 Joel Porte has shown the import of Emerson’s idea of managing an economy of the soul’s energies in the second half of Representative Man: Ralph Waldo Emerson in His Time (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), and especially in the chapter "Economizing," 247–82. For discussion of the idea in Nietzsche, see the index references to "economy" in Parkes, Composing the Soul, particularly those concerning "the great economy of the soul.


22 For a comprehensive account of the roles played by natural imagery in this process, see pt. 2 of Parkes, Composing the Soul, 117–247.

23 The prototype of this idea, as Lopez points out, appears in a journal entry from 1836, and there is another prefiguration in the lecture “Art” from the same year (see JMN, 5:166: Emerson and Power, 103; and EL, 2:45).

24 See Lopez’s discussion of this issue in Emerson and Power, 102–5. He is surely right in saying that such activities are not "types of surrender," but his insistence on the "anthropocentric" character of these "acts of use" may be overstated (105). Emerson’s acknowledgment of our "lean[ing] on what is higher" and of the superior "might of the elements" bespeaks a more ecocentric understanding than did his earlier emphases on human domination.


26 For a more detailed account of Nietzsche’s final stand on nature, see Parkes, “Staying Loyal to the Earth,” secs. 3–6.
27 See KSA, 9:11[207], [125]. Further evidence of Nietzsche's fascination with the benefits of participating in the "dead" world of the inorganic can be found in other unpublished notes from the early 1880s, such as KSA, 9:11[35], [70], and [210]. For a brief discussion see Parkes, "Staying Loyal to the Earth," sec. 7.

28 The locus classicus for will to power defined as interpretation is JS, 374, where Nietzsche asks rhetorically "whether all existence [is not] essentially interpreting existence." An affirmative answer explains why, in BGE, 9, "the most spiritual will to power" is said to be philosophy. For more on will to power as interpretation, see the section "Drives Archetically Imagining" in chap. 8 of Parkes, Composing the Soul, 305-18.