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NIETZSCHE'S LIFE AS BACKGROUND
OF HIS THOUGHT

Here the ways of men part: if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth, then inquire.—LETTER TO HIS SISTER, June 11, 1865.

I am impassioned for independence; I sacrifice all for it . . . and am tortured more by all the smallest strings than others are by chains.—xxi, 88.

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Nietzsche's family background offers a striking contrast to his later thought. It is tempting to construe his philosophy as a reaction against his childhood: his attitudes toward nationalism, Luther, Christianity, small-town morals, and the Germans may seem easily explicable in such terms. Yet this approach, while frequently adopted, bars any adequate understanding of Nietzsche's philosophy. The thought of a philosopher may be partly occasioned by early experiences, but the conception of strict causality is not applicable here. A problem, once suggested, carries its own impetus; and the thinker is driven on by it to new problems and solutions. To understand these, we must follow the development of his thought—and that is best done separately from the survey of his life, as any joint treatment will almost inevitably suggest a false notion of causal relationship between life and philosophy.1

1 In the next few paragraphs I have made use of my article on Nietzsche in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, New York, Macmillan and The Free Press, 1967, vol. 8, 504 ff., which also contains some additional material on Nietzsche's medical history and on the events preceding his call to the chair of classical philology at the University of Basel.
Nietzsche was born in Röcken, in the Prussian province of Saxony, on October 15, 1844. His father, Ludwig Nietzsche, a Lutheran minister and the son of a minister, was thirty-one, and his mother, the daughter of a Lutheran minister, was eighteen. His paternal grandfather had written several books, including *Gamaliel, or the Everlasting Duration of Christianity: For Instruction and Sedation . . .* (1796). Many of Nietzsche’s ancestors had been butchers; none of them seem to have been Polish noblemen, as he believed. His father christened him Friedrich Wilhelm after King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia, on whose birthday he was born. The king became mad a few years later, and so did Nietzsche’s father. Nietzsche later shed his middle name, along with his family’s patriotism and religion, but in January 1889 he, too, became insane.

In an early autobiographical sketch Nietzsche wrote, “In September 1848 my beloved father suddenly became mentally ill.” When Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche published this sketch in her biography of her brother (1895), she changed the wording to read, “. . . suddenly became seriously ill in consequence of a fall.” In fact, the doctor’s diagnosis was softening of the brain (*Gehirnweichung*), and after Ludwig Nietzsche’s death in 1849, his skull was opened, and this diagnosis was confirmed. Nevertheless, most experts agree that the philosopher’s later insanity was not inherited.

In January 1850, Nietzsche’s widowed mother lost her youngest son, born in 1848, and moved her family to Naumburg. Here Nietzsche spent the rest of his childhood as the only male in a household consisting of his mother, sister, father’s mother, and two maiden aunts.

In 1858 he entered the old boarding school of Pforta on a full scholarship. For six years he was subjected to the exacting discipline and traditions of the school which Klopfstock and Novalis, Fichte and Ranke, as well as the brothers Schlegel, had attended before him. He did exceptionally good work in religion, German literature, and classics, and poor work in mathematics and drawing.

In 1861 he wrote an enthusiastic essay on his “favorite poet,” Friedrich Hölderlin, “of whom the majority of his people scarcely even know the name.” Hölderlin had spent the last decades of his life in hopeless insanity, but sixty years after Nietzsche wrote his essay, Hölderlin was widely recognized as Germany’s greatest
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poet after Goethe. The teacher wrote on the paper, "I must offer the author the kind advice to stick to a healthier, clearer, more German poet."

The medical records of the school contain an entry, recorded in 1862: "... shortsighted and often plagued by migraine headaches. His father died early of softening of the brain and was begotten in old age [actually, when his father was fifty-seven, his mother thirty-five]; the son at a time when the father was already sick [most experts deny this]. As yet no grave signs are visible, but the antecedents require consideration."

In 1864 Nietzsche graduated with a thesis on Theognis. Before he left for the university of Bonn, he stated in his *curriculum vitae* that Plato's *Symposium* was his *Lieblingsdichtung*.

At Bonn he joined a fraternity but soon found himself revolted by its lack of sophistication and the very unclassical, beer-drinking patriotism of his fraternity brothers. He made a quixotic attempt to raise their level to his own—and then resigned. It was also as a student at Bonn that Nietzsche, in June 1865, wrote his sister a letter that is noteworthy because it anticipates the temper of *Human, All Too Human* and the other works written after the break with Wagner.

... As for your principle that truth is always on the side of the more difficult, I admit this in part. However, it is difficult to believe that 2 times 2 is not 4; does that make it true? On the other hand, is it really so difficult simply to accept everything that one has been brought up on and that has gradually struck deep roots—what is considered truth in the circle of one's relatives and of many good men, and what moreover really comforts and elevates man? Is that more difficult than to strike new paths, fighting the habitual, experiencing the insecurity of independence and the frequent wavering of one's feelings and even one's conscience, proceeding often without any consolation, but ever with the eternal goal of the true, the beautiful, and the good? Is it decisive after all that we arrive at that view of God, world, and reconciliation which makes us feel most comfortable? Rather, is not the result of his inquiries something wholly indifferent to the true inquirer? Do we alter all seek rest, peace, and pleasure in our inquiries? No, only truth—even if it be most abhorrent and ugly. Still one last question: if we had believed from childhood that all salvation issued from another than Jesus—say, from Mohammed—is it not certain that we should have experienced the same blessings? ... Every true faith is infallible inasmuch as it accomplishes what the person who has the faith hopes to find in
it; but faith does not offer the least support for a proof of objective truth. Here the ways of men part: if you wish to strive for peace of soul and pleasure, then believe; if you wish to be a devotee of truth [ein Jünger der Wahrheit], then inquire.

At first Nietzsche had studied theology and classical philology, but in 1865 he gave up theology and followed his favorite teacher, Friedrich Ritschl, to Leipzig.

His friend Paul Deussen (1845–1919), who later acquired fame as one of the foremost translators and interpreters of Indian philosophy, had shared Nietzsche's experiences at Pforta and at Bonn; but now he went on to Tübingen. Even so, he remained close to Nietzsche and shared the latter's enthusiasm for Schopenhauer. It was in Leipzig that Nietzsche accidentally picked up a copy of Schopenhauer's Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung in a second-hand bookstore—not to lay it down again until he had finished it. Deussen remained more faithful to Schopenhauer than did Nietzsche: he dedicated his System des Vedanta to the great pessimist who had been one of the first to try to draw the attention of Europe to the wisdom of the Upanishads; and Deussen crowned his monumental history of philosophy, which takes the reader from ancient India to modern Europe, with an elaborate presentation of Schopenhauer's thought in which he found the ultimate synthesis of Orient and Occident. Though Nietzsche later outgrew his early infatuation with Schopenhauer, Deussen remained his faithful friend until the end.2

Less fortunate in this respect was Nietzsche's friendship with Erwin Rohde (1845–1898). As fellow students at Leipzig

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2 Deussen later published Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche (1901). A minor episode reported early in the book has attained some literary importance: Deussen describes how the young Nietzsche, arriving in Cologne one day, asked a porter to take him to a hotel and was unexpectedly taken to a brothel. Horrified at the sight of flimsily clad women, the youth first froze, then walked over to a piano, which seemed to him the only live thing in the room, struck a chord, found the spell broken, and hastened out. H. W. Brann, Nietzsche und die Frauen (1981), cited this incident as possibly significant—and Thomas Mann, finally, incorporated it into his Doktor Faustus, where precisely the same story is told of the hero, Leverkühn. (This name contains a conceptual allusion to Nietzsche's famous phrase, "Live dangerously.") Cf. Mann's essay on "Nietzsches Philosophie" in Neue Studien (1948) where this experience is also considered crucial, inasmuch as Mann supposes that Nietzsche could not resist the temptation to return to a brothel a year later and then infected himself. Cf. note 37 below.
they were drawn to each other by a common enthusiasm for ancient Greek culture and became the closest of friends. Professor Ritschl called them "the Dioscuri," and they seemed inseparable. It was not a shift in interests that finally led them apart: Nietzsche never renounced "Dionysus"; and the work which later established Rohde's fame as a classical philologist, *Psyche*, dealt with Greek conceptions of the soul in the same light in which the "Dioscuri" had approached antiquity at Leipzig—yet Rohde's many pages about Dionysus were not to contain a single reference to the author of *The Birth of Tragedy*. It was a divergent development of character that precipitated the end of the friendship. Nietzsche's publication of the enlightened and critical *Human, All Too Human* struck Rohde as a scarcely credible betrayal of their youthful and romantic Wagner worship. Later Rohde married and began to raise a family, while Nietzsche turned to *Zarathustra*. Now Rohde felt increasingly provoked by his friend's excessive self-esteem, and some of his letters suggest that his annoyance may have cloaked doubts whether it was not he himself who had undergone a change rather than Nietzsche, whose fire seemed to feed on itself. Having settled down, the successful professor could not share the loneliness in which his uncomfortable twin conducted his persistent inquiries and uninhibited attacks in book after book. One of Rohde's letters to Franz Overbeck, occasioned by the publication of *Beyond Good and Evil*, shows especially well how utterly unsympathetic Rohde had become. The final break, a year before Nietzsche's collapse, was little more than a formality. But much later, when Nietzsche had become famous, Rohde made a belated and impossible attempt to make up with his former friend. He yielded to the insistent entreaties of Frau Förster-Nietzsche—who probably played on cherished memories—and, without actively collaborating, he gave his backing and sanction to her work. If this action was typical of others who had had no sympathy for Nietzsche in his later years, it seems clear that Rohde did not consciously betray a trust: he had never understood Nietzsche's books after the break with Wagner. The professors at Basel, however, kept better faith with Nietzsche.

His call to the university of Basel came as a surprise to Nietzsche, who had not yet received his doctorate though he had published some fruits of his research in a scholarly journal. He had actually considered giving up philology for science when,
on Ritschl’s recommendation, he was appointed a professor of classical philology at Basel, and Leipzig hurriedly conferred the doctorate without examination. Thus Nietzsche was a professor at twenty-four, and his unusual success does not seem to have humbled him.

At Basel he taught for ten years, from 1869 till 1879, when he retired because of poor health. This illness may have been connected with his brief military service in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War. His previous military training in 1867 had been cut short by injuries contracted through a fall from his horse, and by 1870 he was a Swiss citizen. When the war broke out, however, he volunteered for service as a medical orderly. While ministering—in a boxcar, and unrelieved for three days and nights—to six men who were severely wounded and also sick with dysentery and diphtheria, Nietzsche caught both diseases and, after delivering his charges to a field hospital, required medical attention himself. “Moreover”—he wrote his friend Gersdorff—“the atmosphere of my experiences had spread around me like a gloomy fog: for a time I heard a sound of wailing which seemed as if it would never end.” One gathers that he may have had a physical and nervous breakdown. Yet a month later he is back at the university in Basel, perhaps quite eager to drown in a double load of work his recent experiences and the uncomfortable knowledge that the war is still going on and that other men are still being maimed and disfigured in ways of which he has inextinguishable memories. Thus he plunges into two new lecture courses as well as seminars and the Greek lessons which he has agreed to give at the local Pädagogium. He also writes of committee meetings and a social life—and all of these matter much less to him than his work on his first book and his frequent visits to the house of Richard Wagner. The relation of a possibly incomplete recovery from his illness to the continued spells of migraine headaches and painful vomiting which made Nietzsche miserable during the next ten years has never been clarified conclusively. His last disease will be considered later.

In 1872 Nietzsche published his first book, The Birth of Tragedy. It was not what a university would expect from a young philologist who has yet to establish his reputation as a scholar:

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2a For the original text see Johannes Stroux, Nietzsche’s Professor in Basel (1925); for a translation of most of Ritschl’s amazing encomium, see The Portable Nietzsche, 7 f.
there were no footnotes, references, or Greek quotations; Schopenhauer's philosophy had tinged some of the contentions; and the style was, where not beautiful, flamboyant. Moreover, as Nietzsche himself recognized in his preface to the second edition, he had weakened his case by appending to the fifteen sections which comprised his main thesis about ancient tragedy another ten which utilized these considerations for a poorly written eulogy of Wagner. This conclusion gave the entire work the appearance of a none too well considered but impassioned editorial. Among the many critics of the book who were entirely blind to its merits was Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1848–1931), who later became an outstanding philologist, though his translations of Aeschylus and Sophocles into colloquial German hardly demonstrate the most subtle understanding of tragedy. Rohde, then still Nietzsche's closest friend, countered Wilamowitz's criticisms with a deadly polemic to which Wilamowitz replied. All three pamphlets are nasty to the point of being funny.

Not entirely sympathetic with Nietzsche's tone and quite contemptuous of Wagner, but nevertheless in accord with much that Nietzsche had to say of ancient Greece, was Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897), who was Nietzsche's elder colleague at Basel. In his maturity, his outward sober calm and dignity, and his Olympian reserve, he reminds one of the old Goethe—and like Goethe he did not share the enthusiastic notions of some of the younger men of genius who came within his orbit. Perhaps Burckhardt, like Goethe, looked back upon the storm and stress of his own youth, sensed in himself a still dangerous medley of passions that could be controlled only by maintaining a subtle equilibrium, and deliberately refused to become involved in the younger man's comet-like career which for Burckhardt could mean only destruction. While Goethe, however, deeply wounded men like Hölderlin and Kleist—the poets whose meteoric lives, ending respectively in insanity and suicide, invite comparison with Nietzsche's—Burckhardt managed to let Nietzsche feel his sympathy; and the younger man was frequently less struck by the ironical reserve of Burckhardt's letters to him than we are today.

Nietzsche attended some of Burckhardt's lectures at Basel, though not regularly; and in some of his letters to friends he refers to them with great enthusiasm. Occasionally he met the great historian socially, he even took a few walks with him, and the two men had some long conversations. The similarity of some of
their ideas has inevitably raised the question, who influenced whom—especially as regards their interpretations of classical Greek culture. This problem has never been solved conclusively—but it is hardly very important: for it appears that neither of them was detracted from his own path or greatly helped by the other, and the ideas of each can be explained in terms of his own background. Nietzsche's juvenilia which plainly contain the seeds of much of his later thought are of special value in this respect. One may conclude that the two men, who differed so widely in age and temperament, were probably attracted to each other—insofar as Burckhardt may be said to have been attracted to Nietzsche—by common conceptions and perspectives no less than by their common interest in ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy. Agreement may be due less to any influence than to an affinity. There is thus no need for digression into Burckhardt's ideas about ancient Greece, Christianity, or history.

Nietzsche—and this seems noteworthy—never relinquished his veneration for the old historian who was so remarkably free from most of the prejudices of his time, such as narrow nationalism or glib faith in relentless progress. Long after he had

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3 Burckhardt's posthumously published Griechische Kulturgeschichte (vols. viii–xii of the Gesamtausgabe, 1930–31) was written much later than Nietzsche's parallel efforts. The following sections invite comparison: vol. ii, "Greek Envy" (335), and "Greek Pessimism" and "Suicide" (348–92); vol. iii, "The Free Individuality" (342–81) and vol. iv, "The Colonial and Agonistic Man" (61–163, especially 87 ff.). The section on Greek Tragedy (iii, 190–299) does not associate Socrates with its demise, but describes its development out of the chorus and its ultimate origins in the Dionysian cult—and here Burckhardt, unlike Rohde, gives express credit to Nietzsche. In the section on Socrates (iii, 352–57), his optimism, irony, and dialectic are emphasized, and Burckhardt insists that Socrates wanted death and forced the death sentence upon himself. Burckhardt's Weligeschichtliche Betrachtungen (Force and Freedom: Reflections on History), though also published posthumously, were known to Nietzsche as lectures.

4 These Jugendschriften comprise vol. i of the Musarion edition of the collected works. The first volumes of the "Historical-Critical" edition contain even far more juvenilia, including many trivia.

5 Cf. Löwith, Jacob Burckhardt (1986); Salin, Jacob Burckhardt und Nietzsche (1998); von Martin, Nietzsche, Burckhardt (3rd rev. ed., 1945). Andler's long section on Burckhardt as Nietzsche's précurseur (in vol. 1 of Nietzsche: Sa vie et sa pensée) is not very specific; but Felix Stähelin's few pages on the subject of any possible influence are very good, though admittedly quite inconclusive. (Intro. to Griechische Kulturgeschichte, ed. cit., xxxiii–xxix.)
broken with Wagner, whom Burckhardt had always disliked, Nietzsche still revered the old professor and paid his respects to him in his last works. And it was to Burckhardt that he sent that last four-page letter in which he explained that he would rather have been a Swiss professor than God, but had not dared to push his private egoism so far. The older man’s reaction seems typical: sympathetic and yet without relinquishing his customary reserve, he took the letter to Nietzsche’s friend Franz Overbeck, stating that he believed it was something of concern to Overbeck.

Overbeck (1837–1905) was nearer Nietzsche’s own age, though still seven years his senior, and he was closer to Nietzsche than anybody else in Basel. For a time, the two men lived in the same house; and even after Nietzsche left Basel, Overbeck kept in close touch with him. His disposition, wholly lacking in flamboyancy, was even more different from Nietzsche’s than was Burckhardt’s. For while the older man liked to rise above the level of mere scholarship to the inspiring and inclusive visions of genius, Overbeck could not, with a good conscience, leave the plain of dry and solid research. This inhibition was aggravated by his calling: he was a professor of church history without religious faith. While he also wrote a work on the Scholastics, his main interest was directed toward the New Testament and the Early Church Fathers—and he was deeply impressed by the profound differences between ancient and modern times, and particularly between Early and contemporary Christianity. Lacking Nietzsche’s or Kierkegaard’s temperament, he shrank from communicating any major conclusions to his students, and preferred to dig deeper into ancient documents.

Again the question arises whether Overbeck exerted a decisive influence on Nietzsche—and it is plain that he did not. Nietzsche had early been impressed with what he took to be a deep contrast between modern theology and early faith, and he would hardly have formed a friendship with a church historian who had felt differently. Overbeck may have called Nietzsche’s attention to helpful passages in early writers. Finally, one may mention that Burckhardt, Overbeck, and Nietzsche shared the conviction that asceticism was one of the most decisive features of early Christianity—but again one should not infer rashly that Nietzsche’s

*A facsimile of this letter is appended to Podach, *Nietzsches Zusammenbruch* (1930): a translation is included in *The Portable Nietzsche* (1954).*
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Nietzsche's most famous friend was Richard Wagner (1813–1883). As a student, Nietzsche had been enamored of Tristan; he loved much of Wagner's music; and he considered the composer Germany's greatest living creative genius. Nietzsche's discernment in such matters was generally good, and he believed that Schopenhauer, Heine, and Wagner were the most important men in German arts and letters since Goethe's death. (Later he included himself in this group.) Schopenhauer and Heine were dead, whereas Wagner lived in Tribschen, not far from Basel.

It was Wagner's presence that convinced Nietzsche that greatness and genuine creation were still possible, and it was Wagner who inspired him with the persistent longing first to equal and then to outdo his friend. Again, Nietzsche did not require Burckhardt to suggest to him the agonistic interpretation of classical Greek friendship. Even after his break with Wagner, Nietzsche frankly admitted how much he owed to the early inspiration of this friendship—and one may safely follow his judgment in this instance. The relation to Wagner was indeed crucial. Yet it would be a serious mistake to assume that such a relation must necessarily be construed in terms of an intellectual influence, or that its importance consisted in Nietzsche's acquisition of sundry ideas or opinions: what he received along those lines he was soon to outgrow and abandon. Some of the lasting

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7 Overbeck's Über die Christlichkeit unserer heutigen Theologie: Streit- und Friedensschrift (1873) came out simultaneously with Nietzsche's "untimely" essay on Strauss—and the friends considered their two attacks on the Zeitgeist as twins. Overbeck's later works were scholarly rather than polemical, but some of his most controversial notes were published posthumously by C. A. Bernoulli: Christentum und Kultur: Gedanken und Anmerkungen zur modernen Theologie (1919). Here one finds frequent references to Nietzsche, but they were written after Nietzsche had become insane. Cf. also Löwith's section on "Overbecks historische Analyse des ursprünglichen und vergehenden Christentums" in Von Hegel bis Nietzsche (1941), 514–29; Overbeck's Selbstbekenntnisse, ed. Fischer (1941); and of course Friedrich Nietzsche's Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck (1916).
elements of Nietzsche's thought, however, are inseparable from these personal experiences: the friendship with a man of great creative genius; the jealous aspiration to excel the friend and, begotten by it, the deep insight into the artist’s soul—the starting point of Nietzsche’s depth psychology and one of the decisive inspirations of his later conception of the will to power. And above all, this friendship first raised the sights of the young philologist to distant and not very philological dreams of greatness.

Of course, Wagner attracted Nietzsche not by his greatness alone: Nietzsche had a profound love for music; he admired the revolutionary character of Wagner’s work; and they shared a passion for Schopenhauer. Tristan, moreover, celebrated not only Schopenhauer’s ceaseless, blind, and passionately striving will but also a drunken frenzy which suggested to Nietzsche’s mind the ecstatic abandonment of the ancient Dionysian cults. Even that part of The Birth of Tragedy which deals with the Greek drama could probably never have been written without Wagner’s work. And even years after his break with Wagner, Nietzsche admitted how much Tristan had meant to him:

All things considered, I could not have endured my youth without Wagner’s music. For I was condemned to Germans. If one wants to rid oneself of an unbearable pressure, one needs hashish. Well then, I needed Wagner. Wagner is the antitoxin against everything German par excellence—a toxin, a poison, that I don’t deny.

From the moment when there was a piano score of Tristan—my compliments, Herr von Bülow—I was a Wagnerian... older works I deemed beneath myself—still too vulgar, too “German.”

To this day I am still looking for a work of equally dangerous fascination, of an equally gruesome [schauerlich] and sweet infinity as Tristan—and look in all the arts in vain. All the strangenesses of Leonardo da Vinci emerge from their spell at the first note of Tristan. This work is emphatically Wagner’s non plus ultra... The world is poor for anyone who has never been sick enough for this “voluptuousness of hell”; it is per-

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8 From the posthumously published notes which Nietzsche penned while working on his “untimely” essay on Wagner, one can trace a direct development to the section on artists in his next work, Human, All-Too-Human.

8a For a detailed discussion of this claim, see my commentary on Ecce Homo.
mitted, it is almost imperative, to employ a formula of the mystics at this point.

I think I know better than anyone else of what tremendous things Wagner is capable—the fifty worlds of alien ecstasies for which no one besides him had wings; and given the way I am, strong enough to turn even what is most questionable and dangerous to my advantage and thus to become stronger, I call Wagner the great benefactor of my life [EH II 6].

One may add that Wagner thought well of the young Nietzsche and, for obvious reasons, highly praised his first book. Wagner also had a fascinating wife—and though her importance in Nietzsche’s development can be overestimated, some clarification seems necessary.

Cosima Wagner, illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt, and the wife of Hans von Bülow before she eloped with Wagner, was—so at least it seemed to Nietzsche—the first woman of stature with whom he came into close contact. The difference from the small-town women who had dominated his childhood was indeed striking. Nietzsche never outgrew her fascination: in his late notes and poems she appears as Ariadne, while he increasingly identifies himself with Dionysus—and Wagner must occasionally fill the role of Theseus. It was not until the first days of his insanity, however, that he sent out several notes that revealed who Ariadne was. Cosima herself received a sheet of paper with the sole inscription: “Ariadne, I love you. Dionysus.” And on March 27, 1889, in the asylum at Jena, Nietzsche said: “My wife, Cosima Wagner, has brought me here.”

Frau Förster-Nietzsche assures us that it is fantastic that Nietzsche loved Cosima (he loved only his sister)—and she “explains” the matter. Hans von Bülow, deserted by Cosima, visited Nietzsche in March 1872 and in their conversation likened himself to Theseus, and Cosima to Ariadne, who had now abandoned him for the superior and godlike Wagner-Dionysus. (In the legend it is Theseus who abandons Ariadne.) In Nietzsche’s earlier notes, says Frau Förster-Nietzsche, Dionysus is Wagner.9

9 Cf. Frau Förster-Nietzsche’s forty-page postscript to Paul Cohn, Um Nietzsche’s Untergang (1931)—a feeble reply to Fedach, Nietzsche’s Zusammenbruch (1930). Brinton, Nietzsche (1941), 71, is thus in error when he refers specifically to this postscript claiming that Frau Förster-Nietzsche “continues to deny that the Ariadne story relates to Cosima.” In the earlier writings, moreover, Dionysus is often associated with Wagner. The last important passage in which the god still bears some of Wagner’s
Assuming that all this is perfectly true, it remains a fact that Nietzsche—who in The Birth of Tragedy may still be playing Apollo to Wagner’s Dionysus and later, when he breaks with Wagner, determines to express himself in Apollinian aphorisms—in the end makes Dionysus his own god, while claiming that Wagner really was not Dionysian but only “romantic.” In the later notes, Nietzsche presents himself as Dionysus; and when he lets Ariadne say: “This is my last love of Theseus: I bring about his downfall” (xvi, 428)—he seems to have in mind the influence of the formerly Catholic, religious, and anti-Semitic Cosima on Bayreuth and Parsifal. When he adds: “Last act. Marriage of Dionysus and Ariadne,” he puts on paper the fulfillment of his own wish fantasy. And when madness breaks down all his inhibitions, he frankly signs his last letters and notes as “Dionysus.” Certainly his last note to Cosima did not mean that the long dead Wagner loved her.

Even so, Nietzsche’s love of Cosima was but a secret reverie, impossible of fulfillment—a forbidden wish of which not even the object herself knew. Its prime significance must be sought in the light it sheds on Nietzsche’s attitude toward Wagner. It so happens that the composer was born in the same year as Nietzsche’s father: 1813. His father had died when Nietzsche was four, and it is known how Nietzsche felt about being condemned to live in a fatherless household, alone with five women. He resented his mother and frequently made unrealistic references to his father, whom he pictured as more wonderful than he had actually been. As a child, Nietzsche sorely missed the father who might have redeemed him from his almost intolerable situation; and he evidently fastened on Wagner as a father substitute. One might add that he belatedly experienced Oedipal feelings:

characteristics, though other lines indicate that Nietzsche is steering toward a deliberate contrast with Wagner, is J 295: he “whose mastership [Meisterschaft] includes the knowledge of how to seem—not what he is but what is to those who follow him one more constraint” might yet be Wagner; but he “from whose touch everyone walks away richer, not having found grace nor amazed, not as blessed and oppressed by the goods of another, but richer in himself . . . opened up . . . less sure perhaps”—that is Wagner’s antipode: Socrates. Nietzsche occasionally refers to both men as “pied pipers”—an expression used in J 295 and later (G-V) applied to Nietzsche himself. Nor is Frau Förster-Nietzsche’s claim that eventually “the name Ariadne appears as a symbol of the human soul” (op. cit., 194 f.) as disingenuous as it seems at first glance. An explanation will be ventured in the text.
Nietzsche loved Cosima impermissibly without daring to confess his feelings; any indulgence or marriage was as thoroughly out of the question as if she had been his own mother; and his love of Wagner became more and more ambivalent.

His days in the Wagners' house in Tribschen were as close as he ever came to having a home in which he belonged and of which he could feel proud. In his last book he still recalls "Tribschen—a distant isle of the blessed" (EH–MA 2) and confesses: "I'd let go cheap the whole rest of my human relationships; I should not want to give away out of my life at any price the days of Tribschen" (EH 11 5).

Thus Ariadne meant more to him than just the flesh and blood Cosima Wagner, whom he does not seem to have in mind when he writes: "A labyrinthian man never seeks the truth but always only his Ariadne—whatever he may tell us" (xiv, 22). His sister is not entirely wrong when she claims that he is speaking of the human soul, though today we have perhaps a somewhat more accurate term in C. G. Jung's conception of the Anima: originally dependent on a "mother image," it grows into the ideal which a man pursues through his adult life.10

In the end, one may cite some sentences from the postscripts to The Case of Wagner in which Nietzsche was undoubtedly referring to Cosima:

One cannot serve two masters, when one is called Wagner. Wagner has redeemed the woman; the woman has in return built Bayreuth for him. All sacrifice, all devotion: one has nothing that one would not give him. The woman impoverishes herself for the sake of the master, she becomes touching, she stands naked before him. The Wagnerianerin—the most charming am-

10 Nietzsche's Oedipal feeling for Cosima seems to have eluded the many psychologists who have examined Nietzsche's life and loves. Even W. Stekel, the psychoanalyst, is no exception. In an article on "Nietzsche und Wagner" in the Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft (vol. 4, 1917), he argues: "I see in the love for Cosima only a leaping over of the love for Wagner to the creature loved by him" (26). The love for Wagner is construed homosexual, and Stekel suggests that Nietzsche was a homosexual without himself knowing it. This claim, justly repudiated or ignored in the rest of the literature, seems based on the flimsiest knowledge of Nietzsche. His intellectual celebrations of male friendship notwithstanding, the overheated and strained heterosexual imagery of Zarathustra, especially in its poems, and Nietzsche's later requests for women in the asylum seem proof that his dreams were of women. Cf. Brann, Nietzsche und die Frauen.
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bigness that exists today; she embodies Wagner's cause—in her sign his cause becomes victorious. Ah, this old robber! . . . he robs even our women. . . . Ah, this old Minotaur!

If Wagner was a Christian, well, then Liszt was perhaps a Church father!

Liszt had retired to Rome in 1861, joined the Franciscan order in 1865—and eventually joined the Wagners in Bayreuth, where he died in 1886.

It is not here intended to create the impression that Nietzsche's break with Wagner can be adequately explained in such terms alone. What has been suggested is merely a bare framework. Some passages in Nietzsche's later notes and books cannot be fully understood without such an account, which also supplies the necessary overtones for the symbolical slaughter of the father in Der Fall Wagner and for some of the Dionysos-Dithyramben.

Of greater importance, however, is Nietzsche's experience of what might be called another adolescence: the story of how he left his new-found home, the painful process of emancipation from his "father" Wagner, and his eventual declaration of independence.

Nietzsche did not come fully into his own until he broke with the beloved tyrant who made him change the ending of his first book and then also of the third Meditation, the man who frowned on the second Meditation because it had no special reference to himself and who demanded frequent visits and exertions for his own cause, though they interfered with the work and ideas of the younger man. To the end, Nietzsche conceded Wagner's greatness. He considered it the best sign of Shakespeare's genius that Shakespeare had realized how "the height at which he places Caesar is the finest honor which he could bestow on Brutus: thus alone he raises Brutus' inner problem, no less than the spiritual strength which was able to cut this knot, to tremendous significance" (FW 98).

Nietzsche's Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen have been translated as "Thoughts out of Season." Even more literal translations of the title have missed the meaning of Betrachtungen which distinguishes these "contemplations" from Nietzsche's other, generally uncontemplative, works. The fact that his next book, Menschliches, Allzumenschliches, was, in its first edition, prefaced with a long motto from Descartes' Meditations, suggests that Nietzsche's Betrachtungen were probably named after Descartes' work.
Independence of the soul—that is at stake here! No sacrifice can then be too great: even one’s dearest friend one must be willing to sacrifice for it, though he be the most glorious human being, embellishment of the world, genius without peer . . . [FW 98].

In the man whose passion for philosophy was praised even by the ancients, in Brutus whose Stoic persuasion Nietzsche, who called himself “the last of the Stoics” (J 227), stressed persistently, in the hero who sacrificed Caesar though he himself had been spiritually Caesar’s adopted son (and, according to Plutarch, perhaps actually Caesar’s natural son)—Nietzsche (as he himself says of Shakespeare) finds the “symbolism” of a “dark event and adventure out of” his “own soul of which he wants to speak only in signs” (FW 98).

The battle with Wagner, as it turned out, was only the first and greatest in Nietzsche’s long war for independence; but it should not be viewed merely as an instance of Nietzsche’s “transcending”—and certainly not as proof of his incapacity for any lasting human attachments. Nietzsche retained Overbeck’s friendship until the end; few philosophers have written more eloquently in praise of friendship than Nietzsche; and while he was surely a “difficult” person, the inference that he was incapable of lasting friendship seems unwarranted. The break with Wagner cannot be understood as long as Wagner is treated as a mere occasion, as the man who accidentally played the role of the friend at this particular juncture. His personality and ideas must not be ignored. What is wanted, however, is not the kind of portrait that we should expect from a historian primarily interested in the composer and his music: the decisive question in the present context is how Wagner appeared to Nietzsche when he felt that the friendship had to be ended.

Legend has it that Nietzsche, the pagan, broke with Wagner because he turned Christian in Parsifal. It has already been mentioned that Cosima had helped to inspire this opera. When Bülow had finally divorced her, after she had given birth to three of Wagner’s children, she turned Protestant; but she did

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12 Bertram’s treatment of the break with Wagner under the chapter heading “Judas” (op. cit.) suggests—no less than his insistence on Nietzsche’s “ambiguity” and “romanticism”—how Bertram, then himself the disciple of another “Master,” projected his own problems into his Nietzsche. His evaluation was accepted by E. Gundolf, op. cit., 31: “apostasy.”
not take religion lightly, and her cast of mind helped to suggest to Wagner another way of salvation when the theme of redemption seemed all but exhausted by his previous music dramas: there was yet Christianity, and Wagner wrote *Parsifal*.

Nietzsche never ceased respecting that sincere and “genuine Christianity” which he considered “possible in all ages” (A 39)—but Wagner’s *Parsifal* clearly did not seem to him to belong in that category. In the *Antichrist* Nietzsche called it a lack of “decency and self-respect” that the Kaiser, Bismarck, and their generals, “anti-Christians in their deeds,” should publicly profess their Christianity (A 38). How much more sickening to him was the spectacle of Wagner, obviously burning with worldly ambition, making this ostentatious obeisance to Christian other-worldliness; Schopenhauer’s foremost disciple writing the great Christian music drama; the self-styled modern Aeschylus celebrating the very antithesis of all Greek ideals—“the pure fool.” That Nietzsche was revolted by Wagner’s *Parsifal*, though not necessarily by its music, seems plain—but the break with Wagner was merely sealed in this way. It had come about long before Nietzsche received the opera with a note from Wagner.

The breach developed gradually, as Nietzsche became increasingly aware of the impossibility of serving both Wagner and his own call. Instead of coming out into the open, his aversion first cloaked itself in migraine headaches and vomiting which served Nietzsche as an excuse to stay away from Wagner after he had moved to Bayreuth. Not that the spells were faked: Nietzsche was truly miserable; but there is reason to believe that his misery was psychogenic—and there is no doubt that it was at least made more acute by his profound mental anguish. Nietzsche seems to have hoped that the whole Bayreuth scheme might fail; and while his first three *Meditations* appeared at intervals of about six months, he abandoned the fourth and last one, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, to turn to other plans, stalled again and again, and finally brought it out after a two year interval. Meanwhile he had accumulated many notes which anticipate some of the most basic points of *The Case of Wagner*. Nietzsche, however, had not yet clearly decided in his own mind whether he should

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13 The best account of Nietzsche’s illnesses during this period and the best argument for their psychogenic character is to be found in Hildebrandt, *Gesundheit und Krankheit in Nietzsches Leben und Werk* (1926).
continue to conceal his objections. The breach was finally precipitated "not by Wagner's art, but by Bayreuth." 14

Bayreuth was becoming a "cultural" center of the new empire which Nietzsche had so bitterly denounced in his first Meditation for its predominant "cultural philistinism." Wagner's Bayreuth was developing into a symbol of the "extirpation of the German spirit in favor of the 'German Reich'" (U 1 1): the Holy City of anti-Semitic "Christian" chauvinism. Now this was just what one might have expected of Wagner, who clearly was not another Aeschylus and who had never made a secret of his fanatical bigotry and Germanomana. Yet Nietzsche, moved to the depths by much of Wagner's music, first convinced by it that greatness was still possible in his own time, and then, offered the friendship of this genius, had evidently been quite eager to ignore misgivings about Wagner's personality and opinions. The same attitude is after all still adopted by some of Wagner's greatest admirers who claim that "it was wholly natural and permissible for him, as a German fanatically convinced of the superiority of the 'German spirit' to all other national spirits, to hold these views." 15 Nietzsche may have had similar feelings as long as Wagner was in Tribschen. The canonization of such views at Bayreuth, however, was a different matter.

Perhaps Nietzsche had all-too-innocent expectations when he went to Bayreuth for the first great festival, though he certainly did not expect—Newman's insinuations notwithstanding—that the crowds at the opening night might conform to his own fanciful picture of ancient Athens. His first Meditation, years before, had given impassioned expression to his disillusionment with the victorious German Empire; and his inevitable disappointment at Bayreuth merely meant the final recognition of what Wagner stood for.

What did I never forgive Wagner? . . . that he became reichs-deutsch [EH II 5].

14 Ernest Newman, The Life of Richard Wagner, iv (1946), 525. Newman treats Bayreuth as the cause rather than the occasion of the breach. This whole question is one of the major topics of Newman's volume iv, and his treatment is the most complete and scholarly one available in English; but the interpretation to be offered here differs decisively from Newman's. Under the circumstances, it seems best to refer freely to Newman and to make clear the reasons for the disagreement.

15 Ibid., 271.
Looking back, we cannot consider this disillusionment the result of naïve expectations: what Nietzsche decided to break with was not a dream impossible of fulfillment but a mass movement and a Weltanschauung with which he could not compromise.

Ernest Newman, foremost authority on Wagner, feels that “if the indulgence in sham-intellectual mauldings of this sort helped Wagner in any way to write the Ring and the Meistersinger and Parsifal . . . it did . . . enough to make us look upon it with a tolerant eye. . . . His heart was in the right place, as was proved by the energy with which he threw himself into the campaign against vivisection.” 16 (Hitler later copied Wagner’s anti-vivisectionism and enforced it by law.) Nietzsche, who was then championing the ideals of Voltaire and the Enlightenment, advocating intermarriage between different races, and propagating the vision of the “Good European”—views which, as we shall see, he never repudiated—considered intellectual integrity one of the cardinal virtues. No campaign against vivisection could reconcile him with “the fanatical vegetarian” 17 who in “his insatiable lust for domination” wanted to be “an undisputed dictator,” 18 who considered all other people, including the French in particular, inferior to the Germans, and who “worked himself into a paroxysm over Bismarck’s tolerance towards the Jews.” 19 Even while working on his pro-Wagner essay, Richard Wagner in Bayreuth, Nietzsche had realized how dangerous Wagner was, and “Nietzsche’s notebooks were packed by that time [June 1874] with memoranda that show how far he had diverged by now from Wagner”; 20 but then Wagner still was a lonely genius. Now Bayreuth became the center of political

30 Ibid., 601.
31 Ibid., 192.
32 Ibid., 297.
33 Ibid., 508.
34 Ibid., 435. Newman’s searching scholarship, his exposure of Frau Förster-Nietzsche’s many inaccuracies, and his minute attention to detail are more impressive than his memory for some of the more important points. Thus we are told (494) that “nothing is more certain than that in 1875 Nietzsche was still heart and soul with Wagner in all essentials.” Nor does Newman’s elaborate proof that Nietzsche felt too ill to hear much of the music at Bayreuth rule out the possibility that his severe headaches and upset stomach were connected with his shocked realization of what Wagner stood for. Newman, however, is surely right that it was not Wagner’s music that drove Nietzsche away.
propaganda no less than of the new music drama. Wagner’s “sham-intellectual maulderings” were becoming popular:

Blood crossings have led to the nobler races being tainted by the ignoble. There is no virtue in, no hope for, any but a “pure” race of which the German could be the shining exemplar if it would only rid itself of the Jews. . . .

The Germans, of course, are by nature the flower of humankind: to fulfill their great destiny they have only to restore their sullied racial purity, or at all events to achieve “a real rebirth of racial feeling.”

The Jewish race is “the born enemy of pure humanity and everything that is noble in it.”

It is only fair to mention that Wagner’s admirers see Nietzsche’s break with the master in a different light. Thus Newman’s unbounded enthusiasm for Wagner’s music leads him to attach little or no importance to the composer’s “maunderings.” Yet though he seems quite sold on Wagner’s personality, he does not permit his love to interfere with his superb and scholarly presentation of the evidence—and thus he indirectly indicts his hero more forcibly than any less well documented accusations could. His picture of Nietzsche, on the other hand, is largely based on “Mr. Knight’s valuable book” and on Bäumler’s “masterly epitome of Nietzsche’s thinking, Nietzsche, Der Philosoph und Politiker.” Alfred Bäumler was the professor whom the Nazis called to Berlin to “interpret” Nietzsche. His exegetic principles—including the premise that Nietzsche did not mean what he wrote in his books—will be considered briefly in the next chapter, and some samples of his “interpretations” will be encountered later. Suffice it here to say that he followed Frau Förster-Nietzsche in discounting completely the three works which were the fruit of Nietzsche’s break with Wagner, i.e., Human, All-Toohuman, Dawn, and The Gay Science, as well as the two anti-

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21 Ibid., 616, 617, 639. This is Newman’s paraphrase of Wagner’s Religion and Art. The quote within the last quotation is from one of Wagner’s letters to King Ludwig.

22 Ibid., 498 and 335. Of course, Newman does not always agree with Knight or Bäumler, but he shows no equal familiarity with other recent studies of Nietzsche; and he is apparently unaware of the full extent of Knight’s indebtedness to Frau Förster-Nietzsche, Richard Oehler (her nephew), and Bertram, of Knight’s many “original” factual errors, and of Bäumler’s near-perfect perversion of Nietzsche.
Wagner polemics of 1888; that he accepted her edition of The Will to Power as Nietzsche's magnum opus; and that he approached Nietzsche with preconceived ideas (Nazism) that he was determined to read into Nietzsche's work. Newman, while detesting Nazism, takes Bäumler's word for it that Nietzsche was a Nazi—and concludes: “Could fifty Wagners have led the nation into worse disasters than one Nietzsche has done?”

Hitler, of course, knew fifty times as much about Wagner as he did about Nietzsche, and Wagner's essays, unlike Nietzsche's, did not have to be expurgated by the Nazis before being used in schools. One is reminded that another English Wagner enthusiast, a generation ago, also considered Bayreuth the greatest of all monuments of German art and culture, moved there after Wagner's death, asked Frau Cosima for the hand of Wagner's daughter, married her, and was entrusted by the Frau's Meisterin with the task of propagating Wagner's heritage. This was Houston Stuart Chamberlain, who abominated Nietzsche, preached the gospel of Teutonism and a new "Aryan" Christianity, and wrote Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, a two-volume work to which the Nazis' Alfred Rosenberg later wrote the sequel in Der Mythus des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Now it might seem that the real Wagner was perhaps as different from the Wagner legend as Nietzsche was from his. Thus Newman says that "the true founders of Wagnerism as a 'faith,' a religion, were Cosima and Houston Stuart Chamberlain." Yet nobody has submitted more evidence to show how Wagner himself founded this faith than has Newman himself, and one fails to see how or in what respects the Nazis altered this faith or disagreed with Wagner. That he was a musical genius is a different matter.

It may seem idle to attach so much importance to Nietzsche's break with Wagner, but no other episode in Nietzsche's life has excited more public interest and comment; Nietzsche devoted two books to Wagner; and their break illuminates Nietzsche's thought and his historical position. Before long, Nietzsche was once more confronted with a man who, owing to his lack of genius, was an even more typical proto-Nazi than Wagner.

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23 Ibid., 530.
24 Ibid., 103.
III

Nietzsche's relation to his sister always evidenced a powerful ambivalence. It is conceivable that his passionate love of her as a boy had something to do with his later remark: "To Byron's Manfred I must be profoundly related: I found all these abysses in myself—at thirteen, I was ripe for this work" (EH ii 4). His love, however, alternated with a hatred no less passionate. As in the case of Wagner, Nietzsche came to realize that her character and outlook were basically opposed to what he wanted his own to be. Yet even though she embodied the narrowness, the chauvinism, and the deeply unchristian Christianity which he loathed, she loved him devotedly and had faith in him for a long time. That was more than he experienced from any other woman and therefore humanly more important to him than the patent fact that she could not understand nor follow his ideas. "What does he know of love who did not have to despise just what he loved!" (Z i 17).

In 1885, his sister was married to Bernhard Förster, a prominent leader of the German anti-Semitic movement which Nietzsche loathed. His contempt for anti-Semitism was not prompted by the man who took his sister away from him: Nietzsche's position had been established unmistakably about the time of his breach with Wagner, and Human, All-Too-Human (1878) leaves no doubt about it.

Förster's ideology, briefly, comprised "partly racial notions of Gobineau's, received second-hand from Wagner . . . partly Förster's own conceptions, such as . . . the notion of Christ as Aryan with which he secures for himself the honor of having been the predecessor of Julius Langbehn, Ernst Haeckel, and H. St. Chamberlain. . . ." Christ appeared among the Jews—to cite Förster himself—because "on the dark background of the most depraved of all nations, the bright figure of the Savior of the world would stand out the more impressively." And "in the emphasis on the special predestination of the religious make-up of the Teutonic tribes for Christianity, Förster could scarcely satisfy himself. At the same time, however, he thought with sorrow and not without consciousness of sin of the faithlessly abandoned cult of Wotan." 25 Nietzsche, on the other hand, had

25 Podach, Gestalten um Nietzsche, 134 f.
written, even before his sister fell in love with Förster: "If one wants to claim that the Teuton was preformed and predestined for Christianity, one must not lack impertinence"; he had called "Jesus [whom he respected without believing in the Incarnation] and Saul [St. Paul] the two most Jewish Jews perhaps who ever lived"; and he had insisted that "Christianity issued from Judaism" (xi, 73). The full meaning of these statements, especially the last one, will be discussed later, when Nietzsche's thought is examined in detail. The contrast with Förster speaks for itself. Nevertheless, Förster—typical in this respect, too—blandly admired Nietzsche.

A scandal which ensued when Förster insulted and manhandled Jewish streetcar passengers helped to precipitate his emigration to Paraguay, where he founded a Teutonic colony, Nueva Germania. It was there that Elisabeth went to live with him during the years when her brother wrote his last, and probably most important, works.

Nietzsche's attitude toward his sister's marriage and the issues involved in it is of at least as much interest as the facts themselves; and it seems best to quote some of his reactions from the second volume of his letters to his mother and sister:

You have gone over to my antipodes. . . . I will not conceal that I consider this engagement an insult—or a stupidity which will harm you as much as me [377].

To an enthusiasm for "deutsches Wesen" I have indeed attained very little so far, but even less to the wish to keep this "glorious" race pure. On the contrary, on the contrary [409].

The whole affair [the marriage] went through and through me. And since your son is in poor health, he was consequently sick all the time; this spring was one of the most melancholy springs of my life. . . . For my personal taste such an agitator [Förster] is something impossible for closer acquaintance. . . . Vegetarianism, as Dr. Förster wants it, only makes such natures still more petulant [409].

²⁶ In 1956, Schlechta showed in his edition of Nietzsche's Werke, III, 149 ff., that at least thirty-two of the letters printed in Gesammelte Briefe, V (1909), are inauthentic; also that this does not mean that all of these letters to the sister were invented by her: in composing these epistles to herself, she made abundant use of letters and drafts of letters to others. Among these "forgeries" are two of the letters quoted in the text: #377 above and 479 below. Plainly, the quoted passages were not made up by the sister, though the possibility cannot be ruled out that she may have toned down some parts.
One may note that Förster was the first, but not the last, anti-Semitic rabble-rouser in Germany to have copied both Wagner's ideology and his vegetarianism. Förster, like Hitler, was an admitted Wagner disciple.

When he heard that Förster had decided to concentrate on his colonial work and give up his racist propaganda—a report which later turned out to have been false—Nietzsche wrote: "Since he has stepped back from his agitation, which like every negative striving contains the danger of corrupting an originally noble character most easily, I am full of sympathy" (#417). This, however, did not prevent him from confessing to Overbeck, in October 1885: "I have not yet laid eyes on my brother-in-law, Herr Dr. Förster—... that suited me excellently just that way" (#418). Loath to break entirely with his sister, yet quite unwilling to leave any doubt about his position, he writes to her in Paraguay in 1886, calling himself an "incorrigible European and anti-anti-Semite" and suggests that Förster should abandon his ideology and come back to Germany to become the head of "an independent educational institution that would actively oppose the drilling of State slaves," which Nietzsche considers characteristic of German schools (#430). While he thus suggests to his sister that he might like to have her back in Germany, he writes his mother that he is glad that Förster left Germany before getting involved again in his anti-Semitic movement (#431). Speaking of anti-Semites generally, he writes: "You see, because of this species of men I could not go to Paraguay: I am so happy that they voluntarily exile themselves from Europe. For even if I should be a bad German—in any case I am a very good European" (#443).

Most interesting, however, are two letters in which Nietzsche expressly takes a stand concerning his beginning "influence." The first is dated one week later than the four line draft which his sister later used for her edition of The Will to Power, partly because the title of the fourth part contained a reference to "Breeding":

I have somehow something like "influence." ... In the Anti-Semitic Correspondence (which is sent out only "to reliable Parteigenossen") my name is mentioned almost in every issue. Zarathustra, "the divine man," has charmed the anti-Semites; there is a special anti-Semitic interpretation of it which made me laugh very much [#460; cf. letter #271 to Overbeck].
By the time Nietzsche writes the second letter, Christmas 1887, he is no longer in a laughing mood. He has discovered that his sister's colony has after all an essentially anti-Semitic character. Now he decides to speak his mind to her:

One of the greatest stupidities you have committed—for yourself and for me! Your association with an anti-Semitic chief expresses a foreignness to my whole way of life which fills me ever again with ire or melancholy. . . . It is a matter of honor to me to be absolutely clean and unequivocal regarding anti-Semitism, namely opposed, as I am in my writings. I have been persecuted in recent times with letters and Anti-Semitic Correspondence sheets; my disgust with this party (which would like all too well the advantage of my name) is as outspoken as possible, but the relation to Förster, as well as the after-effect of my former anti-Semitic publisher Schmeitzner, always brings the adherents of this disagreeable party back to the idea that I must after all belong to them. . . . Above all it arouses mistrust against my character, as if I publicly condemned something which I favored secretly—and that I am unable to do anything against it, that in every Anti-Semitic Correspondence sheet the name Zarathustra is used has already made me almost sick several times [#479].

In a similar passage in his last book, Nietzsche is horrified that anyone should have associated him with the political Right, and especially with the nationalistic and anti-Semitic Kreuzzzeitung, the Junker newspaper:

Would you believe it? The Nationalzeitung—a Prussian newspaper, as I might explain for the benefit of my foreign readers—I myself read, if I may say so, only the Journal des Debats—actually managed to understand the book [Beyond Good and Evil] as a "sign of the times," as the real and genuine Junker philosophy for which the Kreuzzzeitung [an ultra-right newspaper] merely lacked the courage? [EH III, 1].

Anti-Semitic Teutonism—or proto-Nazism—was one of the major issues in Nietzsche's life, if only because his sister and Wagner, the two most important figures in his development, confronted him with this ideology. In both cases Nietzsche's attitude was uncompromising—and if his suggestion to "expel the anti-Semitic squallers out of the country" (J 251) might seem a mere literary flourish, one may recall that this idea so possessed him that, when madness began to break down his inhibitions, he scrawled across the margin of his last letter to Burckhardt: "Abolished [Kaiser] Wilhelm, Bismarck, and all anti-
Semites”—while the last note to Overbeck ends: “Just now I am having all anti-Semites shot.”

If one wanted a symbol of his sister’s unfitness for her later role as his apostle, one might find it in the name which she assumed in this capacity: Förster-Nietzsche. The irony of this name suggests almost everything that could be said against her: the gospel she spread was indeed Förster first and Nietzsche second. Like her husband and the party men who so troubled Nietzsche, she never accepted Nietzsche’s break with Wagner and attempted throughout to reconcile their irreconcilable heritages. And it is perhaps pertinent to observe, though it takes us beyond the actual span of Nietzsche’s life, that his sister doggedly persuaded the Nazis to accept her brother as their philosopher, and that it was in response to her insistent invitations that Hitler eventually visited the Nietzsche-Archiv—on a trip to Bayreuth. Years before, she had written, in The Young Nietzsche, in her comment on his letter which was cited near the beginning of this chapter: “the most difficult task of my life began, the task which, as my brother said, characterized my type—i.e., ‘reconciling opposites.’”

Some other figures, though less important for Nietzsche’s life than Wagner and Elisabeth, must still be considered. First, there is the “disciple” Heinrich Köselitz (1854–1918), an unsuccessful composer, whom Nietzsche preferred to call Peter Gast or even Pietro Gasti. From him Nietzsche received in his last years that unwavering devotion and complete faith in his greatness which even his sister—whom he also occasionally called a “disciple”—had not been able to give him. Yet while Gast was invaluable as a human being who was willing to share Nietzsche’s loneliness and as a clerk who copied manuscripts, he was not the kind of pupil Nietzsche wanted most. Elisabeth and Gast were, in the end, “undesirable disciples”: “This one cannot say No, and that one says to everything: ‘Half and Half’” (FW 32). Gast applauds

27 Cf. the last note to Fräulein von Salis: “The world is transfigured, for God is on earth. Do you not see how all the heavens rejoice? I have just now taken possession of my kingdom, am casting the Pope into prison, and am having Wilhelm, Bismarck, and Stöcker shot.” Adolf Stöcker, a Protestant minister, was the prime exponent of anti-Semitism in Germany. The text of this note was first published in Neue Schweizer Rundschau, April 1955, p. 721.
the master's every whim, while Elisabeth would like to blend half of his ideas with those of Wagner or Förster—or Hitler. She is the type who "will fabricate a mean out of every cause he represents and thus make of it something mean—such a disciple I wish my enemy!" (FW 32). The young Elisabeth and Gast may also have been in his mind when he wrote in a key passage at the end of the first part of Zarathustra, quoted again in the preface to Ecce Homo:

You say you believe in Zarathustra? But what matters Zarathustra! You are my believers—but what matter all believers! You had not yet sought yourselves, and you found me. Thus do all believers; therefore all faith amounts to so little.

What Nietzsche wanted desperately was a disciple who would be more than a disciple. Thus he said in the passage from which we have just quoted: "One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a pupil only. And why will you not pluck at my wreath?" Nietzsche wanted to be different from Wagner, who had appeared to him tyrannical and unwilling to permit contradiction. Wagner had taken pleasure in the most uncritical adulation of his Wagnerians. Nietzsche, loath to be another such "master" in search of disciples, gradually came to regard himself as another Socrates who had no system of his own and encouraged intellectual independence—and Nietzsche's search for a Plato was fraught with heartbreak.

Lou Salomé came closest to being accepted by Nietzsche for the role that neither Elisabeth nor Gast could fill. In fact, the only other serious candidate was Heinrich von Stein, who never ceased being a Wagnerian—and Nietzsche quickly abandoned hope. The three days the two men spent together in the Engadin, when von Stein came to visit Nietzsche, may have meant much to both; but in a letter to his sister, only a few months later, Nietzsche refers to the youth with cutting condescension. In Ecce Homo, the episode is mentioned twice:

This excellent human being, who had waded into the Wagnerian morass (and even into the Dürringian one [i.e. anti-Semitism]!) with all the impetuous simplicity of a Prussian Junker, was, during these three days, quasi changed by a gale of freedom, as one who is suddenly lifted to his own height. . . . I kept saying to him that this was due to the good air up here . . . and that one was not 6,000 feet above Bayreuth for nothing—but he would not believe me [EH 1 4].
Once when Dr. Heinrich von Stein complained quite honestly that he did not understand a word in my Zarathustra, I said this was quite in order . . . [EH III 1].

Nietzsche's relationship to Lou Salomé (1861–1937) had been far closer and meant much more to him. She was, he thought, of very unusual intelligence and character, and she had written a "Hymn to Life" which he considered magnificent and set to music. Later, long after his break with Lou, he had the poem published with the score and still referred to it with high praise in Ecce Homo (EH-Z 1). He had found a person to whom he could speak of his innermost ideas, receiving not only intellectual understanding but a response based on Lou's own experience.

Nietzsche met Lou through two friends: Malwida von Meysenburg (1816–1903, the author of Memoiren einer Idealistin, which was at first published anonymously in 1876, and was in its third edition by 1882) and Paul Rée (1849–1901). Rée and Nietzsche met in Basel in the spring of 1873, when Rée, who had been wounded in the Franco-Prussian War, was still working on his dissertation. He wrote on Aristotle's ethics; and in 1875 he received his doctorate and published Psychologische Beobachtungen. Nietzsche liked these "psychological observations" and wrote the author a very cordial letter (October 22); Rée replied October 31; and a genuine friendship developed that lasted seven years.

Rée's Der Ursprung der moralischen Empfindungen (1877) owed a great deal to discussions with Nietzsche. The twenty-six extant (but hitherto largely unpublished) letters Rée wrote Nietzsche up to April 20, 1882, show how asymmetrical a relationship it was, and that Rée was conscious mainly of his own debt to Nietzsche. Rée's letters are of exceptional charm—including the twenty letters he addressed to Elisabeth Nietzsche during that period and the twelve he addressed to Nietzsche's mother. During the same period, Nietzsche sent Rée twenty-six letters, still extant and mostly shorter than Rée's; and all these documents suggest that this friendship was among the best things that ever happened to Nietzsche. There was something heavy about Overbeck and Gast, and neither of them could stimulate Nietzsche philosophically. Rée had a light touch and was interested in some of the very same problems that occupied Nietzsche.

It was Rée who wrote Nietzsche about Heinrich von Stein
and later about Lou. Lou, incidentally, was not Jewish, as many writers have claimed. Rée, much to his own regret, was a Jew.

The relationships between Nietzsche, Lou, and Rée have been a matter of controversy ever since Nietzsche broke with Lou and Rée. Until 1967 there were mainly two versions: Elisabeth’s and Lou’s; and those who had discovered Elisabeth’s sovereign impatience with the truth, and eventually that she had even tampered with the documents and forged letters, believed in Lou’s unquestionable honesty. It was only in a comprehensive study of Lou’s life and works published in 1968 that her falsification of the record and her tampering with the evidence were proved.\(^{28}\) Now we know that both women are unreliable witnesses.

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\(^{28}\) Rudolph Binion’s *Frau Lou* (1968) supersedes all previous accounts. He deserves all the credit for the breakthrough, and at the end of his book he describes how difficult it was to get to see some of the relevant documents. Had it not been for him, I should have left unchanged the substance of my account in the second edition; but my analysis and quotations are now based on the documents themselves, and in some minor ways our interpretations, like our translations, differ slightly.

The original texts of some of the letters cited in the remainder of this section have been published. The two letters to Overbeck are included in *Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck* (1916), and a few of the drafts I quote are included in *Gesammelte Briefe*, V (1909)—#343, 350, and 361—but the printed versions are not reliable. Four letters are included in *Werke*, ed. Schlechta, III (1956): the second letter to Lou (#155), the letter to Paul Rée (#167), the letter Nietzsche addressed to Lou and Rée together (#169), and the 1882 letter to Overbeck (#171); but the letter Nietzsche wrote Lou the day after he wrote #167, which shows that #167 was not mailed to Rée, is not printed by Schlechta, any more than the draft that shows how #169 ended. Schlechta did not have all the documents at his disposal when he prepared his edition (see III, 1372); his summary of the friendship and break with Lou (1972 ff.) is full of errors and betrays a strong bias against Nietzsche; and it is completely dated by Binion’s work.

Podach’s *Friedrich Nietzsche und Lou Salomé* (1938) includes few of our texts: the draft for the letter to Georg Rée (86 ff.), the letter to Lou and Rée together, with the relevant draft (155 ff.), and parts of the draft for a letter to Malwida, July 1882 (159). He also prints (79 ff., 89 ff.), with the express intent to implicate Nietzsche, two letters to the sister (#364 and 401) which, as Schlechta has shown meanwhile, the sister forged. Podach’s book is utterly dated now, but his bias against Nietzsche mars his last two works (discussed in the Appendix, below) to an even greater extent.

Stefan Sonns had no access to Nietzsche’s and Rée’s unpublished correspondence and actually thought that most of it was lost (*Das Gewissen in der Philosophie Nietzsches*, 1955, 34); but his dissertation takes
Fortunately, we have enough documents beyond April 1882 to reconstruct what happened. Though Lou’s letters to both Rée and Nietzsche are largely lost, Lou kept about two dozen letters from each of them (through December 1882); and many relevant letters from others, including Malwida and Elisabeth and the Overbecks, have survived along with Nietzsche’s notebooks, which contain many drafts for letters.

Plainly, Lou was a very remarkable woman, even at the age of twenty-one when Nietzsche knew her, in 1882. She soon became a prolific writer, but in spite of her many books her chief claim to fame remains that she was for a few months Nietzsche’s friend, that she later became—after marrying F. C. Andreas (1846–1930)—Rilke’s mistress, and that, much later, she became a friend of Sigmund Freud. A complete list of her friends approximates a catalogue of German and Austrian literary figures of the period. The photographs that illustrate her posthumously published Lebensrückblick (1951) remind us forcefully that in 1882 she still looked more like a schoolgirl than like the stunning woman she had become by 1897. Her first book, *Im Kampf um Gott*, appeared in 1885, three years after her encounter with Nietzsche.

She came “west” with her mother after an early and unhappy attachment to a married man, and we still have a letter she wrote him from Rome in March 1882. Her tone was totally different not only from that of old progressives like Malwida and young reactionaries like Elisabeth, who were Victorian prudes compared to her, but also from the courteous, seasoned manners of Rée and Nietzsche. She was precocious, quick, and brash; eager to meet famous people (if possible, Burckhardt in Basel and the Wagners in Bayreuth); and proud of being free of old-fashioned inhibitions.

After Rée’s death, Lou spread the tale that both he and Nietzsche had proposed marriage to her, and that Nietzsche had asked Rée to transmit his proposal. Others embellished the story by adding that, unknown to Nietzsche, she was Rée’s mistress even then. Binion has shown that she remained a virgin until more than ten years later and that Nietzsche never proposed into account Rée’s books and shows that, notwithstanding the claims of Lou and of various writers who relied on her, Nietzsche did not adopt Rée’s ideas. Incidentally, Rée inscribed a copy of his *Ursprung* for Nietzsche: “To the father of this essay, most gratefully from its mother.”
marriage to her, although she was apparently waiting for him to do so.

For years Nietzsche's health had been wretched. If his own comments on his pains should be suspect, consider a passage from Overbeck's letter to Gast, June 25, 1882, which incidentally illustrates Overbeck's rather professorial and pedantic manner:

I found that N had reached the point which I had expected to see him reach soon, in case his health should allow one to expect anything at all; namely, full of the urgent desire for a new way of life that might remove him less from men and things. Moreover, his appearance made the attempt seem possible; only that it is to be made so far up north fills me with the greatest worry, at least for the winter... Five days like those he recently spent here—with the exception of a few hours, usually speaking or listening enthusiastically until about midnight—also much music [footnote in letter: two long sessions with the dentist are not to be forgotten either]—all this without any real crisis and even a single hour of complete prostration—I have not experienced with N for many years now, during which I was not accustomed to seeing N even for two days without N's spending about half the time in bed. Bad days, to be sure, had gone immediately before and also followed immediately—nevertheless the experience remained most surprising and agreeable...

The following day, June 26, Nietzsche wrote Lou to suggest that she spend part of the summer with him at Tautenburg (about fifteen miles east of Weimar):

My dear friend, half an hour from the Dornburg on which the old Goethe enjoyed his solitude, lies Tautenburg in the midst of beautiful woods. There my good sister has fixed up an idyllic little nest for me, for this summer. Yesterday I took possession; tomorrow my sister is leaving and I shall be alone. But we made an agreement that may bring her back. For supposing that you found no better use for the month of August and found it seemly and feasible to live with me in the woods here, my sister would accompany you here from Bayreuth and live with you here in the same house (e.g., the parson's where she is staying at the moment: the village offers a selection of modest but pretty rooms). My sister, about whom you can ask Réé, would prefer seclusion precisely for this period in order to brood over her little novella eggs. She finds the thought of being in your and my proximity extremely attractive.—There! And now candor "even unto death"! My dear friend! I am not tied down in any way and could most easily change my plans if you have plans. And if I am
not to be together with you, simply tell me that, too—and you don’t even have to give any reasons! I have complete confidence in you: but that you know.

If we harmonize, our healths will harmonize, too, and there will be some secret advantage somewhere. I have never yet thought that you should read to and write for me; but I should like very much to be permitted to be your teacher. Finally, to tell the whole truth: I am now looking for human beings who could become my heirs; I am carrying around a few ideas that are not by any means to be found in my books—and am looking for the most beautiful and fruitful soil for them.

Just look at my selfishness!—

When I occasionally think of the dangers to your life, your health, my soul is always filled with tenderness; I cannot think of anything that brings me so close to you so quickly.—And then I am always happy to know that you have Réé and not only me for a friend. To think of you two together walking and talking is a real delight for me.— . . .

Faithfully your friend

Nietzsche.

That he wished to be her teacher, he had already told her in another letter eight days earlier. He had reached a second great turning point in his career, comparable to the transition from his early works (The Birth of Tragedy and the Untimely Meditations) to Human, All-Too-Human; and a day later he wrote Lou, after mentioning that he was about to proofread The Gay Science: "This book marks the conclusion of that series of works which begins with Human, All-Too-Human: together, they are meant to erect 'a new image and ideal of a free spirit.'" And less than a week later:

My dear friend, Now the skies above me are bright! Yesterday around noon things were happening here as if I had a birthday: you sent me your acceptance, the most beautiful present anyone could have given me now—my sister sent cherries, Teubner [the printer] sent the first proof sheets of The Gay Science; and, on top of all this, the very last portion of the manuscript had just been finished, and thus the work of 6 years (1876–82), my whole “free-spiriting”!

Around the same time, he wrote in a draft for a letter to Malwida, after remarking again that the new book represented the end of a chain: "The next years will not bring forth any books—but I want to study again, like a student." And:
This year, which signifies a new crisis in several chapters of my life (epoch is the right word—an intermediate state between two crises, one behind me [1876–79?] one ahead of me [which turned out to be the final collapse?] has been made much more beautiful for me by the radiance and charm of this truly heroic soul. I wish to acquire a pupil in her and, if my life should not last much longer, an heir and one who will further develop my thoughts [Erbin u. Fortdenkerin]. Incidentally: Rée should have married her; and I for my part have certainly urged him all I could. But the effort now seems in vain. At one final point he is an unshakable pessimist; and how he has remained faithful to himself at this point, against all the objections of his heart and of my reason, has in the end won my great respect. The idea of the propagation of mankind seems intolerable to him: it goes against all his feelings to add to the number of the wretched. For my taste, he has too much pity at this point and too few hopes.

It is interesting to consider against this background the last three aphorisms of The Gay Science (not counting Book V, which was added only in the second edition, in 1887). Number 340 bears the title, The Dying Socrates, and begins: "I admire the courage and wisdom of Socrates in all he did, said—and did not say." The next section deals with the eternal recurrence and will be quoted and discussed in due time, in Chapter 11. Nietzsche's plan to go back to a university and study was probably inspired in part by the desire to see if the eternal recurrence of the same events could be proved scientifically; but his psychological interests, too, led him to feel that he ought to know more about physiology and the natural sciences generally. The concluding aphorism, finally, is entitled "Incipit tragœdia" (the tragedy begins) and describes Zarathustra's decision to leave his mountain and return again among men. Soon this section was used again—as the beginning of Nietzsche's next book, Thus Spoke Zarathustra. The plan to go to a university town together with Lou and Rée—first they were thinking of Vienna, in the end of Paris—came to nothing; and so did the resolve to stop writing for a few years. The winter of 1882/83, when the first part of Zarathustra was written in Rapallo, and the summer of 1883, when he wrote Part II, in Sils Maria, were among the loneliest and most desperate periods in his life.

The meeting in Tautenburg (August 7–26) got off to a bad start: Elisabeth and Lou had a terrible scene before they ever got there. Our major source for the details of what each of them
said is a very long letter Elisabeth wrote a friend not quite two months later. Here she describes Lou as "the personified philosophy of my brother: this insane [rasend] egoism that knocks down whatever is in its way, and this complete lack of morality." Such was Elisabeth's understanding of her brother's philosophy!

As for the hatred she conceived for Lou, that had a threefold inspiration. First and above all else, jealousy. Elisabeth had been unusually attached to her brother ever since their childhood, and suddenly found herself displaced by another woman whose intellect was far superior to her own and who could talk about philosophy with Nietzsche as she could not. The situation in Tautenburg was bound to be extremely painful for Elisabeth and plainly called for extreme tact, consideration, and maturity on Lou's part. But Lou, at least at twenty-one, did not have these qualities; far from it.

Still, it might have helped if Lou had approached Nietzsche with a certain reverence, showing profound appreciation of his interest: that might have mollified Elisabeth to some extent. But Lou did more nearly the opposite—first at Bayreuth, which she visited with Elisabeth, and then in Jena, on the way to Tautenburg, during the crucial scene between the two women. It was one thing for Elisabeth herself to say near the beginning of the letter to her friend: "Alas, my dear, dear Clara, don't tell anybody, I have lived through hideous days here; I had to realize that Fritz has become different; he himself is just like his books." It was another matter entirely for Lou to pooh-pooh Elisabeth's lecturing her about her "pure-minded brother."

This brings us to the last point: Lou was sufficiently annoyed to retort, according to Elisabeth's letter: "Yes, your noble, pure-minded brother first had the dirty plan of a 'wild marriage'!" She also suggested that this was after all what all men want, and said—there seems to be no reason to doubt Elisabeth's word about that: "I could sleep in the same room with him without any rebellious thought." And Elisabeth comments: "Do you consider that possible? [She meant, no doubt, to refer to that kind of talk, but the ambiguity is amusing, and her misspelling of Hälst instead of Hälst (halten means "hold" or "consider," while halsen means "neck" or "embrace") adds to the involuntary humor of her query.] I was also entirely besides myself and shouted at her more than once: 'Stop talking so dirty!' 'Pah,' she said; 'with Rée I even talk much dirtier.' She had also told me
that it was Rée who had told her that Fritz was thinking of a 'wild marriage.' ”

It seems that Elisabeth informed her brother of the gist of this conversation the following morning, although, as she wrote Clara, “of course, I could not tell it to him as dirty as it had been. Ah, for my delicate feelings the whole story was torture! They had it out”—but Lou stayed until August 26 and spent a great deal of time with Nietzsche, while Elisabeth was excluded and had time to nurse an overpowering resentment. Nietzsche commented on some of Lou’s manuscripts, rewrote some of her aphorisms, and discussed some of his own ideas with her. When Lou left, they were still agreed to spend the winter in Paris, with Rée, to study there. In the fall the three of them spent some time together in Leipzig, and that was the last Nietzsche saw of either Lou or Rée: the plans for the winter fell through. In November Nietzsche went south again, to Rapallo, estranged from his sister and his mother, lonelier than ever.

Nietzsche liked to call his sister “llama”—a nickname he first gave her when they were children because, as she explained later, they had a book in which this animal was characterized in terms “exactly fitting” her. But the pointless description quoted by her, apparently from memory, is not to be found in the children’s biology book, which was preserved in the *Nietzsche-Archiv*. What the book does say is this: “It is characteristic that the llama, as a means of defense, squirts its spittle and half-digested fodder at its opponent.”

Her performance was unusually revolting in the present case. Her accusations, recriminations, and gossip did not remain oral only but were also poured out in a stream of letters. It would be tedious to quote from these at any length, but a single sentence, from a six-page postscript that she added to a twelve-page letter about this matter to Overbeck’s wife, January 29, 1889, may give some idea of the level to which she could stoop: “[Lou] is rather like an animal in other respects, too, able to move her ears singly as well as her scalp.” So much for Lou Salomé!

What all of this did to Nietzsche, and in the long run also to Lou, is not funny. Having given up his sister and mother for Lou’s sake, though they did after all love him in their miserable way as nobody else did, he seems to have come to feel more and

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20 Quoted by Podach (1938), 112, from F. Schoedler, *Buch der Natur*. 
more that Lou ought to have appreciated this, and her lack of "reverence" apparently bothered him more and more. We cannot fully reconstruct the development that finally led him to break with Lou in December, even if we assume that the lost letters he sent her correspond closely to the drafts that have survived in his notebooks, for her letters to him are no longer extant, and his growing annoyance seems to have been due in large part to what she wrote him. In November he was still well disposed toward Lou and Rée and wrote Rée:

But dear, dear friend, I thought you would feel the opposite way and be secretly happy to be rid of me for a while! There have been a hundred moments this year, beginning in *Orta*, when I felt that you were "paying too high a price" for our friendship. I have already received far too much of your Roman find (I mean, Lou)—and I always felt, especially in Leipzig, that you had a right to become a bit taciturn toward me.

Think as well as possible of me, dearest friend, and ask Lou on my behalf to do likewise. I belong to both of you with my most cordial feelings—I think I have proved this better through my separation from you than through any proximity.

All proximity makes one so exacting—and in the end I am after all an exacting person.

From time to time we'll see each other again, won't we? Don't forget that as of this year I am suddenly poor in love and consequently very much in need of love.

Write me something really definite about what now concerns us most—what "has come between us," as you write.

Love [In ganzer Liebe], Yours,
F.N.

And the next day he wrote Lou:

My dear Lou, yesterday I wrote the enclosed letter to Rée; and just now I was on the way to the post office with it, when something occurred to me and I tore off the envelope again. This letter, which concerns you alone, might create greater difficulties for R. than for you. In brief, you read it; and it is entirely up to you whether R. should read it, too. Take this for a token of confidence, of my purest will to create mutual confidence between us.

And now, Lou, dear heart, let there be a pure sky over us! I no longer wish for anything anywhere except for pure, bright sky: as far as everything else is concerned I'll manage somehow,
no matter how hard it may go. But a solitary suffers terribly from
any suspicion concerning the few people he loves—especially
when it is a suspicion concerning a suspicion they have regarding
his whole character. . . .

You know, perhaps, how intolerable I find any desire to put
to shame, all accusing and having to defend oneself. One does
much wrong, inescapably—but one also has the splendid counter-
force to benefit and to create peace and joy.

I feel every impulse of the higher soul in you; I love nothing
in you except these impulses. I gladly renounce all familiarity
and proximity if only I may be sure of this: that we feel at one
where common souls don't reach. . . .

Forgive me! Dearest Lou, be what you must be.

F.N.

Around the same time, also toward the end of November,
 Nietzsche wrote in drafts for a letter to Malwida: "I beg you
with all my heart to retain your tender interest in Miss S—
even to do more. . . . 'The virtuoso of self-overcoming'—that is
what Rohde recently called me. There is an awful lot to overcome
in my self. . . . My sister considers L. as poisonous vermin that
must be destroyed at any price. This is a thoroughly exaggerated
point of view and repels me utterly: on the contrary, I should
like to profit her as much as possible . . . ."

During the next two weeks Nietzsche's drafts suddenly strike
some very different notes, evidently in response to some letters
that disappointed him deeply. The chronological sequence of
these quotations is uncertain:

M[y] d[ear] L[ou] Don't write me such letters! What is that kind
of wretched stuff to me? [Was habe ich mit diesen Armeseligkeiten
zu tun!] Can't you see: I wish you would raise yourself up before
me so that I need not feel contempt for you.

But L, what kind of letters are you writing? That is how venge-
ful little school girls write. What is that kind of paltry stuff
[Erbärmlichkeiten] to me? Do understand: I wish you would
raise yourself up before me, not that you make yourself still
smaller. How am I to forgive you if I do not first rediscover in
you the character for whose sake one can forgive you!

No, m. d. L., we are nowhere near "forgiving" yet. I cannot shake
forgiveness out of my sleeves after the injury [Kränkung] has
had four months' time to burrow into me.
Adieu, m. d. L. I shall not see you again. Preserve your soul from sim. acts and make good to others and esp. to my friend Réé what you cannot make good to me any more.

I have not created the world and L: I wish I had—then I alone could bear the guilt that things turned out that way between us.

Adieu, d. L. I haven’t yet finished your letter, but I have already read too much.

Part of the last quoted draft is crossed out, and none of it may have been mailed. But he did break with Lou about the middle of December; it was he who broke off the relationship; and lacking her letters to which he responded we cannot tell to what extent he overreacted. Only one of the letters she actually received in mid-December survives; and that shows abundantly in what state of mind he was by that time:

My dear ones, Lou and Réé: Do not be too upset about the outbreaks of my “megalomania” or of my “hurt vanity”—and even if, prompted by some feeling, I should accidentally take my life some day, that, too, would not be reason for too much sorrow. What are my fantasies to you! (Even my “truths” were nothing to you hitherto.) By all means, take into due consideration between the two of you that in the end I am a half-madman who suffers in the head and whom long solitude has confused completely.

This, as it seems to me, reasonable insight into the situation I have reached after taking an immense dose of opium—from despair. But instead of thus losing my reason, I seem to have found it at long last. Incidentally, I was really sick for several weeks! and if I say that for twenty days I have had Orta weather here, I need not say anything further.

Friend Réé, ask Lou to forgive me everything—she will yet give me an opportunity, too, to forgive her. For so far I have not yet forgiven her anything.

It is much harder to forgive one’s friends than one’s enemies.

That brings to mind Lou’s “defense.”

The rest of this letter Lou did not preserve. But there are drafts for this letter, and they provide a conclusion, though we cannot be certain that the actual letter continued precisely the same way:

That brings to mind Lou’s defense. Strange! Whenever anybody defends himself before me, the upshot is always that I am supposed to be in the wrong. By now I know this in advance; hence I have lost interest.
Should Lou be a misunderstood angel? Should I be a misunderstood ass?

*in opio veritas:*
Long live wine and love!

On Christmas day, Nietzsche wrote Overbeck:

This last *bite of life* was the hardest I have chewed yet, and it is still possible that I may *suffocate* on it. I have suffered of the ignominious and tormenting memories of this summer as of a madness . . . I tense every fiber of my self-overcoming—but I have lived in solitude too long, living off my “own fat,” so that now, more than anyone else, I am being broken on the wheel of my own feelings. If only I could sleep! But the strongest doses of my opiates help me no more than my six-to-eight-hour marches.

If I do not discover the alchemists' trick of turning even this—filth into *gold*, I am lost.—Thus I have the *most beautiful* opportunity to prove that for me “all experiences are useful, all days holy, and all human beings divine”!!!

All human beings divine—

My suspicion has now become very great: in everything that I hear I feel contempt for me.—E.g., most recently in a letter from Rohde. I could swear that, were it not for the accident of our former friendly relationship, he would now condemn me and my goals in the most disdainful manner.

Yesterday I broke off my correspondence with my mother, too: it had become unendurable, and it would have been better if I had stopped enduring it long ago. *How* far the hostile judgments of my family have spread meanwhile and ruined my reputation—well, I'd still rather know it than suffer this uncertainty.—

My relationship with Lou is in its final and most painful throes: at least it seems that way to me today. Later—if there is any later—I'll say a word about that, too. *Pity*, my friend, is a kind of hell—whatever the adherents of Schopenhauer may say.

I am not asking you: “what am I to do?” A few times I thought of renting a small room in Basel, visiting you now and then, and attending lectures. A few times I also thought of the opposite: driving my solitude and renunciation to its ultimate point and—

Well, let that be. Dear friend, you with your worthy and wise wife—you are almost the last foothold I have left. Strange!

May you two fare well!

*Your F.N.*

All experiences *were* useful for Nietzsche, and he turned his torments into his later books, from *Zarathustra* to *Ecce Homo.*
When he wrote of pity and resentment, solitude and conscience, he knew whereof he spoke. And when, a little over four years later, he discovered Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, he instantly recognized a matchless psychologist.

Yet the end of 1882 did not bring the end of the relationship with Lou and Rée. In March, Nietzsche wrote Overbeck that he had a bad case of influenza, felt physically miserable, and expected it to last for four to six weeks. But the weather was clear, and inside, too, he felt a new clarity. "The detachment from my family is beginning to appear to me as a real blessing. Oh, if you knew what I have had to overcome in this chapter (since my birth)! I don't like my mother, and the voice of my sister grates on me; I have always become sick when I was together with them. . . . Another 'liberation' I'll merely hint at: I have refused that Rée's major work, 'History of Conscience,' should be dedicated to me—and have thus put an end to a relationship that led to many calamitous misunderstandings.—Whether my last work [*Zarathustra*, Part I, completed meanwhile] is being printed seems doubtful to me; I neither hear nor see anything of it. Well, there is no hurry. . . ."

Late in April, he received a conciliatory letter from his sister and decided to visit her in Rome in May, apparently with the expectation that there would be no further discussion of Lou. Alas, there was. And the new angle was that Rée had behaved even worse, if that was possible, than Lou.

After six weeks with his sister, Nietzsche proceeded to Sils Maria in late June, and there wrote the Second Part of *Zarathustra*. No sooner had he finished it than his sister sent him a copy of a letter she had written Rée's mother, and convinced him that the previous year she had not told him the worst facts. As he put it in a draft for a letter to Frau Overbeck: "Suddenly Dr. Rée moves into the foreground: having to relearn about a human being with whom one has shared love and confidence for years, is dreadful."

There was just barely enough truth in Elisabeth's charges to make them seem justified. Rée had quickly become infatuated with Lou in a way in which Nietzsche had not; while Nietzsche called her *Sie*, Rée called her by the familiar *Du*, and though they made a great point of calling each other brother and sister, and Rée also called her "snailie" and himself her "housie," he did feel possessive about her, and his jealousy of Nietzsche was
Nietzsche's Life as Background of His Thought

plain—though evidently not to Nietzsche. Long before Rée put it that way in a letter, Lou had come "between" them, and Nietzsche had ceased to be the friend to whom Rée wrote and had instead become an object about whom he talked and corresponded with Lou. It was not a deliberate intrigue but rather what happened to Rée, and it made him feel guilty vis-à-vis Nietzsche.

It will suffice to quote two passages. The first comes from a letter Rée wrote Lou, probably in late May 1882. "I just thought (I really ought to be thinking about 'the origin of conscience in the individual,' but, dammit, I am always thinking about Lou) that in my relationship to Nietzsche I am not altogether frank and honest, especially since a certain little girl from abroad appeared. But entirely frank, as I am with you, I never was with him, and I am with nobody in the whole world; only with one person besides you, in the past. Now it is true, to be sure, that one can have several friends . . . But with me that is after all not the case. I am wholly friends only with you, and that is how it shall remain. It does not offend my conscience when I dissemble a little and behave a little falsely, a little mendaciously and deceitfully against somebody, excepting you. . . ." And on July 29 he wrote her: "Motto: true to myself, false to others (excepting one person)."

The point here is not to place Rée in a bad light: perhaps he was more honest with himself and with Lou than most men are in comparable situations. But by totally ignoring this development, most writers on this matter have given an utterly false account of Nietzsche's eventual reaction and of Nietzsche's character. That Rée had spoken critically and indiscreetly about Nietzsche to Lou, is plain, and evidently Lou had cast up some of these remarks to Elisabeth, admitting they came from Rée. Now Elisabeth convinced Nietzsche that both of them had said terrible things about him behind his back, ruining his reputation and thus discrediting his books.

In August, alone in Sils Maria, during the depression that followed the completion of Zarathustra, Part II—Part III was written in Nice the following January, but now he was living through the insufferable lull between books—Nietzsche penned some dreadful drafts for letters that survive in his notebooks: one to Lou's mother, one to Rée that evidently was not sent, and then one to Rée's brother to tell him that henceforth he could
no longer write Paul Rée because "behind my back he behaved toward me as a sneaky, slanderous, mendacious fellow." The letter to Georg Rée he actually mailed, but we do not know whether the final version was as bad as the draft, and the letter from Rée to which Nietzsche refers in his draft for a reply has not survived. What we do know is that immediately afterwards Nietzsche wrote his sister how terrible he felt about his own letter.

Georg Rée replied, threatening him with a libel suit, and Nietzsche, more than three-quarters blind, responded by threatening him—as he put it in a letter to Frau Overbeck—"with something else"; no doubt, a duel. The Overbecks often received letters hinting at thoughts of suicide, and once Nietzsche put the point by saying that he found the thought of a pistol pointed at him pleasant.

In a draft of that time he calls Lou and Rée "persons whom I have loved and whom I perh. still love even now: at least I am prepared to throw away at any moment the whole lot of insults and injuries done me if I knew I could really profit them."

The ugly drafts for letters of August 1883 remain. What would almost anyone else have done in a comparable situation? He might have said to his wife or to a friend, perhaps over drinks, that the bastard had evidently double-crossed him. Nietzsche had not a soul to speak to. How was he to get the poison out of his system? Taking Freud's advice before Freud gave it, he wrote down some of his thoughts—and feeling dirty about writing things like these into his notebooks, behind Rée's back, he felt he ought to tell him what he thought. And so he mailed a couple of ugly letters. Eventually, Nietzsche offered his own apology in Ecce Homo:

> It also seems to me that the rudest word, the rudest letter are still more benign, more decent than silence. . . . Swallowing things leads of necessity to a bad character . . . If one is rich enough for this, it is even a good fortune to be in the wrong [I 15].

More of this passage is quoted in Chapter 12, section V, below; and there are also—not surprisingly—parallels in Zarathustra, above all in the chapter "On the Adder's Bite" (I 19), which is among the finest things Nietzsche ever wrote. He also went out of his way in Ecce Homo to speak generously of both Lou and Rée. He despised resentment; he noted at the time, in
1882 and 1883, how sullied he felt by such sentiments; and in August 1883 he purged himself of the poison.

In November 1886, Lou became engaged to—and subsequently married—Fred Charles Andreas (1846–1930). He was much older than she was, but only two years Nietzsche’s junior; he had eye trouble and an interest in Zarathustra; he was a philologist and a professor; and though he called himself Charles she called him Fred—and in writing usually “F.”

In November 1883, Elisabeth became engaged to—and in May 1885 she married—Bernhard Förster, whom we have already considered; and early in 1886 the couple went to Paraguay. In May 1884, Nietzsche wrote Malwida:

> Meanwhile the situation has changed, and I have broken radically with my sister: for heaven’s sake, don’t think of mediation or reconciliation—between a vengeful anti-Semitic goose and me there is no reconciliation. Otherwise I am as considerate as possible because I know what is to be said in defense of my sister and what lies behind her behavior which for me was so ignominious and unworthy: love. It is absolutely necessary that she should sail for Paraguay as soon as possible. Later, much later, she will come to see for herself how much she has harmed me during the most decisive period in my life, with her incessant, dirty insinuations regarding my character (this story has been going on for two years now!). In the end I am left with the very uncomforta-

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20 The juxtaposition no less than the information about Andreas comes from Binion’s masterly sketch of him. Binion’s Frau Lou also offers a detailed critique of Lou’s book on Nietzsche, a sustained analysis of Nietzsche’s impact on her life and works, and proof that her memoirs, which include a chapter on Nietzsche and Rée, are far from truthful.
ance with Miss S: how much may my sister have misunderstood and read into what Miss S said! She lacks even the slightest gift for understanding people. . . . Again, forgive me for bringing up again this old story! . . . Extraordinary people, like Miss S, deserve, especially when they are so young, the highest degree of consideration and compassion. And even if I am not yet able, for various reasons, to wish that she would approach me again—if her situation should become bad and desperate, I would put out of mind any personal considerations. Now I have come to understand only too well, through manifold experiences, how easily my own life and fate could become every bit as notorious as hers—deservedly and undeservedly, as is always the case with such people.

In one of his last letters, Nietzsche wrote Overbeck, Christmas 1888: “I still dare to tell you that in Paraguay things are as bad as can be. The Germans who have been lured over there are in revolt and demand their money back—but there is none. There have already been brutalities; I fear the worst.—This does not prevent my sister from writing me for October 15 [Nietzsche’s birthday], with the utmost derision, that apparently I also wish to begin to become ‘famous.’ What a sweet idea that was! And what riffraff I had sought out—Jews who have licked at every pot, like Georg Brandes.—And then she calls me ‘Herzensfritz’—That has been going on for seven years now!—So far, my mother has no idea of all this—that is my masterpiece. For Christmas she has sent me a game: Fritz and Lieschen.”

For all that, Elisabeth (as well as, and even more than, Wagner) was very close to Nietzsche. One may recall The Brothers Karamazov: there are four brothers, and the clue to the character of each is that whatever is embodied explicitly in one is implicitly present in the other three. Alyosha’s devout soul contains Smerdyakov’s wickedness, Mitya’s passion, and Ivan’s skepticism—nor would Ivan be so troubled if his philosophy had come more easily to him, and if Alyosha were not within him fighting his position. So, too, Nietzsche’s sister was, as it were, the embodiment in the flesh of that part of his character which he tried, all his adult life long, to overcome. That he was really not entirely unlike her is true enough but misses the more significant point: because he was cursed with the same heritage that came to full flower in her, his philosophy was a triumph of integrity. “My strongest characteristic is self-overcoming. But I also need it most” (xxi 102).
A few words remain to be said about Nietzsche’s books and then about his final illness. In 1879, when Nietzsche resigned from the university, his health seemed broken completely. Yet Nietzsche celebrated the new vistas of his freedom in Dawn. Upon this followed The Gay Science, which seemed to him to mark the consummation of his conquest of death. He had thought that he might die in 1880, at the age of thirty-six as his father had done; but now he felt that he had been restored to life and become capable of a new and halcyon gaiety. Next he wrote Zarathustra, spending only about ten days on each of the first three parts, but availing himself of material and ideas which he had accumulated previously. The very rapid composition itself, however, was accomplished in a frenzy of inspiration in which the author felt as if he were a mere mouthpiece of the flood which erupted out of him. The fourth and last part, of which only a very few copies were privately printed and distributed while he was sane, was not originally intended as the conclusion of the work but as a mere interlude.

Because he associated Zarathustra with the joy in which he had composed it, Nietzsche loved this book more than any of his others, though he occasionally referred to it as the mere antechamber of his final philosophy. An unprejudiced examination of this work would indicate that it is neither “the most profound book” of world literature (G ix 51) nor “destructive nonsense.” \(^\text{31}\)

To explain Zarathustra, which contains most of Nietzsche’s ideas in veiled and symbolical form and is hence a good summary for those who know Nietzsche thoroughly, but hard to understand correctly for those who do not, Nietzsche added first Beyond Good and Evil and then the Genealogy of Morals.\(^\text{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Brinton, op. cit., 63: “Zarathustra is destructive nonsense.”

\(^{32}\) An intelligent reader with an open mind and no false preconceptions about Nietzsche can of course understand a good deal of Zarathustra without having read Nietzsche’s other books. G. Wilson Knight’s “The Golden Labyrinth: An Introduction to Thus Spake Zarathustra” (Chap. v of Christ and Nietzsche, 1948) is a case in point, for Knight states in the Preface that he did not consult J and that he knows little of Nietzsche’s other writings except GT. It seems relevant that he admittedly has little or no acquaintance with the Nietzsche literature, but an un-
1888, finally, he sensed a euphoria unprecedented in his long experience of illness and recovery, and within six months he penned *The Case of Wagner, Götzen-Dämmerung, Antichrist, Ecce Homo,* and *Nietzsche Contra Wagner* (a collection of passages from his earlier works, some admittedly edited a bit, designed to show that *The Case of Wagner* was not the fruit of sudden resentment but rather of long and mature deliberation). *The Case of Wagner* was the last book which Nietzsche himself saw published. When the *Götzen-Dämmerung* appeared early in 1889, he was hopelessly insane. The other three works of 1888 were published many years later by his sister.

These works, which were the fruit of Nietzsche's final efforts, are perhaps his most important. If Nietzsche's repudiation of Wagner as his antipode had been taken seriously—Nietzsche reiterates what fascination Wagner's music holds for him—and if *Ecce Homo* had been understood better, with its vitriolic denunciation of any Darwinistic construction of the overman, of racism, of German nationalism, of almost everything that he has since been associated with—perhaps there would never have been the legend that prevailed so long. There has been a tendency, however, to discount these works as the writings of a madman; the *Antichrist* has been ignored either to "shield" Christianity or to "shield" Nietzsche; and the other books of 1888, too, have rarely been read closely.

The ending of the *Antichrist* and much of *Ecce Homo* certainly show so strange a lack of inhibition and contain such extraordinary claims concerning Nietzsche's own importance that, knowing of his later insanity, one cannot help finding here the first signs of it; and some of his letters show the same symptoms. A study of Nietzsche's earlier letters, however, back to his comments on his first book, or even to his school years, reveals that they contain a great number of similar passages.\(^{33}\) That they are lacking in tact is clear, but that they are lacking in sanity is a questionable inference—the more so because Nietzsche's conviction that his books, then still ignored, would some day become

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\(^{33}\) Many of these are listed by Hofmiller, "Nietzsche" (*Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, November 1931).
famous has since been borne out. Evidently Nietzsche had a strong sense of having a mission and little doubt concerning his own significance; and in 1888 his inhibitions decreased rapidly to the point where he freely expressed himself on these subjects not only in more and more letters, but in his books, too. Altogether, the disease can explain no more than his growing lack of any inhibition and, toward the very end, the failing power to fashion ideas into a well designed whole. It certainly cannot explain away Nietzsche’s ideas. Large parts of his last books are actually distinguished by a clarity and lucidity that are almost unequaled in German letters, and by a startling depth of insight. And if the preface to *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*—one of the very last things Nietzsche wrote—admittedly ends on a note that lacks relation to the preceding passage, the final sentence warns the Italians “whom I love” not to enter into a Triple Alliance with the German *Reich*. It is dated Christmas 1888. Even the notes Nietzsche sent to his acquaintances during the first days of January 1889, signing them “Dionysus” or “The Crucified,” throw light on his thought and are meaningful, if mad.

Early that January, he collapsed on the street in Turin, the city where Cesare Lombroso, the author of *Genius and Insanity*, was living even then. As Nietzsche fell on the pavement, he threw his arms around the neck of a mare that had just been flogged by a coachman. He had to be carried home. When he recovered consciousness, he sent the aforesaid notes to his friends.

When Overbeck arrived, prompted by the note he had received and by the longer letter Nietzsche had sent to Burckhardt, Nietzsche recognized him but also visited upon him fitful Dionysian frenzies which Overbeck later preferred not to discuss. He decided to take Nietzsche to Basel—and on the train Nietzsche sang the Gondola Song from his *Ecce Homo*.34 In Basel, Nietzsche was taken to a clinic—and from there to the asylum in Jena.

Julius Langbehn claimed that he could cure Nietzsche, if given unlimited authority over the patient. He was the author of a sensational book which was then about to be published anonymously: *Rembrandt as Educator* (1890). This title is generally

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34 This incident found its way into Malraux’s novel, *La Lutte avec l’ange*. An English translation of this episode appeared in *Partisan Review*, Spring 1946.
taken to have been suggested by Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator*, though the content is anything but Nietzschean. Nietzsche's mother refused Langbehn's suggestion, after consulting Overbeck—and soon after, Langbehn fled, frightened by an outburst of Nietzschean wrath.\(^5\) A little later, Nietzsche was taken home by his mother.

Elisabeth, home from Paraguay after her husband's death, sat under the same roof and penned appeals for money to get a Christian minister for her *Nueva Germania*. Then she returned to Paraguay to liquidate the colony. A while after her return, when Nietzsche's fame had begun to spread rapidly, she climbed on the bandwagon. She acquired the sole rights to all his writings, including even the letters that he had sent to others. She sued those who published material to which she could claim a right. After her mother's death, she moved the hopelessly insane invalid, whose right side was paralyzed, to Weimar where he lingered on another three years and died August 25, 1900—in Goethe's city, as planned by his sister. At his funeral, Gast proclaimed: "Holy be thy name to all coming generations." In his *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche had written:

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\(^5\) Cf. the chapter on Langbehn in Podach's *Gestalten um Nietzsche*, and *Der Kranke Nietzsche: Briefe seiner Mutter an Franz Overbeck*, ed. Podach (1937). Langbehn followed up his Rembrandt book with a volume of painfully poor verse, some of it pornographic. When the poems were suppressed, he hung a black wreath on the plaque which he had previously placed on the publisher's house to commemorate the printing of the "Forty Poems by a German." (Cf. Hofmiller, "Der Rembrandt-Deutsche als Dichter" in *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, August 1931: xxvii, 11, 819 ff.) Another man who hoped to cure Nietzsche—through a Corybantic dance!—was Alfred Schuler, a close friend of Klages, the famous characterologist. (Both men were then still affiliated with the *George Kreis*.) Schuler studied ancient texts but decided to change the rites freely "according to disclosures which he received through inquiries from his own innermost soul, and contrived preparations for almost two years, but only in—conversation. . . . He . . . used to expect the practical steps toward realization from other people; then doubts increased. with time whether it would be possible to find suitable youths for the cultic dance; finally, it seemed hopeless to raise the required means. . . . The armor of the dancers would have had to be of pure copper because he credited this above all metals with symbolic contents and magical power. . . ." Klages concludes this account by saying it proves that Schuler's "inner connection with the cultic soul of antiquity was through and through a matter of living experience . . . and by no means a matter of mere objective research which could be presented in theories." (*Alfred Schuler: Fragment und Vorträge aus dem Nachlass mit Einführung* [119 pp.] von Ludwig Klages, 1940, 60.)
I have a terrible fear that one day I will be pronounced holy: you will guess why I publish this book before; it shall prevent people from doing mischief with me. I do not want to be a holy man; sooner even a buffoon.—Perhaps I am a buffoon [EH iv 1].

During his disease Nietzsche was almost invariably gentle and pleasant, and in lucid hours he engaged in conversation. Sometimes, however, he was wild and frenzied. At no time could he be induced to discuss any of his works or ideas. His last books and letters notwithstanding, his disease was not paranoia but almost certainly an atypical general paralysis. If this diagnosis is correct, it would follow that he must have had a syphilitic infection—but it cannot be claimed that “the fact that Nietzsche did have syphilis may be regarded as proved (as certainly as anything of the kind can be proved).” \(^{36}\) The certainty that can be achieved today by various tests can never be matched by post-humous conjectures on an atypical disease. All we can say is—and all sober and unsensational medical treatments of the subject seem agreed on this—that Nietzsche very probably contracted syphilis.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{36}\) Brinton, op. cit., 15; the sentence continues: “by the publication of E. F. Podach’s book, *Nietzsches Zusammenbruch*.” Podach himself concludes more than once that this diagnosis is “unproved,” cf. especially 159 ff.

\(^{37}\) So far as is known, Nietzsche lived as an ascetic, and very probably had no knowledge of having contracted syphilis. Hildebrandt, *op. cit.*, considers the possibility that Nietzsche might have infected himself without sexual relations—perhaps through a skin wound during the war when he ministered to sick soldiers. Brann, *op. cit.*, suggests that Nietzsche may have visited prostitutes twice in his life, infecting himself both times as a form of subconscious self-punishment. This hypothesis is based on the following entry in the clinical records at Basel, dated the day of Nietzsche’s admission in January 1889: “In the afternoon, pat. speaks continually in utterly jumbled confusion [wirr durcheinander], at times singing and yelling loudly. The contents of his talk is a variegated confusion [buntes Durcheinander] of former experiences; one thought chases another without any logical connection.—Claims that he has specifically infected himself twice.” Podach, who published these records (*op. cit.*, 110), attaches no significance to this entry, and one may surely doubt whether it contains more “truth” than does Nietzsche’s assertion that his wife, Cosima Wagner, had brought him to the asylum. Thomas Mann’s account of the matter in *Neue Studien* (1948) blends *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and is probably to be understood only in connection with his novel, *Doktor Faustus* (1947), which fuses Nietzschean motifs into a vast allegory. (Cf. note 1 above.) To cite Podach (158 ff.) once more: “One can with the best conscience agree with Hildebrandt’s judgment: ‘For the claim that Nietzsche infected himself with lues in 1866, any trace of a proof is lacking.’ It should also be noted that later examinations of
What seems important today is mainly whether any of his books can be discounted as the fabrications of a madman. To this the answer is an unreserved No. In his later works we find a steady decrease in tact and a rapidly mounting lack of inhibition, and the form of expression shows signs of the coming madness. The contents of the books, however, cannot be disposed of lightly. There is a decided break in Nietzsche's sanity which comes only later, after his collapse in the street. From then on there is no startling lucidity, no great vision, but only a steadily increasing and unrelieved dullness of mind, a spreading darkness which envelops Nietzsche's mind in hopeless night.

One author—the first to have defended the diagnosis of progressive paralysis in a sensational book which has come in for much criticism from all sides—has claimed that even Zarathustra was a product of insanity. This view has been rejected almost universally, and it has frequently been pointed out that even the eleven and a half year period of verified insanity is quite extraordinarily long for a paralysis. Antedating the outbreak of this disease means adding to this figure and also would involve the claim that Beyond Good and Evil and the Genealogy, as well as the books of 1888, would be the works of an advanced paralytic. As such, they would be unique. Thus we cannot get rid of any of Nietzsche's works simply by referring to his illness.

The diagnosis that has been suggested would eliminate the notion that Nietzsche's insanity was the inevitable outcome of his thought. The fact remains that his life and work suggest an organic unity, and the claim that he was just about to complete his magnum opus when his disease broke out has no plausibility. Rather, one feels that he had been unable to fashion the systematic work that would have carried out his promises; he had taken refuge in writing other works instead—by way of pre-

Nietzsche for signs and traces of a lues had completely negative results.”

See also my article on Nietzsche in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 8, 505 f., and section viii of the Appendix, below.

P. J. Möbius, Uber das Pathologische bei Nietzsche (1902).

P. Cohn, op. cit., 29. This book, favored with a forty-page postscript by Frau Förster-Nietzsche, seems typical of the literature sponsored by her: Nietzsche was "perhaps the greatest mind of mankind" (29); "Nietzsche was a royal spirit; consequently all he grasped became royal in itself; he was a royal psychologist, a royal philosopher, a royal stylist"—and as for his ironical self-glorification in Ecce Homo, "Nietzsche might well have used even much higher words" (50).
paring the public—and as long as he still had anything left in himself to say, it appears as if he had been able to ward off the final outbreak of his dread disease. His disease does not seem to interrupt an otherwise organic development; it gives an appearance of continuity with his active life.

Some see Nietzsche's final catastrophe as the last act in which the Devil claims his own, while some extravagant disciples see it as a transfiguration. As I see it, few men have fought more heroically against illness and agony, seeking to derive insight from their suffering, utilizing their talents to the last, and making their misery a stepping stone to new and bolder visions. This is not to deny that Nietzsche occasionally resembles Don Quixote, or that—as some of his biographers like to remind us—he came from the middle class and was a "petit rentier, at that." He did live modestly on a small pension from the University of Basel, and his outward life was very simple. His rank, however, must be determined not by looking at his life—whether devoutly or ironically—but by a careful examination of his thought.

Nietzsche loved Don Quixote and tended to identify himself with him. He censured Cervantes for having made his hero look ridiculous—and of Nietzsche's own fear of being no less ridiculous there can be no doubt. Thus he envies Demosthenes the stature of his audience and concludes: "he did not have to consider himself a Don Quixote" (v, 226). And the young professor of classical philology speaks of "the reverence for classical antiquity" as "a magnificent example of Don Quixotism: and that is what all philology is at best. . . . One imitates a mere chimera . . . which has never existed. . . . There can be no imitation . . ." (vii, 208). He jots down: "One of the most harmful books is Don Quixote" (vii, 381)—and explains in a later note: "Cervantes could have fought the Inquisition, but he preferred to make its victims, i.e., the heretics and idealists of all kinds, look ridiculous. . . ." Cervantes' attack on the romance of chivalry turned "into the most general Ironisierung of all higher aspirations," and the book must therefore be considered a symptom of "the decadence of Spanish culture" and "a national misfortune" (ix, 445). In the same note, Nietzsche protests: "Yes, he does not even spare his hero the dreadful illumination about his own state at the end of his life. . . ."—and in the Dawn (114) Nietzsche compares "the poor dying Don Quixote's" sudden enlightenment about himself to Jesus' "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" In another note he again refers to Don Quixote's "horrible end" and comments: "Mankind is ever threatened by this ignominious denial of oneself at the end of one's striving" (x, 413). Cf. also U II 5; xiv, 293; and GM II 6.

Brinton, op. cit., 50.