

Introduction to Ernst Bertram, Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology¹

by Pierre Hadot

translated by Paul Bishop

Translator's Preface

Ernst Bertram was born in Elberfeld in 1884, and he held the post of professor of German literature from 1922 to 1946. A prolific scholar, he is best remembered today, if at all, for his study of Nietzsche, first published in 1929, which became an immediate bestseller. More recently, his significance as a commentator on Nietzsche has become overlooked, but in 1990, the French publishing house Éditions du Félin reprinted the French translation of his study by Robert Pitrou, first published in 1932. And in 2009 the University of Illinois Press published the first English translation, prepared by Robert E. Norton.

The 1990 French edition included a preface by the renowned French scholar, Pierre Hadot. In it, he placed Bertram's Nietzsche in its intellectual and historico-cultural context, and in particular Bertram's friendship with another German admirer of Nietzsche, Thomas Mann. Hadot's preface explains why Bertram's image of Nietzsche remains so significant, and provides an excellent introduction to Bertram's work; it has been translated here to bring it to a wider audience, and with a view to promoting further interest in Bertram's study.

¹ [Pierre Hadot's preface is included in the 1990 reprint of Robert Pitrou's translation (1932) of the seventh edition (1929) of Ernst Bertram's study of Nietzsche, available as Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Essai de Mythologie* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 1990, repr. 2007). For the original German edition, see Ernst Bertram, *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie* (Berlin: Bondi, 1918); tenth edition (Bonn: Bouvier, 1989). Bertram's book has been recently translated, with an introduction, by Robert E. Norton, as *Nietzsche: Attempt at a Mythology* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009). In this translation of Hadot's preface, references are to (and quotations taken from) Norton's translation. Unless placed within square brackets, all footnotes or material in footnotes are by Pierre Hadot. For a discussion of Norton's translation of Bertram, see Keith Ansell-Pearson's review in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 38 (Autumn 2009), also available online at the following HTML address: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/philosophy/jns/RVW_AnsellPearson_Bertram.shtml.]

*Introduction by Pierre Hadot***Symbols**

I have often read and reread this book, and I have always found it new, unexpected, and unique.² Yet it was written over seventy years ago now, and translated nearly sixty years ago. In 1948, however, Thomas Mann predicted: “It will be frequently republished and it will always inspire admiration.”³

Its very first phrase is laden with meaning: *Alles Gewesene ist nur ein Gleichnis*—“All of the past is but a parable.”⁴ This is an allusion to the grandiose conclusion of Part Two of Goethe’s *Faust: Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis*—“All that passes away is only a symbol.”⁵ A “symbol,” that is, of what Goethe in subsequent lines calls the “indescribable” and the “inaccessible.”⁶ The author thus describes both his book’s method—we shall return to this point—and its content. Throughout his work, Bertram will propose “symbols” of this “indescribable” and this “inaccessible”, which constitute his hero’s personality, as they do that of every human being; and Nietzsche’s mystery will be wrapped in these symbols as it unveils itself.

“The admirable secret of your book, which lies in its conception,” so Thomas Mann wrote to Bertram in 1918, “is precisely that, in each of these essays and its variations, the entire antithetical intensity of life, all the unutterably interesting character, all the intellectual magic of its subject are compressed.”⁷

As a work of art that is at once delicate and monumental, and constructed with a masterful skill, Bertram’s *Nietzsche* represents something entirely unique in the history of literature, in the secret of its structure and its mode of composition.

To begin with, each of its chapters is presented, as it were, in a musical way, in the form of “theme and variations.” As he develops each theme, Bertram

2 Cf. the chapter “The Figure of Socrates” in my book *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, second edition, 1987), in which I took up themes developed by Bertram in his chapter entitled “Socrates.” [[See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995): 147-178.]]

3 In this foreword, Thomas Mann’s letters will be cited after the translation by Louise Servicen, published by Gallimard in four volumes (covering the years 1889-1926; 1937-1942; 1943-1947; 1948-1955). [In this translation, letters are cited from the German edition of Mann’s correspondence: Thomas Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, ed. Erika Mann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1961); *Briefe 1937-1947*, ed. Erika Mann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1963); and *Briefe 1948-1955 und Nachlese*, ed. Erika Mann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1964).] Not all Thomas Mann’s letters, notably certain letters written to Bertram, appear in these volumes; see below, note 7. [Here the quotation is from Thomas Mann’s letter of 30 July 1948 to Werner Schmitz; *Briefe 1948-1966 und Nachlese*, p. 40].

4 [Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 1. An alternative translation, preferred by Hadot, is, “All that has been is only a symbol”; see below, note 5.]

5 [See Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, ll. 12104-05.]

6 [Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, ll. 12106-12109: Das Unzulängliche, / Hier wird’s Ereignis; / Das Unbeschreibliche, / Hier wird’s getan.]

7 See Thomas Mann’s letter to Ernst Bertram of 21 September 1918, in: Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, p. 151; and Inge Jens (ed.), Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1910-1935* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1960): 76 (this edition gives the German text of Mann’s correspondence with Bertram, together with an excellent commentary). [...]

gradually brings to light all its various harmonies, its implications, and everything that crystallizes around it. In each chapter, it is always Nietzsche who appears in his division, internal and contradictory, like a living coincidence of opposites: “The individual chapters that follow,” Bertram writes in his introduction, “thus seek to elucidate the intrinsic spiritual duality of this mind, the great balance in which his nature and his values indeterminately hover.”^[8]

Each chapter bears the name of realities, images, attitudes, people, or places, laden with tradition and with mystery, which became myths for Nietzsche, either implicitly or explicitly (hence the book’s subtitle: *An Attempt at a Mythology*). In other words, they became symbols of himself and of his aspirations. This is why we find all of Nietzsche, every time, behind the mask of these symbols, which reveal him precisely because he likes to mask himself behind them.

As he sketches each symbol, Bertram always returns to the same theme: the inner duality of the Nietzschean soul, and its struggle against itself, its amorous hatred of itself. Moreover, one could say that what Nietzsche asserts about the “magic of Socrates” is true of himself: “He had his soul, and behind it another one and behind it yet another.”⁹ All these contrary aspects of Nietzschean multiplicity are manifested or concealed in the different phases of his intellectual development, but sometimes even in the course of a particular phase: Germanophilia and Germanophobia, rationalism and mysticism, Socratic irony and Dionysian ecstasy, Christianity and Hellenism, North and South, the return to the Greeks and the prophecy of the Superman.

The choice of these myths, and the lyrical orchestration in which they are so magnificently set forth, confer on this book that “intellectual magic” of which Thomas Mann speaks.

As Robert Pitrou comments in his translator’s preface,^[10] one may, if one wishes, read these chapters in any order one pleases, particularly beginning with the most approachable ones, such as *Arion*, *Judas*, *Weimar*, or *Venice*. This is not surprising, since, as indicated, each of them opens up a perspective on Nietzsche as a whole. Nevertheless, one can detect in this succession of symbols a certain movement, a progression, a certain secret order that orients the work.

In a way, the chapter entitled *Ancestry* (perhaps *Ahnentafel* would be better translated as “genealogical table”) corresponds to the first (usually quite tedious) pages that biographers devote to their hero’s parents and family. Here, however, Bertram speaks less about Nietzsche’s ancestors than about his passionate quest for a genealogy, that is, ultimately, his anxious search for the symbols of himself. This genealogy not only enables him to understand his biological and psychological individuality, but also allows him to situate himself spiritually within the world’s most aristocratic genealogy—that of Heraclitus, Empedocles, Spinoza, and Goethe. Better still, the glance that Nietzsche casts on the past as a “visionary poet,” “the founder of what persists,”^[11] to use Hölderlin’s expression which Bertram placed as an epigraph

8 [Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 8.]

9 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 151. [Nietzsche, *Nachlass* of April-June 1885; KSA 11, 34[66], 440.] [...]

10 [Robert Pitrou, “Préface du traducteur,” pp. 47-48 (p. 48).]

11 [“Poets, however, establish what remains” (Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 11. Cf. the final lines of Hölderlin’s poem “Remembrance” (*Andenken*): “But what is lasting the poets provide”

at the beginning of this chapter, becomes in a sense the consciousness and the memory of humanity, in the words of *The Gay Science*: “Anyone who manages to experience the history of humanity as his own history [...] being a person whose horizon encompasses thousands of years past and future, being the heir of all the nobility of all past spirit—an heir with a sense of obligation, the most aristocratic of old nobles and at the same time the first of a new nobility—the like of which no age has yet seen or dreamed of [...] if one could finally contain all this in one soul and crowd it into a single feeling—this would surely have to result in a happiness that humanity has not known so far: the happiness of a god [...] This godlike feeling would then be called—humaneness.”^[12]

Thomas Mann said that when reading the second chapter, entitled *Knight, Death, and Devil*, he felt “close to tears.”¹³ In this engraving by Dürer, which accompanied Nietzsche throughout his life and which, on several occasions, he both received and gave others as a gift, the disciple of Schopenhauer and of Wagner sensed a symbol of his own existence, a symbol both of his pessimistic vision of the world and of his courage to face up to the terrible secret. To be sure, in Dürer’s view, this Knight symbolized Luther’s conception of the Christian, for whom life is a battle, and whose faith fears neither Death nor the Devil. But this is precisely what justifies the position of this chapter in the overall economy of Bertram’s work. It prolongs the theme of *Ancestry*, and announces the theme of *The German Becoming*. Indeed, it recalls the figure of Nietzsche’s father, a Lutheran pastor (“I am the issue of entire generations of Christian ministers”; “I have never felt my innermost dependence on the spirit of Luther more strongly than I do now”),¹⁴ and at the same time it introduces the notion of a properly German version of Christianity, of a “Christian ideal of the North,” or a “Christianity of the North,” as embodied, for instance, in Dürer’s figures of the Apostles. It is a virile, active, and “Protestant” Christianity, but also tormented. “It was left to the Germans,” as Wölfflin wrote in his book on Dürer that Bertram cites,¹⁵ “to represent the Apostles not as autocratic, perfect men, but as men who were consumed by a feeling of painful inadequacy.”^[16] This German Christianity is one of the elements that make up the tonality of the Nietzschean soul. The theme of a specific German Destiny, of German “Becoming,” thus makes its appearance.

This new theme, as sketched above, undergoes a powerful orchestration in the next chapter, whose title is none other than *The German Becoming*. Here, moreover, another quotation from Wölfflin’s book echoes the passage we have just mentioned: “Northern beauty is not a beauty that is circumscribed and limited, but is rather boundless and endless [...] The finished form means too little to the

(Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter). See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press, 1994): 510-511.]

12 [The *Gay Science*, §337; see *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974): 268-69; KSA 3, 565.]

13 See Mann’s letter to Philipp Witkop of 13 September 1918 (Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, p. 150).

14 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, pp. 20 and 48 [Nietzsche’s letters to Heinrich Köselitz of 21 July 1881 and to Erwin Rohde of 28 February 1875].

15 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 50.

16 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Die Kunst Albrecht Dürers*, 5th edition (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1926): 272 (I have only been able to find a copy of the fifth edition; the first edition was published in 1905); [Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Art of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. Alastair and Heide Grieve (London: Phaidon, 1971): 217]

Germanic imagination, it always has to be enlivened with the additional attraction of movement.”¹⁷ This dissatisfaction, absence of limits, and movement, all express the profound essence of what it is to be German or, rather, of German “Becoming.”

A “Becoming” that is German, because the essence of Germanness consists precisely in being unfinished, in being always in motion and evolution. Thus, Luther’s adage is quintessentially German: “This life is not piety, but rather a *becoming* pious [...] it is not *being*, but *becoming*.”^[18] To become German, that is, to become *more* German, is, in Nietzsche’s eyes, an invitation to “de-Germanize” oneself, to surpass oneself, to leave oneself behind, to become permeable to all the riches of humanity, to “form” oneself, allowing oneself to be fascinated, as Goethe was, by a nostalgia for the South and for Being. Nothing could be less Nietzschean than complacency in the national glory that arose after the victory of 1870. In his view, Chauvinism and nationalism spelled the death of German hope, precisely because, according to Bertram, Germanism—like the Superman, moreover—is, for Nietzsche, a kind of Platonic idea, as it were inaccessible. It is a hope, and, above all, a demand with regard to oneself.

Hence Nietzsche’s virulent criticism and amorous hatred with regard to the Germans (that is to say, with regard to himself as a German, as an aspect of German Becoming), but also with regard to this German and Lutheran form of Christianity which was, as we have seen, part of himself, and which he never forgave for having twisted, falsified, and distorted its Greek heritage. For, in Nietzsche’s view—and in this respect he is faithful, despite the modifications and changes he makes to it, to a tradition that goes back to Winckelmann and to Goethe—the true Platonic Idea of Germanism resides in a conception of ancient Greece as the country of “artists of life”, that is, a superior humanity in possession of the secret of existence, a country whose image Nietzsche projects both into the past and into the future: “Every day we are becoming more and more Greek, to begin with, as is proper, in our concepts and in our value judgments [...]: but at some stage, one hopes, also with our body! Here lies (and here has always lain) my hope for the Germans.”¹⁹

It is now the theme of Greece, which has just appeared, that is to be orchestrated, in the perhaps unexpected tonality of *Justice*. For Nietzsche’s hesitations and contradictions are soothed and reconciled in the contemplation of Justice according to Heraclitus, that is, by the most Greek of all the Greeks. “Only a Greek,” as Nietzsche wrote in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, “was capable of finding such an idea to be a foundation of an apology for the cosmos.”^[20] Nietzsche goes on to explain that the experience of combat, rivalry, and struggle, was

17 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 62. I have been unable to find this text in the fifth edition. [Norton is the source of this quotation given in Norton’s translation.]

18 [Dieses Leben ist keine Frömmigkeit, sondern ein Fromm-Werden. Keine Gesundheit, sondern ein Gesund-Werden. Kein Wesen, sondern ein Werden. Keine Ruhe, sondern ein Üben. Wir sind es noch nicht; werden es aber (Luther, *Commentary on Philippians* 3: 13; in Luther, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Johann Georg Walch, 23 vols. (reprinted St Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1883-1910): vol. 15, 1494-95; cited in Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 59).]

19 [This passage, which concludes the chapter “The German Becoming” in the seventh edition of Bertram’s *Nietzsche*, the basis of Pitrou’s French translation, is not included in Norton’s translation, which is presumably based on an earlier edition; cf. Bertram, *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie*, p. 99. See Nietzsche’s *Nachlass*, August-September 1885; KSA 11, 41[4], 679.]

20 *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, §5 (KSA 1, 825).

a fundamental characteristic of Greek life “in the gymnasia and in the *palestras*.”^[21] Generalizing from this experience, Heraclitus sees in this universal struggle, “in which the judges seemed to fight, and fighters seemed to be their own judges,”^[22] Justice itself, the sole form of Justice. The divine eye that contemplates the universe sees all contraries, and all oppositions converge in an invisible harmony: an artist’s gaze, or that of a child contemplating the play of the world.

This is an artistic vision of the universe, but it is also a musical one: “Over all the individuals realized in sound and the struggles their passions undergo, over the whole vortex of opposing forces, there soars in the supremest self-possession an overwhelming symphonic intelligence which out of all this conflict brings forth concord: Wagner’s music as a whole is an image of the world as it was understood by the great Ephesian philosopher: a harmony produced by conflict, the unity of justice and enmity.”²³ It therefore comes as no surprise that the following chapter is dedicated to “Music.” It should really have been given this title, rather than that of *Arion*, which seems to be neither a Nietzschean myth nor a symbol. If the preceding chapter allowed us to catch a glimpse of what Nietzsche meant by a return to Greek thought, the hope and ideal of the German soul, this one explains a different aspect of German “Becoming”: music. In any case, it is an essential chapter in the perspective of the general economy of the book. For we know, from his correspondence with Gundolf and with Ernst Glöckner, that Bertram had planned to give his work a different title, *The Music of Socrates*.²⁴ It is an essential chapter, that gives us a foretaste of what, toward the end of the work, the evocation of Socrates allows us to glimpse: Nietzsche dreaming of a musical Socrates, who is then identified with Dionysos, just as music itself is identified for him with the Dionysian state. Bertram therefore analyses the successive and contradictory attitudes toward music adopted by Nietzsche in the various stages of his development, notably because of his break with Wagner: his surpassing of German nationalism (so closely bound up with music), and the increasing fascination exerted upon him by the South. It is an itinerary that moves from enthusiasm to repugnance, from admiration for Wagnerian harmony (and by the same token, as we have seen, Heraclitean) to a deliberate preference for Mediterranean melody. Ultimately, however, as Bertram emphasizes, Nietzsche’s ineradicable northern character betrays him: in 1882, when composing his orchestration of the *Hymn to Life* (with text by Lou von Salomé), Nietzsche had believed he was producing an example of a music of the South, anti-Romantic and anti-Christian. But an Italian who heard this *Hymn*, as played by Peter Gast, thought he was listening to Church music: “He had a vision of Calvary Hill with the seven stations of the cross!”²⁵ A highly significant anecdote: for Nietzsche, music was always ultimately a sign of the legacy of Germanic Christianity; born of tragic pessimism, music is suffering and the transcendence of suffering. Music and pessimism are both

21 *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, §5 (KSA 1, 825).

22 [*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, §6 (KSA 1, 826).]

23 *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, §9 [see *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 242; KSA 1, 494. The “philosopher of Ephesus” is, of course, Heraclitus.]

24 See Heinz Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Mythologeme* [Monographien zur Nietzsche-Forschung, vol. 12] (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1984), pp. 172 [Gundolf’s letter to Bertram of 6 February 1918] and 186 [Glöckner’s letter to Bertram of 3 January 1918].

25 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 102.

signs and masks of the end, of finality, and of death. Ultimately, music is Passion, in the liturgical sense of the word.

This theme of the Passion and of suffering is explored in the following chapter under the patronage, somewhat artificial, of Philoctetes (who is not a symbol used by Nietzsche).^[26] Another motif, which had been developed at length in all the preceding chapters, is reintroduced along with this theme: that of the Christian atavism of Nietzsche, the son of a pastor. If Nietzsche said of Goethe that he was situated “between Pietism and Hellenism,”²⁷ it is particularly true of the Goethe whom, as we shall see, he often liked to use as a biographical mask; that is, it is true first and foremost of Nietzsche. For, on one hand, Nietzsche uses “Christian” tones analogous to those of Pascal or Novalis, speaking of the value of suffering and sickness, of the fruitfulness of asceticism, and of the acceptance of pain. On the other hand, however, he goes beyond Christianity to join Hellenism in its idea of a triumph over illness through the will to health, to life, and to healing. “Such happiness,” he said of Epicurus, “could be invented only by a man who was suffering continually.”²⁸

The first six chapters are dominated by an evocation of the legacies, atavistic traits, and collective and traditional representations, that exerted an influence on Nietzsche’s psychology. The ten following chapters that follow, in contrast, invoke the deep instincts of the Nietzschean soul: betrayal (*Judas*), concealment (*Mask*), and the mythical personalities behind which Nietzsche hides himself, because he recognizes himself in them: Goethe (*Weimar*), *Napoleon*. After a kind of interlude concerning Nietzsche’s style (*Jokes, Cunning, and Revenge*), subsequent chapters evoke the *Stimmung* proper to the Nietzschean soul, his cult of the fragmentary, of the aphorism, of the Moment (*Anecdote*), the autumnal tone (*Indian Summer*), the magic of the South (*Claude Lorrain*), the music of the South (*Venice*), and the premonition of the end (*Portofino*).

The last three chapters, *Prophecy, Socrates, and Eleusis*, orchestrate in a grandiose way the theme of the premonition of the end, which is at the same time a projection toward the future, allowing each reader to glimpse the figure of Dionysos.

Let us return, albeit briefly, to the content of these chapters and to the links between them.

Bertram uses the figure of *Judas* (who seems never to appear in Nietzsche’s work) to symbolize the drama of the Nietzschean soul which, although naturally full of gratitude and acknowledgement, is nevertheless moved by a profound instinct of betrayal, which prompts it to deny and to slander what it loves: “To attack is for me a form of gratitude.”²⁹

The chapter on the *Mask* is one of the most important in the book, for it analyzes with great subtlety the meaning of Nietzsche’s strategies of concealment.

26 [In Norton’s translation, the chapter title *Philoktet*, translated by Pitrou as *Philoctète*, is translated as *Illness*.]

27 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 108. [Nietzsche, *Nachlass*, May-July 1885; KSA 11, 35[66], 539.]

28 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 197. Cf. *The Gay Science*, §45 [trans. Kaufmann, p. 110; KSA 3, 411].

29 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 123 [cf. *Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so wise,” §7; trans. R. J. Holingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992): 17; KSA 6, 275].

On the one hand, he needs to hide behind mythical figures to express and confess himself: Goethe, Napoleon, but above all, Socrates. On the other, Socratic irony inspires its own ironic method of dissimulation, its style with double meanings, which is based on the “great educator’s” need to practice what Kierkegaard called “indirect communication.”³⁰ He therefore conceals himself behind a character, or behind an attitude he adopts without identifying himself with it, or behind an ironic tone. As the final chapters of the book suggest, the deep justification of this dissimulation lies in the sheer impossibility of expressing the mystery of existence.

The next two chapters sketch two of the masks, as Nietzsche imagines and recreates them, behind which he most enjoyed taking refuge: Goethe (symbolized by the town of *Weimar*, which held a magical attraction for Nietzsche) and *Napoleon*.

Jokes, Cunning, and Revenge is a “prelude in German rhymes” to *The Gay Science*, a prelude whose title is taken from an operetta by Goethe that was set to music by Peter Gast, a composer dear to Nietzsche. The rhymed sayings of this “prelude in German rhymes” deliberately imitate those of Goethe. The evocation of this stylistic kinship provides Bertram with the opportunity to engage in a suggestive study of Nietzsche’s style, and in particular the structure of his aphorisms.

This notion of the aphorism leads, naturally enough, to the next chapter, which starts out from a consideration of a related literary form, the *Anecdote*. If, as Bertram thinks, Nietzsche’s technique can be reduced to his masterful and Romantic handling of the anecdote, it is precisely because this particular form of aphorism has its roots in Nietzsche’s soul. The Nietzschean idea is a symbol, an image, grasped in “an azure moment of sinful happiness,”³¹ to use Nietzsche’s words, in a privileged moment, since his life is made up of isolated, autonomous moments, and expresses itself in fragments, almost all of which have a purely anecdotal character. As Bertram remarks with profundity, even the doctrine of the Eternal Return is the fruit and the glorification of a supreme Moment.³² We can only experience eternity, Bertram remarks, in the form of the Dionysian Moment: we can only affirm eternity in the yes we say to the *Now* that justifies the entire universe.

In my view, the four following chapters are the most fascinating and convincing in the work. It is remarkable how Bertram enables us to feel the fundamental tones of Nietzschean inner music and landscape, uncovering all the meaning that, for Nietzsche, was contained in these words, heavily laden with magical and mythical value: *Indian Summer*, *Claude Lorrain*, *Venice*, *Portofino*.

Indian Summer (Nachsommer) is the title of a novel written by the Austrian writer Adalbert Stifter and published in 1857; Nietzsche said of it that it was “the only German book, after Goethe,” that had “a magic effect” on him.³³ The predilection of

30 On this problem, cf. Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 78-95 [*Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 150ff.]

31 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 198 [*The Will to Power*, §1039, in Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. R. J. Hollingdale and Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968): 535; KSA 11, 14[1], 217; cf. KSA 14, 758-59].

32 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 202.

33 Nietzsche, *Nachlass*, October-November 1888; KSA 13, 24[10], 634 [das einzige deutsche Buch nach Goethe, das für mich Zauber hat]. This entire text may serve to illustrate several pages from Bertram: “As far as Goethe is concerned: the first impression, a very early impression, decided everything: the lion-novella [cf. Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 204], which was,

the author of *Zarathustra* for this distinguished, elegant, conservative, backward-looking work is surprising.

This “late summer,” this “Indian summer,” is above all the serene wisdom of an old man, the Baron of Risach, who has withdrawn to a country estate, the Asperhof, located in the mountains of Austria, and lives in a marvellous landscape in close contact with nature, devoting himself to gardening and agriculture, dedicating his life to the cult of beauty and art. It is also about the late reunion of two beings who loved each other in their youth. It is highly significant that Nietzsche was fascinated by this dream of aristocratic life, spent amid beauty, nature, and tranquillity. A tranquillity that is indeed autumnal, in that it combines luminous happiness, maturity and fecundity, as well as a premonition of death. The fundamental tone of the Nietzschean soul is autumnal; it is fascinated by the light of the October sun. “Gilded cheerfulness, come! / sweetest, secretest / foretaste of death!”³⁴

One of these autumnal notes is the following, concerning the year 1888: “Never have I experienced such an autumn, nor have I thought anything of the sort possible on earth—a Claude Lorrain thought on to infinity, each day of the same excessive perfection.”³⁵ The paintings by Claude Lorrain to which Bertram dedicates the following chapter meant, for Nietzsche, both the autumn light and the “South,” with all the mythical, magical significance that the word held for him: the desire to transcend Germanism, Europe, and even Greece. Ultimately, it is “a de-realized symbol,” as Bertram says, “of a higher reality, a mysterious medium through which he senses and reveres the first homeland of his humanity and, beyond that, of his German humanity.”³⁶

The following chapter, *Venice*, allows us a glimpse of Nietzsche’s emotional geography: Basel, Genoa, Turin, Venice; above all Venice, “the only place on earth that I love,” “a consecrated place for my feeling.”^[37] “When I seek another word for music I never find any other word than Venice. I do not know how to distinguish between tears and music—I do not know how to think of happiness, of the south, without a shudder of faintheartedness.”³⁸ This music of Venice is for him, as it was for Goethe in his *Italian Journey*, the “Song of the Gondolier” that his soul wished to sing, the cry of the solitary soul who does not know whether another soul will respond to his cry.^[39]

strangely enough, the first that I learned of him, gave me once and for all my concept, my taste of ‘Goethe.’ An autumnal feeling, transfigured into purity, in enjoyment and allowing things to grow ripe, in waiting, an October sun rising up into the spiritual heights; something golden, something that sweetens, something mild, not marble—that is what I call Goethean. Later I absorbed, on account of this concept of ‘Goethe,’ Adalbert Stifter’s *Nachsommer* with a highly favourable disposition: basically it is the only German book after Goethe that has a magic effect on me.”

34 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 206 [*Dionysos-Dithyramben*, “Die Sonne sinkt”; *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Anvil Press, 1984), “The Sun Sinks,” p. 51].

35 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 218 [*Ecce Homo*, “Twilight of the Idols,” §3; trans. Hollingdale, p. 88; KSA 6, 356].

36 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 222.

37 [Nietzsche’s letter to Overbeck of 24 March 1887; KSB 8, 47; and his letter to Carl Fuchs of 14 April 1888; KSB 8, 294. Cited in Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 225.]

38 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 342 [*Ecce Homo*, “Why I am so clever,” §7, trans. Hollingdale, p. 32; KSA 6, 291].

39 [See the poem at the end of this section of *Ecce Homo*.]

The idea of Zarathustra came to Nietzsche's mind in two places, both symbolic for him: one is the Engadine, more precisely along Lake Silvaplana, next to an enormous block of rock, not far from Surlei; the other is the bay of Rapallo, dominated by the promontory of *Portofino*. It is not by chance that Nietzsche emphasizes this detail, because, for him, Portofino is a symbol of the art of ending things. "The best [musicians] of the second rank always become restless as the end approaches and do not manage to slope into the sea in such profound and calm harmony as, for example, the mountains at Portofino—where the bay of Genoa ends its melody."⁴⁰ The art of knowing how to finish was Nietzsche's great art: knowing how to finish his aphorisms, which offer new views when they fall, also knowing how to finish an entire world that ends up with him, to launch, at this very end, an appeal toward the Ocean of the Future.

The last three final chapters—*Prophecy*, *Socrates*, *Eleusis*—are closely linked, because they touch upon three aspects of the mission with which Nietzsche believed he had been charged: annunciation, pedagogy, and mystery.

In his chapter on *Prophecy*, Bertram traces the different stages that Nietzsche went through as he became aware of his vocation: his childhood and his youth, then his encounter with Wagner, that initial annunciation that took the form of *The Birth of Tragedy*. The revelation of his mission gradually took form, until it became a blinding flash at the time of *Zarathustra*: an awareness of a millennial mission, making him forever a man of predestination and solitude, a consciousness that erupts in his ecstatic glorification of the destiny that gave him this vocation, but also a consciousness of the sin, of the *hybris* he is committing in acclaiming himself as a prophet, and, finally, a consciousness of the tragic end that will be the punishment for this *hybris*: "I am a prophet of the lightning: [...] this lightning is called Superman." "A flash of lightning, Dionysos becomes visible in emerald beauty"⁴¹. Dionysos, the god of becoming!

The book's culmination is the chapter devoted to *Socrates*. Many pages have prepared and announced it, particularly the chapters entitled *Arion* and *Music*. Socrates, Nietzsche's mask, whom he pursues with his amorous hatred. What he hates in Socrates is the theoretician, the critic, and the moralist inherent in Nietzsche. Yet he is nostalgic for the musical Socrates evoked in the *Phaedo*. In particular, Socrates is a name and symbol for Nietzsche's burning nostalgia for being the Great Educator. His pedagogical ideal is that of Plato's Socrates, of education in an atmosphere of love. He dreams of a new Platonic Academy, of a "Community of the Elect." In the Nietzschean description of the great educator, moreover, we find the theme of concealment that we encountered in the context of the figure of the *Mask*. The great educator never says what he thinks. Like that of Socrates, his greatness manifests itself in silence. Nietzsche's drama consists in the fact he himself was a master without disciples, but his triumph lies in his projection of his Socratic myth, his singing Socrates, onto the gigantic figure of Zarathustra, the Dionysian educator. And, mysteriously, as in Plato's *Symposium*, the figure of Nietzsche's Socrates comes

40 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 234 [*The Gay Science*, §281; trans. Kaufmann, p. 227; KSA 3, 525].

41 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 259 [*Zarathustra, Prologue*, §4, in Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p. 45; KSA 4, 18; and "Klage der Ariadne"; "Ariadne's Complaint," in *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*, trans. Hollingdale, p. 59; KSA 6, 401].

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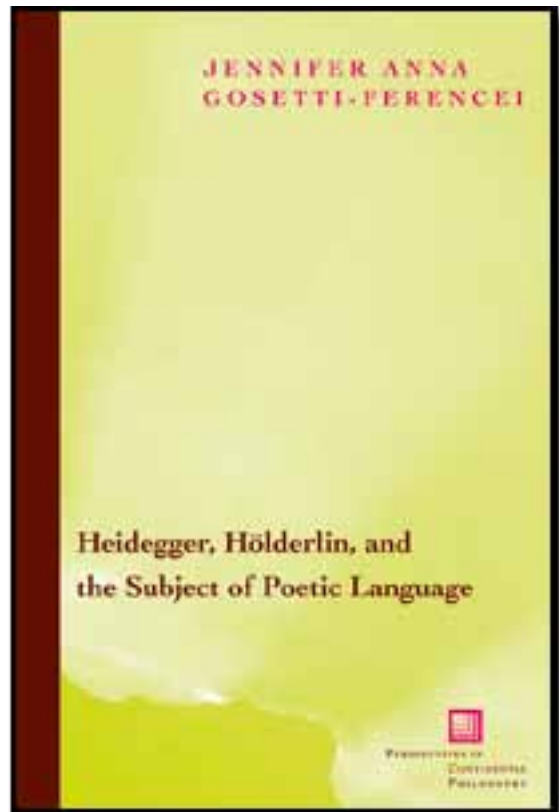
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to coincide with the figure of Dionysos, in the hymn to the Genius of the Heart, “the tempter-god whose voice knows how to descend into the netherworld of every soul.”⁴²

Eleusis (which is not a symbol explicitly used by Nietzsche) evokes the initiations into the mysteries of ancient Greece, whose secrets it was forbidden to reveal. Here, once again, Bertram traces Nietzsche’s itinerary throughout his life, torn between the rationalist thirst for “knowledge” and communication, and the experience of the ineffable mystery. Even at his most rationalist and sceptical, one always finds in Nietzsche the theme of the mortal danger of knowledge, and a concern to conceal it beneath the veils of myth, and to respect mystery. At the high-point of his intellectualist period, he inscribed the following dedication into a copy of *Daybreak*: “Whoever will have much to proclaim one day, / Must long remain silent unto himself: / Whoever intends to ignite lightning one day, / Must long be—a cloud.”^[43] Words cannot express what is accessible only through the experience and suffering one has gone through: Aristotle said that the initiates of Eleusis did not learn, but they “experienced,” or they “suffered.”^[44] Nietzsche’s itinerary thus leads up to an ultimate ineffable experience.

The Legend

As I have said, Bertram’s book is, above all, a work of art. It is a kind of prose poem, written in a lyrical, even hieratic style in which Nietzschean myths and symbols reflect and tinge one another, in a way that is simultaneously musical and plastic.

In his *Introduction*, entitled *Legend*, Bertram justifies the “mythological” method he employed in writing his work. In fact, and we shall return to this point, it is true that, in a certain sense, the method defined in the introduction is not quite the one he actually applies. Nevertheless, the considerations he develops in this way at the beginning of his book are extremely significant.

For him, real history (he is thinking in particular of literary history) is the history of souls, and the revelation of souls. This being the case, history can never be a pure statement of fact. All history is interpretation. What subsists of the past is never life itself, but its “legend.” This is particularly true in the history of individuals. Biography is always, in some way or another, hagiography. Only in a legendary form

42 [See *Beyond Good and Evil*, §295; *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968): 423; KSA 5, 237. Cited in Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 284.] [Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 147ff.]

43 [Inscribed into August Bungert’s copy of *Daybreak* in Genoa on 14 March 1883; KSB 8, 597. Cited in Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 300.]

44 [See Synesius, *Dio*, 10.48a, citing Aristotle: “As Aristotle claims that those who are being initiated into the mysteries are to be expected not to learn anything but to suffer some change, to be put into a certain condition, i.e., to be fitted for some purpose” (*The Works of Aristotle*, ed. Sir David Ross, vol. 12, *Select Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), “Fragments on Philosophy,” no. 15, p. 87; cf. Synesius of Cyrene, *The Essays and Hymns*, trans. Augustine Fitzgerald, 2 vols. (Oxford; London: Oxford University Press; Humphrey Milford, 1930): vol. 1, p. 163. For further discussion, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical* [*Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*] [1977], trans. John Raffan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 286: “Aristotle states, however, that the important thing was not to learn anything but to suffer or experience (*pathein*) and to be brought into the appropriate state of mind through the proceedings.” Cf. Bertram’s discussion in *Nietzsche*, p. 300.]

can a personality be prolonged beyond time. It lives, it survives, it wants to become an image, an image with its own life that gradually transforms itself over time. Each generation adds to this image and, in a sense, a “great man” is always our creation, just as much as we are his. Thus history is the active creation of images, not the reproduction and conservation of what has been.

True history is thus poetry, or literary creation. This does not mean that history is the arbitrary invention of images and myths, but that it is necessarily mythic and poetic, because it emanates from its object—here, Bertram is always thinking of great men and of Nietzsche—, a force that shapes its own body and its posthumous image, its legend and its myth.

The image of Nietzsche that Bertram presents in his book thus corresponds to a moment in the history of his myth, to the vision one could have of Nietzsche from the perspective of the beginning of the twentieth century. It does not claim that, in the future, there will not be “any higher stage of his future legend, any deeper myth of his being.”⁴⁵

From all these statements of principle, we should first of all retain the last one. His portrait of the author of *Zarathustra* is—as Bertram is perfectly well aware— closely linked to a particular epoch and environment (which, as we shall see, exercised a very strong influence on his work, and which, as Bertram himself came to believe, was ultimately harmful).⁴⁶ Yet unlike what sometimes happens to those of our contemporaries who, like Bertram, doubt the possibility of historical objectivity, he avoids considering his exegesis as a definitive and final explanation, for he does not forget that each moment in the evolution of the myth is only provisional.

Secondly, it could be said that these initial statements do not correspond precisely to the book’s method. No doubt, to some extent, Bertram describes the myth of Nietzsche as it was conceived and experienced in the circle around Stefan George, which is indeed a moment in the history of the Nietzsche myth. Yet if this perspective, this vision, which is linked, so to speak, to a particular time and place, leads Bertram to privilege certain aspects of Nietzsche’s personality over others, they do not explain the peculiar structure of the book, each chapter of which is situated at a different observation point, in an attempt to grasp the whole of Nietzsche’s personality, in each of the myths or symbols that pertain to his very being. Here, the word “myth” does not have exactly the same meaning as in the *Introduction*, where Bertram uses it as a synonym for “legend.” It refers instead to images which, for Nietzsche, are, in Bertram’s expression, “points of crystallization,”⁴⁷ whether they be historical or mythological figures, cities or landscapes. From this perspective, there is something “psychoanalytic” about Bertram’s method, in the broadest sense of the term. It is an exploration of the Nietzschean “imaginary.” I mean by this that Bertram is trying to circumscribe the Nietzschean personality, by analyzing everything that crystallizes around the symbols, images, figures, and tones (for instance, that of autumn) that fascinate him and have become, in some sense, a part of himself. Ever since Bertram, literary criticism has accustomed us this kind of approach. At his time, however, it was an entirely new procedure, which could moreover be entirely justified

45 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 9.

46 See Bertram’s letter to Ernst Glöckner of 2 April 1918, in Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 205-06.

47 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 267.

by the particular nature of the Nietzschean soul, for which each idea is transformed into sensual emotion and imaginative vision. Thus, to give just one example, Nietzsche does not hesitate to speak of “the taste of Goethe,”⁴⁸ which, for him, is that of an October sun, of gold and honey. And his thought is dominated by images laden with emotion, such as the North and the South, or the Eternal Recurrence, or the Superman, whose precursors are the great figures of humanity, images that are “mythologized,” so to speak, by his visionary thought, even when he wants to be critical and rationalist. Added to this is his need to mask himself behind the figures with which he identifies, such as those of Socrates and Goethe, or to create a legend out of himself, in his lifetime. Bertram was therefore perfectly right to try and analyze these foundational images, these symbols, masks, and myths, which imposed themselves upon the Nietzschean soul. He did not succumb to the easy option, which would have been to concentrate above all on the myths that are, so to speak, self-evident, such as Dionysos, the Eternal Recurrence, or the Superman, but he tried to detect the less noticeable symbols, which reveal the essence of his personality. Some titles, as we have said, are not particularly felicitous, because they do not belong to Nietzsche’s vocabulary, as is the case with *Arion*, *Philoctetes*, and *Judas*, but the realities they symbolize—music, suffering, betrayal—are eminently Nietzschean. Bertram also had the great merit of choosing these symbols while situating them within the German tradition that anticipated them. It too is evoked both in the texts placed as epigraphs at the head of each chapter, and in the analysis that develops the meaning of these symbols. Yet this “psychoanalysis” lacks, among other things, one essential element: the figure of the female, and Nietzsche’s attitude toward women. There should have been a chapter that could have been entitled *Ariadne*, because of the note sent by Nietzsche, on the brink of madness, to Cosima Wagner: “Ariadne, I love you. Dionysos,”⁴⁹ and because of the extraordinary *Ariadne’s Lament* that features in the *Dithyrambs of Dionysos*. This lacuna may be explained by Bertram’s own homosexual tendencies, and by the climate that prevailed in the circle around Stefan George, which influenced him.

The methodological principles set out at the beginning of the book thus do not entirely explain its structure. According to the Introduction, the “Attempt at a Mythology” mentioned in the book’s subtitle should have presented the state of the Nietzsche legend at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁰ Yet the nineteen chapters that make up the book actually present Nietzsche’s inner mythology, although the choice of symbols is influenced in part by the Nietzsche myth in the George Circle.

Nevertheless, Bertram’s theory of biography and literary history, as set out in the *Introduction*, deserves our attention. According to Bertram, as we said, it is impossible to resurrect the past. To write history is in fact to describe the life and the survival, present and actual, of the past, both in us and in collective consciousness. The observer’s viewpoint is part of the description. In a lecture given in Bonn in 1919-1920, Bertram applied to history what Goethe said of nature: “In speaking of nature,

48 See above [note 33], *Nachlass* of October-November 1888.

49 [See Nietzsche’s letter to Cosima Wagner of early January 1889; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1966): vol. 3, p. 1350.]

50 [Cf. “Introduction,” p. 6: “The following pages are intended to provide studies toward a mythology [...] of the last great German, to record some of what the historical moment of our present seems to see in and as Nietzsche.”]

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each person speaks only of himself.”⁵¹

This idea that perfect historical objectivity is impossible should not be too surprising for our contemporaries; I expect they have read Raymond Aron’s *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: Essay on the Limits of Historical Objectivity*,⁵² a book from which I should like to cite a few phrases to show their kinship to the views expressed by Bertram twenty years earlier: “All spiritual activity fits into a tradition in and by which the individual defines himself [...] Every age chooses for itself a past, drawing on the collective reservoir, each new existence transfigures the inheritance it has received, by giving it another future, another significance [...] This explains how masterworks are enriched by the admiration of the ages. It explains why no fact, as long it is not purely material, is definitively excluded from the actuality.”⁵³ “For human beings, there is no truth of an existence. Each interpreter composes an image, and only God could discern the unity of a final will.”⁵⁴

Bertram’s theses belong, in fact, to a long history about which we shall have more to say. For the moment, let us say that this critique of historical objectivity does not authorize the historian to interpret facts arbitrarily. Bertram states this more clearly in the lecture cited above: writing history is always an act of literary creation, but one “which assumes as its subject-matter the tradition of facts, a tradition subjected to the most conscientious research and attempts at verification. It is a literary creation which has gone through the historical school of the nineteenth century and which restricts itself, aware of its limitations, to the facts attested by tradition and proven by the most rigorous attempts at critical verification, but which moves within this limitation [...] like Bach does in his counterpoint: very freely. It is a writing of history that ultimately has the right to return to this spiritual attitude which, according to Goethe, constitutes the real, unique value of history: enthusiasm.”⁵⁵

Let us salute in passing this homage to the great historical school of the nineteenth century, and to the kind of indispensable training that it represents, on which our contemporaries would do well to meditate; and let us note that Bertram by no means had contempt for the concern for accuracy.

It must be admitted that, in his book on Nietzsche, Bertram constantly strives to back up his affirmations by texts (his book is, moreover, a sort of Nietzschean breviary), without trying to force their sense or over-interpret them. Rather, his method consists in drawing from this material a magnificent literary work, a veritable

51 Part of this lecture is reproduced in the *Nachwort* added by Hartmut Buchner to his new edition of Ernst Bertram’s German text, in *Nietzsche*, Bonn: Bouvier, 9th [and 10th] edn, 1985, pp. 403-04. [Cf. Goethe’s letter to C. L. F. Schultz of 8 January 1819: *Jeder spricht nur sich selbst aus, indem er von der Natur spricht*. This passage is also cited in Georg Simmel, *Goethe* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1913): 36, and Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, vol. 1, *Gestalt und Wirklichkeit* (Munich: Beck, 1920): 137.]

52 Raymond Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1938, p. 103.

53 This had already been stated by Jacob Burckhardt, as summarized by Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 8: “Thucydides may have reported a fact of the first importance that will be noticed only a hundred years from now” [cf. Jacob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*, Introduction; and *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*].

54 Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l’histoire*, p. 112.

55 In Buchner, “Nachwort des Herausgebers,” p. 404.

prose poem, which he offers to the memory of Nietzsche as a great creator.

By demanding that the historian write not merely a “scientific” but also a literary work, Bertram wanted him to engage, in a personal way, in a creative effort, which would express the life of the historical object in a consciousness that is itself historical. For him, a seemingly objective and impartial report is not sufficient to enable us to know reality. One must coincide internally with the spiritual life of historical reality through the creation of a literary work, itself endowed with spiritual life, and capable of provoking enthusiasm and emotion.

The circle of Stefan George

Although Bertram himself never used the word, his historical method nevertheless implies, as we have seen, the idea of the *historicity* of interpretations. He admits that the image of Nietzsche he presents is “the image of the moment in which his myth appears to us to be standing at present.”⁵⁶ It is therefore legitimate, and even necessary, to resituate Bertram’s book, too, within its historical and spiritual context.

Bertram’s *Nietzsche* is dedicated “To my friend Ernst Glöckner,” and this is full of significance.

It was Glöckner who had been at the origin of the book. It was he who, on 5 April 1915, because of his concern for Bertram’s state of health, had advised him to undertake a great work: “Not a scientific book, but a book of life, in which *you will write yourself*”—(already the “writing of the self” of Michel Foucault!)—“as is the case with all books, if they have any real value [...] There is a topic for which you are as if it were predestined: Nietzsche.” And a few lines later, Glöckner returns to the same exhortation: “Write yourself and you will write the best book about Nietzsche.”⁵⁷

Bertram, 22 years old, had met Ernst Glöckner, aged 21, in 1906. It was the beginning of a long friendship, and an enduring love: their correspondence, sometimes daily, which lasted from 1907 to 1934, the date of Glöckner’s death, consists of some five thousand letters.⁵⁸ In 1927, Bertram refused an appointment to the Chair of the History of Literature at the University of Munich, in order to be able to realize his dream of a life shared with Glöckner in Cologne.⁵⁹ The latter is described by a contemporary as follows: “Doctor Glöckner is a curious, monk-like figure, who earns his living by producing works of calligraphy and who belongs to the circle of Stefan George.”⁶⁰

56 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 61.

57 Some letters by Ernst Glöckner to Ernst Bertram are reproduced in Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 171-213. [Here cited from p. 184.]

58 On the relationship between Ernst Glöckner and Ernst Bertram, see the *Nachwort* by Inge Jens, placed at the end of the German edition, with a commentary by the same author, of Thomas Mann’s letters to Bertram (*Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram: Briefe aus den Jahren 1910-1955*, pp. 291-307), and the correspondence between Ernst Glöckner and Ernst Bertram in Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 171-213.

59 See Jens, “Nachwort,” pp. 297-298.

60 Cited in Kurt Hildebrandt, *Das Werk Stefan Georges* (Hamburg: E. Hauswedell, 1960): 419.

It was thanks to Glöckner that Bertram met Stefan George, who was, moreover, already familiar with Bertram's poems, in 1910.

Who, then, was this Stefan George (1868-1933)? For the history of literature, he was a poet who, in his time, was considered a very great poet. But he was also an unusual personality, who had an extensive influence and who, through the intermediary of his "circle," or his group of admirers, exercised a considerable influence, in terms of literature, scholarship, and politics, on the whole of Germany in the twentieth century. The signs of this influence are still visible today. In 1983, for example, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death, a symposium was held by the Heidelberg Academy, devoted precisely to Stefan George's impact on scholarship, either directly or through such disciples as Friedrich Gundolf or Max Kommerell. For instance, Hans-Georg Gadamer evoked his studies in Marburg, and his repeated encounters there with the work and thought of Stefan George, through such personages as Ernst Robert Curtius, Friedrich Wolters, and Paul Friedländer, whose pupils included Friedrich Klingner and Georg Rohde.⁶¹ In Frankfurt, the same influence could be discerned in Karl Reinhardt, Walter F. Otto and, in particular, Max Kommerell. It was then, particularly between the two wars, that Germany rediscovered Hölderlin, thanks to the work of a young poet, Hellingrath, who died at the front in the First World War, and who also belonged to George's movement. Nor was Gadamer's teacher Martin Heidegger a stranger to the general admiration for Stefan George. According to Gadamer, this movement produced a profound transformation in approach to history, philology, and even other disciplines.

In his youth (1889), Stefan George had been closely linked to the French Symbolist movement, and he had come under the influence of Mallarmé in particular. One of his central ideas seems to have been rooted in this experience: the key rôle of language, understood as it were in its own right, independent of its communicative function, as a sacred incantatory power.⁶² "The poet," as Maurice Boucher has written about George, "will have to recreate language, giving a purer meaning to the words of the tribe, choosing and assembling them to create multiple evocations, an allusive density laden with mysteries, secret correspondences, and magical prolongations [...] Poetry will thus be the work of an elite who, in their haughty solitude, will not speak for the crowd at all, but will elaborate, among an inner circle of initiates, an erudite polyphony where the voices of thinkers and priests shall mingle."⁶³

In *The Year of the Soul* [*Das Jahr der Seele*], published in 1897, one can discern "the subtle influence" of Ida Coblentz, the only woman whom George ever

61 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Stefan George (1868-1933)," in *Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft: Ein Symposium*, ed. Hans-Joachim Zimmermann [Supplemente zu den Sitzungsberichten der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, 1984, vol. 4] (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1985): 39-49 [cited here from "Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft," in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 9, *Ästhetik und Poetik II: Hermeneutik im Vollzug* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993): 258-270]; here, pp. 39-42 [i.e., pp. 258-262].

62 Gadamer, "Stefan George (1868-1933)," p. 45 ["Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft," pp. 259-60].

63 See Maurice Boucher, "Preface," in Stefan George, *Poèmes 1886-1933*, trans. with preface and commentary by Maurice Boucher (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1969): 32. [Cf. Mallarmé's poem "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe," which includes the line *Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu*; Stéphane Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Gallimard, 1945): 70.] See also Charles du Bos, "Maquettes pour un hommage à Stefan George" [1926; pub. 1928], in *Approximations* (Paris: Éditions des Syrtes, 2000): 857-88.

loved, but with whom he had quickly broken up.⁶⁴ In the years that followed, Stefan George sought to increase his influence by becoming the center of a literary circle, in which he often liked to read his works, as if reciting psalms, before the members. This was also the moment in which his sentimental life became firmly oriented towards homosexuality. 1901 saw the official publication of the collection entitled *The Carpet of Life* [*Der Teppich des Lebens*]. This was the time of the “cosmic” circle in the Schwabing district of Munich (around 1903), which brought together such figures as Klages, Schuler, Wolfskehl (the organizer of the circle), and Gundolf, until it broke up in 1904. 1904 also witnessed the death, at the age of 16, of Maximilian Kronberger, the young man who had been the object of George’s passionate and apparently completely “Platonic” love. This love is evoked in the collection entitled *The Seventh Ring* [*Der siebente Ring*] (1907), which practically divinized the dead youth, under the name of Maximin. In a diary entry of 2 August 1928, Charles du Bos speaks of “this new, sacrilegious mystery of Incarnation” that organized itself around “Maximin.”^[65]

As Michael Winkler has observed, the collapse of the Munich circle, along with other symptoms, shows how this group of friends, originally conceived as a poetic circle, had ended in failure. No doubt, George’s admirers continued to meet, whether in Berlin, Bingen, or Heidelberg. Nevertheless, “George henceforth saw himself obliged to try to obtain the influence he still hoped to exert on the intellectual life of Germany primarily through the scholarly works of his friends.”⁶⁶

Gundolf and Wolters then founded the *Jahrbuch für die geistige Bewegung* (1910). Above all, however, the following years saw the publication of a series of monographs (*Werke der Wissenschaft aus dem Kreis der Blätter für die Kunst*), works by people close to or sympathetic to Stefan George, that helped disseminate the master’s ideas into university scholarship.⁶⁷ In particular, these books included those by Heinrich Friedemann on Plato (1914), by Gundolf on Goethe (1916), and later by Kantorowicz on Frederick the II Hohenstaufen (1927).^[68] Bertram’s *Nietzsche*, which Glöckner had advised him to write in 1915, was published in 1918.

As Michael Winkler remarks, these studies shared certain characteristic features, including “an almost exclusive concentration on what was considered exemplary in previous epochs of Western high culture, whose spiritual world may serve for an age lacking direction, as an authoritative model; a striving for monumental unity which, in opposition to analytical perspectivism, unifies the diverse elements of historical reality, adds them together, and raises them to the level of heroic legend and myth.”⁶⁹ One of the most original contributions of George’s thought was the interest it attributed to the notion of ‘form’ (which must be understood in the sense of a whole that transcends its component parts). Hans-Georg Gadamer has placed a

64 For this detail, and those that follow, see Michael Winkler, *Stefan George* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1970): 29 ff.

65 [See Charles du Bos, *Journal*, vol. 4, 1928 (Paris: Corrêa, 1950): 159.]

66 Winkler, *Stefan George*, p. 53.

67 See the book (with a bibliography) by Michael Winkler, *George-Kreis* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1972).

68 [See Heinrich Friedemann, *Platon: Seine Gestalt* (Berlin: Blätter für die Kunst, 1914); Friedrich Gundolf, *Goethe* (Berlin: Bondi, 1916); Ernst Kantorowicz, *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite* (Berlin: Bondi, 1927).]

69 Winkler, *George-Kreis*, p. 94.

Pierre

Hadot

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great deal of emphasis on this point, describing the works arising from George's circle as *Gestaltbiographien*, or "biographies of Form,"⁷⁰ because instead of reducing works and actions to simple sequences of events and to a sum of historical influences, they see them as 'forms' that find their unity within themselves.

It was precisely in 1910, when Stefan George was giving this fresh impetus to his followers, that Bertram met the author of *The Seventh Ring*, and from 1915 on his project of writing a book on Nietzsche was integrated within the group's intellectual and "university" project, as outlined above. A letter from Bertram to Thomas Mann, dated 5 June 1916, attests to the admiration he felt in the presence of the Master: "The sight of a man who realizes his potential so completely and fearlessly, and who embodies the great *amor fati* as no one, so far as I know, after Nietzsche has ever done, is always something that gives one heart."⁷¹

Valuable testimony about the composition of the work and the reactions of Glöckner, Gundolf, and George can be found in the extracts of correspondence published by Heinz Raschel.⁷² Glöckner, who had been at the origin of the project, sees everything, with considerable naivety, from the perspective of the cult he himself renders to Stefan George, and he is enthusiastic. On 3 January 1918, he writes that the chapter *Prophecy* had made a deep impression on him, and that this chapter will certainly have a tremendous effect on George. "It is almost as if the latter's life is being told here under someone else's name, the whole of his being that is essentially interpreted." He thinks the title that Bertram wanted to give to his book, "The Music of Socrates," is just as excellent. In his letter of 17 February 1918, Glöckner foresees that George will no doubt be less enthusiastic about the chapter *Socrates*, because he has never been happy with Nietzsche's position with regard to Socrates. Eventually, however, on 1 March 1918, he writes that George is satisfied with the chapter, and regards it as being of central importance.

Gundolf, for his part, voices several criticisms.⁷³ He completely refuses to accept the title "The Music of Socrates", on the grounds it makes no commercial sense (6 February 1918). And he asks questions: Is it really true that Nietzsche never strikes a theatrical pose? Isn't the role of the mask somewhat exaggerated? (25 February 1918). Again, he makes the following remark, which gives an accurate reflection of the arrogance of the circle's members: it is impossible to cite in connection with Nietzsche an author such as Dehmel, or such ephemeral writers as Thomas Mann, Fontane, or Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (29 March 1918). Bertram stuck to his guns, here, and eliminated only Richard Dehmel. In his letters to George, Gundolf shares his reflections on the book and on Nietzsche himself. He likes the book (22 February 1918), but Nietzsche's attitude as it emerges throughout the book, this "monomania" that leads him to engage in ceaseless self-contradiction and constantly to question what he has established, is a real torture for Gundolf. When Gundolf reproaches Nietzsche his big mouth, this amounts to an implicit criticism of the book's final chapter (*Eleusis*): "Nietzsche was never able to keep a secret." "What a difference

70 Gadamer, "Stefan George (1868-1933)," p. 43 ["Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft," p. 263].

71 See Thomas Mann to Ernst Bertram, ed. Jens, pp. 217-18.

72 Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 171-213.

73 See also Gundolf's personal notes on Bertram's book, in Lothar Helbing and Claus Victor Bock (eds), *Stefan George: Dokumente seiner Wirkung aus dem Friedrich Gundolf Archiv der Universität London* (Amsterdam: Castrum Peregrini, 1984): 16-18.

from Goethe [...], who either speaks plainly [...] or falls silent in the face of what is inexplicable." Nietzsche is by no means non-theatrical, "he is always looking at how he strikes a pose," "he never lives without a mirror" (this is aimed at the beginning of the chapter *Mask*).

Reservations with regard to Stefan George and the ambiance surrounding him surface repeatedly in Bertram's letters to Glöckner. For him (28 October 1915), Heinrich Friedemann's book on Plato is unreadable, because it is written "in the jargon of the *Blätter*" (the series inspired by George). When reading the chapter *Claude Lorrain* out to George, he senses that the Master does not seem enthusiastic (27 March 1917). We learn from his letter of 31 December 1917 that Bertram intended to write, but never completed, two other chapters: *Tower of Babel* and *Rhythm*. On 6 January 1918, there is a tone of regret: "There is too much George in this book, I fear, but I could not help it, even though I saw this from the outset." It matters little: what counts for Bertram is what he expresses in his letter of 9 January 1918: "Thank you, my dear friend of my heart, for having given me the possibility of finishing this work and so giving *you* a cause for joy. *Your joy*, it is in your joy that the value of this work resides." With regard to the chapter *Judas*, Bertram (28 January 1918) makes an interesting remark about the autonomy of what he calls legend and myth: "That the legend [of Judas] 'exists,' and that it existed independently before the composition of the book, is quite sufficient; the fact that the author of the book is a poet is irrelevant." From March 1918 on, the letters mainly concern the problem of publication. On 2 April 1918, Bertram is worried: "It seems that the obstacles to printing have had and continue to have less to do with the printer, Bondi, than with the fact that the manuscript had not entirely been sifted through by the censors [of George and his circle, and that Bondi does not have the right to print anything that has not been completely approved. I am always under suspicion of some heretical deviation." And he again expresses the fear of having falsified the problem of Nietzsche by mixing in too much George.

After publication, Bertram bitterly notes (23 November 1919): "George, after the fact, has never forgiven the *Nietzsche* [...] There are too many things in this book that he will not and cannot accept." "I shall never forget this experience: perhaps the Master himself can be a Judas." Finally, the definitive judgment is pronounced on 13 June 1924: "The 'circle' has been the greatest delusion of my life [...]."

Considering the ambivalent and complex feelings of the different protagonists in this story, how should we define the relation that existed between Bertram's book and the circle of Stefan George? Should we consider, with Heinz Raschel,⁷⁴ that the influence exerted on the book by the poet of the *Seventh Ring* was considerable and ultimately detrimental, as was George's influence on German scholarship in general? Or else, on the contrary, should we, with Hartmut Buchner⁷⁵ and Inge Jens,⁷⁶ emphasize Bertram's independence with regard to George, and the deep differences of opinion between the author of *Nietzsche* and the circle? Should we, finally, with Hans-Georg Gadamer, judge that George's ideas had a positive influence on the development of research in the humanities?⁷⁷

74 Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 153-70.

75 Buchner, "Nachwort des Herausgebers," pp. 409-10.

76 Jens, "Nachwort," pp. 300-06.

77 Gadamer, "Stefan George (1868-1933)," pp. 39-49 ["Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf

To begin with, it should be acknowledged that Stefan George is already present in Bertram's book, in the form of some highly significant quotations from George's poems. In the Introduction,⁷⁸ first of all, there appear (anonymously) some verses from *Jahrhundertspruch*, a poem from *The Seventh Ring*, "Ten thousand die without a sound ..." [⁷⁹], lines that are very difficult to interpret. Charles du Bos, who cites them in his *Sketches for an Homage to Stefan George*, seems to think that only the Founder, the Prophet (*Künder*), hence the Poet, creates language.⁸⁰ Bertram, for his part, seems to see in the "ten thousand" "the crowd of the humble who die without glory," while the great king (or the great poet) bequeaths *his* name to posterity, becoming a representative figure, God's prophet for the age. George was obviously thought to be the Founder, Poet, and Prophet within his circle. In addition, the chapters *Arion* and *Socrates*⁸¹ quote the last verses of the poem *Nietzsche*, taken from the *Seventh Ring*, which express George's attitude toward Nietzsche ("And when the austere and tormented voice...", "There is no path that leads over the icy cliffs...").⁸² They express themes that are indeed taken up in Bertram's book:

die Wissenschaft"], pp. 258-70.

78 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 8.

79 [Cf. the poem:

Zehntausend sterben ohne klang: der Gründer
Nur gibt den namen .. für zehntausend münder
Hält einer nur das maass. In jeder ewe
Ist nur ein gott und einer nur sein künder.

("Jahrhundertspruch," in Stefan George, *Werke*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984): vol. 1, p. 338)

Ten thousand perish wordless, one alone,
The founder, gives the name. One sounds the tone
Ten thousand tongues will sing. Each age has only
One god, and only one proclaims his throne.

("Centenary Lines," in *The Works of Stefan George*, trans. Olga Marx and Ernst Morwitz (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1949): 239).]

80 Du Bos, "Maquettes pour un hommage à Stefan George," [pp. 876-77].

81 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, pp. 89 and 287.

82 [Cf. the final stanza of George's poem:

Der kam zu spät der flehend zu dir sagte:
Dort ist kein weg mehr über eisige felsen
Und horste grauser vögel—nun ist not:
Sich bannen in den kreis den liebe schliesst ..
Und wenn die strenge und gequälte stimme
Dann wie ein loblied tönt in blaue nacht
Und helle flut—so klagt: sie hätte singen
Nicht reden sollen diese neue seele!

("Nietzsche," in Stefan George, *Werke*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984): vol. 1, pp. 231-32 [p. 232].

He came too late who might have pleaded with you:
There is no way across the icy summits
And haunts of ghostly birds—now you must learn
To stay within the circle drawn by love.
And when his voice, austere and full of torment,
Rings like a paeon into azure night
Across the surf—we mourn: It should have chanted,
This first new soul, it never should have spoken.

Translation

Nietzsche was unable to create a “circle of love” around him, that is, he remained without influence, because, unlike the author of *Seventh Ring*, he was not capable of gathering a community around him. Moreover, echoing something Nietzsche himself said about *The Birth of Tragedy*, George seems to want us to believe that Nietzsche seems to regret not having been exclusively a poet: “It should have sung, rather than spoken, this new soul.”^[83]

Heinz Raschel has noted a number of the book’s themes that echo the circle’s representation of Nietzsche.⁸⁴ The most indubitable connection seems to me to be to the image of Nietzsche as someone who, unlike George, lacked disciples, isolated, living without the community indispensable for the influence of a Master. This is Nietzsche’s pedagogical nostalgia, as described in the chapter *Socrates*. On the other hand, I am not sure whether Bertram clearly presents Nietzsche as a precursor of George. When, at the end of the chapter on *Weimar*, it is said that Nietzsche retained “the sense [of] someone who [was] coming [...], whether one calls him the Superman or lends him more human names,”⁸⁵ the use of the plural for “more human names” seems to me to rule out that he had just one person in mind. Bertram’s expressions always remain vague on this point. Could he have seriously considered George as the Superman, the creator of a new world, while criticizing him for his sectarianism and, in the end, his betrayal? When praising him to Thomas Mann,⁸⁶ does he not compare him precisely to Nietzsche, without considering him in the slightest to be someone beyond Nietzsche? Moreover, the Superman is, according to Bertram’s interpretation,⁸⁷ a Platonic Idea, which guides action, but which remains an inaccessible, transcendent goal. How could George have been identified with it? It seems rather that Bertram never really shared his circle’s adoration of the Master, and that, as Hartmut Buchner has observed, it was precisely his aversion to its sectarian spirit that distanced him from Stefan George.

One point that seems to me particularly interesting is the idea of Germany as a new Hellas, or a return to ancient Greece. This, as we have seen, is the theme of *German Becoming*. It was also an idea dear to George, who wanted to recreate divine man, to bring about a “deification of Man” and a “humanization of God,” on the Greek model.⁸⁸ In this regard, he was the heir of a long German tradition that goes back to Winckelmann, Lessing, Voss, Goethe, and Hölderlin, and was, moreover, based on a false representation of Greek life. Under the influence of Winckelmann, the way of life of the Greeks was imagined after the model of the sculptures of classical Greece. Thus arose the myth of Greek serenity, inspired by the silent, immobile bliss of the Greek gods. As Klaus Schneider has shown, these so-called “silent gods” of ancient Greece, of which Hölderlin spoke, were a mere reflection of a conception of divinity

(“Nietzsche,” in *The Works of Stefan George*, trans. Marx and Morwitz, p. 159).]

83 [KSA 1, 15: sie hätte singen sollen, diese “neue Seele”—und nicht reden!]. The phrase can be found in the text “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” placed in 1886-1887 by way of a prologue to the beginning of the book. There is an excellent critique of George’s poem by Raschel in his *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 37-54.

84 Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 149-53.

85 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 169.

86 See above, Bertram’s letter of 5 June 1916.

87 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, pp. 61 and 173-75.

88 Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 168 and 73-84.

inspired by neo-Platonism and Pietism.⁸⁹ This error of perspective continued to have an effect, beyond Stefan George, on the conception of Greek religion proposed by Walter Otto.^[90] Nietzsche, following Jacob Burckhardt,⁹¹ reacted with vigour against this representation of Greek life, insisting on the pessimistic, tragic, and tormented character of the Greek soul. Yet despite his usual variations and contradictions, Nietzsche always remained faithful to the idea that the Germans had as their mission and hope to become “more Greek,” in mind and body, as we see from a text dating from 1885, cited at the end of the chapter on *The German Becoming*.⁹² The theme of the “return to Greece” deserves a highly attentive study.⁹³

It is perhaps in its method that Bertram’s *Nietzsche* comes closest to the theories of the George Circle. Indeed, it represents one of the *Gestaltbiographien* of which Gadamer speaks, and corresponds in its spirit it to the new conception of scholarly research favoured by the circle, and which exercised an influence on the whole of twentieth century German scholarship. Here, moreover, lies the source of the book’s qualities as well as its shortcomings. Its qualities include its meticulous craftsmanship, its monumentality, its poetry, its deep inspiration, and its vibrant sensibility. Yet it has its shortcomings, too, such as its lyrical style, often ponderous, the complete absence of references enabling the reader to identify quotations, and its massive and unverified claims in the field of the history of ancient religions.

Yet what should one think, in general, of the value of the scholarly method embraced by the George Circle? Heinz Raschel has subjected it to a vigorous critique on the basis of one particularly well-chosen example: the representation of Nietzsche held by the members of this inner circle.⁹⁴ The picture painted by Raschel is quite appalling, and even frightening. As far as Bertram himself is concerned, however, it seems to me that Raschel has not sufficiently brought out his originality and his independence with regard to the official doctrine espoused by the circle. This is why George and Gundolf never forgave him for his book.

Let us return to the question: what should one make, in general, of the value of the scholarly method inspired by George? Hans-Georg Gadamer seems to think that the reaction against the historical method of the nineteenth century that developed around George had a beneficial influence on German scholarship.⁹⁵ We must distinguish, Gadamer remarks, between two senses of the word “history.” On the one hand, the history criticized by the George circle is what one might call historicism, understood as an attitude that the historian can exclude from his historical vision

89 Klaus Schneider, *Die schweigenden Götter: Eine Studie zur Gottesvorstellung des religiösen Platonismus* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1966): 1-13 and 100-03.

90 [The German classical philologist Walter F. Otto (1874-1958) wrote numerous studies of classical literature and ancient mythology.]

91 See Charles Andler, *Nietzsche, sa vie et sa pensée, vol. 1, Les précurseurs de Nietzsche* (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1920): 194-210 [see note 130 below].

92 [Bertram, *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie*, p. 99.] Cf. *Nachlass*, August-September 1885; KSA 11, 41[4], 679.

93 In addition to the works cited above and their bibliographies, one may also consult E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany: A Study of the Influence exercised by Greek Art and Poetry over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1935).

94 See Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*.

95 Gadamer, “Stefan George (1868-1933),” p. 46 [“Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft,” pp. 266-67].

both his own life and his own point of view. For the George Circle, historical objectivity is an illusion. Genuine history, in contrast, as practiced in the great biographies that emanate from this inner circle, is a history that sees itself as historical. It is aware of the fact that historical vision implicates within it the very life of the historian, the values to which he is committed, and the present moment in which he thinks. It is thus a historical vision that “edifies,” in the etymological sense of the word, that is, it constructs, enriches, communicates enthusiasm, and ultimately has a formative pedagogical value. This vision appropriates the legacy of the past in an existential way—Gadamer uses the term “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*)⁹⁶—a fusion that takes place between the historical horizon and the horizon of the present.

Gadamer implies, moreover, that if pedagogical concerns were of such importance in these conceptions proper to the ambience of George’s circle, it was because they were reviving, as it were, the experience of the Platonic Academy—the living dialogue between master and disciple. This also explains, in his view, the renewal of Platonic studies that took place thanks to the circle’s work, particularly of Paul Friedländer. On this point I must nevertheless say that there seems to me to be a huge gap between the Platonic Academy, where Plato was merely the *primus inter pares*, and where discussion was free and open, and the *milieu* of George, where he would pontificate in front of submissive admirers, upon whom he imposed his judgments and his will.⁹⁷

Be that as it may, here again, as in the case of Germany as the new Hellas, it must be admitted that this conception of history is in fact part of a long tradition, and that it is not as new as one might think. Antiquity was already familiar with this opposition between history as simple curiosity for knowledge, and history as teacher of life, educative and formative. We find this problem in Goethe, in the second of Nietzsche’s *Untimely Reflections*, and in Dilthey, and finally in the philosophers of life (*Lebensphilosophen*). Basically, this tendency was already in the air of the time, as it were.

Gadamer does not hide his sympathy for this “Georgian” conception of history, and his own theory of interpretation was certainly influenced by it. Obviously, I cannot deal with this problem in depth here. Perhaps, however, I may offer a reflection inspired by more than forty years’ experience of historical and philological work.

That the historian is himself an historical being, that the past can only be thought in the present, by a living being who necessarily has a particular perspective: all of this is hard to deny. That it is a matter of existential urgency to give a personal, living, formative sense to our enquiries into the past—this is what historians and philosophers of Antiquity had long taught. To understand this, it suffices to read Plutarch’s *Lives*, or to think of the resonance they found in Montaigne and in other thinkers of the Renaissance and of modern times. This pragmatic conception of history had been suppressed by the development of a rigorous historical method,

96 Gadamer “Stefan George (1868-1933),” p. 47 [“Die Wirkung Stefan Georges auf die Wissenschaft,” p. 267. See [on the concept of *Horizontverschmelzung*] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 2 edn (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965): 289, 356 and 375 [*Truth and Method*, trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975): 273, 337 and 358].

97 On this aspect of George’s personality, see Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, pp. 109-18.

the discovery of which honours the nineteenth century, which wanted to do real scholarship, not write hagiography. Unfortunately, however, one witnessed the development, throughout the twentieth century, under the influence of Nietzsche, George, Heidegger, and Gadamer, of certain interpretative *practices* that led to genuine aberrations. Nietzsche's phrase, cited by Bertram in his *Introduction*, is its fundamental principle: "One and the same text permits innumerable interpretations—there is no 'correct' interpretation."⁹⁸ Taking as its starting-point the principle that historical objectivity is an illusion, and that, for various reasons, it is impossible to know what an author meant, and that this is of no importance anyway, since the text must be treated as an autonomous reality, one allowed oneself to take all kinds of liberties in the interpretation of or even in the translation of texts, or, what is more, in their establishment, and this resulted in interpretations that are absolutely phantasmagorical. This is an unfortunate regression to the most artificial and arbitrary procedures of allegory, as they were practiced at the end of Antiquity. If we continue down this road, and if such methods become generally accepted, we will reach the point where we end up cutting ourselves off from our historical roots, and replacing our memory of the past by some fantastic mythology or phraseology. Nietzsche was wrong. We must firmly maintain the opposite principle: "The same text cannot license all interpretations. There are valid interpretations and inadmissible interpretations."

The dangers inherent in these new historical methods, whether advocated by George or by others, thus seem to me to be considerable. In their original intention, however, they represented a salutary reaction against the withering positivism of a purely scholarly attitude. In their intention, moreover, they were, once again, an unconscious regression or return from the scientific method of the 19th century, to the conception of history maintained from Antiquity to the Renaissance, and even down to the modern period. This time, the regression was salutary, insofar as one thus rediscovered, in the guise of new expressions, the idea of a truth that may be achieved only by transforming oneself.⁹⁹

To conclude these reflections, then, let us say that ultimately, the writing of history (probably like every other human activity) should be a *coincidentia oppositorum*, trying to respond to two contrary demands, each as urgent as the other: to perceive and evaluate historical reality, we need, on the one hand, a conscious and complete engagement of the ego, and, on the other, a complete detachment from the ego, a deliberate effort at impartial objectivity. In my view, only the exercise of scientific rigour, that detachment from the self demanded by an objective and impartial judgment, can give us the right to implicate ourselves in history, giving it an existential meaning.

Be that as it may, as we have seen, Bertram himself did not disown the great historical school of the nineteenth century, the school of rigour and precision, and he knew how to combine exactitude with enthusiasm, at least as far as Nietzsche is concerned. From this point of view, too, his Nietzsche does not completely belong to the George Circle.

⁹⁸ Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 5. [Nietzsche, *Nachlass*, Fall 1885-Spring 1886; KSA 12, 1[120], 39.]

⁹⁹ On this conception of truth in ancient times, cf. my book *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* [[*Philosophy as a Way of Life*]] (see note 2). For a critique of certain methods of interpretation, see Ernst H. Gombrich, *Symbolic Images*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Phaidon, 1978): 1-5.

Finally, we may say in conclusion that Bertram's book attests to a certain autonomy with regard to the theories and the demands of the author of the *Seventh Ring*. As Inge Jens has noted, Bertram's conception of art was ultimately very different from that of the Circle.¹⁰⁰ For example, Bertram greatly admired the bourgeois literary genre of the novel, "from Hermann Bang to Thomas Mann."^[101] His literary interests were focused on figures other than those in the "Georgian" pantheon, and he was aware of this. He was, for instance, a passionate fan of Lichtenberg and of Stifter. Taking up a comment made by Hartmut Buchner, I would say that his *Nietzsche* ultimately seems not so much the precursor of George as "the crystallization of many centuries of the history and intellectual destiny of Germany," and "one of the greatest and most influential manifestations in the history of the human mind."¹⁰²

This is probably why Bertram himself could write: "There are too many things in this book that George will not and cannot accept."¹⁰³

Thomas Mann

"The magically seductive Tristan-ambiguity of Venice, a metaphysical ambiguity commingling the closest proximity of death with an ultimate sweetness of life—it is this masqueraded beauty of Venice to which everyone has always succumbed [...] one thinks of Platen's *Venetian Sonnets*, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's 'On the Grand Canal,' or Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*—all instances in which beauty does not, as with Plato, only seduce us to the highest life, but also where it simultaneously, mysteriously simultaneously, must signify a seduction toward death."¹⁰⁴

When he read these lines from *Nietzsche*, Thomas Mann was, as he later wrote, "terrified" to see his name mentioned "in a passage [...] belonging to book that unfolds in such elevated spheres."¹⁰⁵

When Bertram wrote a review of *Königliche Hoheit* [*Royal Highness*], Thomas Mann had begun a correspondence with him on 2 January 1910 (the same year that Bertram first met George). Bertram was nine years younger than Thomas Mann. They had continued to correspond, and then met in Munich, where they played music together. Bertram became the godfather of one of the novelist's daughters: "We were close friends," Katia Mann wrote, "with Ernst Bertram, the Germanist from Bonn who was then living in Munich. He had one foot in the circle of Stefan George, but he admired and had great respect for my husband. As for Stefan George, my husband did not like him at all, all this prophetic pomposity was quite alien to him."¹⁰⁶ This

100 Jens, "Nachwort," p. 303.

101 [Hermann Bang, 1857-1912, was a Danish author and Impressionist writer.]

102 See Buchner, "Nachwort des Herausgebers," p. 410. [The second phrase is a reference to Gottfried Benn's essay "Nietzsche—Nach fünfzig Jahren," see note 134 below.]

103 See Bertram's letter to Glöckner of 23 November 1919; Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, p. 212.

104 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 227.

105 See Mann's letter to Bertram of 21 September 1918 [Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, p. 150; *Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, p. 75].

106 Katia Mann, *Thomas Mann: Souvenirs à bâtons rompus* (Paris: A. Michel, 1975): 66 [translated by Louise Servicen from Katia Mann, *Meine ungeschriebenen Memoiren* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1974): 59].

Pierre
Hadot
translated by:
Paul
Bishop

friendship between Bertram and Mann is, we may note in passing, an additional proof of Bertram's independence from Stefan George, for George hated Thomas Mann so much that he absolutely forbade Ernst Glöckner to have anything to do with the novelist.¹⁰⁷

Thomas Mann and Bertram discussed literature, politics, and above all the books on which they were currently working: Bertram's *Nietzsche* and, in Mann's case, the *Unpolitical Reflections* [*Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*]. They would read each other's chapters, and Mann would often ask Bertram to transmit quotations from Nietzsche to him, particularly ones from the *Nachlass*, which the novelist did not own. This worried Bertram a bit, for he was afraid that, if his book appeared after "Tom's" did, his own quotations would look as if they had been stolen from Thomas Mann.¹⁰⁸ Finally, thanks to Mann's intervention with the publisher Bondi, both books appeared more or less simultaneously, in August and September 1918. In general, Thomas Mann's letters to Bertram are an extremely valuable testimony to the personalities of both Mann and Bertram, and to life in Germany during the First World War and the years after it.

As soon as the book was published, Mann expressed his enthusiasm in a letter to Bertram.¹⁰⁹ He admired "the arrangement of the chapters," "the mixture of philology and music." "Never has an essentially philological approach been handled with such vibrant sensitivity." He loved the chapter on justice. Perhaps he found the beginning of Weimar regrettable, a bit too "psychoanalytic" for his taste.

Mann added: "Every now and then it seems to me [...] to be *my* book, intended for me—for which I give thanks to a benevolent providence." He could detect, he added, a connection between Nietzsche and his own *Reflections*: "I see in it not only their complement, but in some sense their redemption [*Erlösung*], just as, inversely, the truth of your *Legend* finds its confirmation, to a certain extent, in my stammering confessions."^[110] Elsewhere, he called Bertram's book the "sibling" [*Geschwister*] to his *Reflections*.¹¹¹

One also finds interesting entries in Mann's *Diary*: "[...] a book whose qualities are moving"; "[...] it is my book and it discusses what interests me most by far—my central subject, and it discusses it with a love full of passion, of a kind that present-day philology and history cannot rival." He sensed that, in certain passages, Bertram was thinking of him without mentioning him by name. In the light of the book, he noticed the "Greco-Goethean element" present in his own *Felix Krull*. He wrote: "It is reassuring to think that without *Tonio Kröger* and *Death in Venice*, this book would not have been possible, either in certain isolated turns of phrase or in its entirety."¹¹²

107 See Ernst Glöckner's letter to Ernst Bertram, dated 21 August 1921, cited in Jens, "Nachwort," pp. 278-79.

108 See Bertram's letter to Ernst Glöckner of 1 March 1918 [cited in Raschel, *Das Nietzsche-Bild im George-Kreis*, p. 201].

109 See Mann's letter to Bertram of 21 September 1918 [Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, pp. 151-52; *Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, pp. 74-78].

110 [Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, pp. 151-52; *Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, pp. 76-77.]

111 See Thomas Mann's letter to Philipp Witkop of 13 September 1918 [Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, p. 150].

112 [Thomas Mann, *Tagebücher 1918-1921*, ed. Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1979): 5-9].

The statements by Thomas Mann raise a very interesting problem in terms of literary history. Why did he think of Bertram's *Nietzsche* as a "sibling", or, better yet, as the redemption of his *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*? What link can there be between a virtually timeless biography of Nietzsche, and that product of circumstances, his *Reflections*?

As a product of circumstances, Mann's *Reflections* is a huge book,¹¹³ a series of "stammering confessions," as he himself says, that bears little resemblance to the ordered and prestigious monument Bertram erected in honour of Nietzsche. No doubt the *Reflections* bear fascinating witness to Thomas Mann himself, to his personal ideas, his likes and dislikes. But the book is hard to read, full of digressions and disconcerting excursions. It is a product of circumstances, for two reasons. First of all, it is a plea for Germany at war, directed against Allied propaganda. Next, it was a scathing response to an attack by his brother, Heinrich Mann, which had hurt him deeply. In his *Zola*, published in Switzerland in 1915, Heinrich had both taken the side of democratic values defended by the Allies, and attacked Thomas, describing him as a sort of "apolitical" aesthete, living in his ivory tower without caring about the distress of humanity or the welfare of the masses.

For the most part, the *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* develop a theme already sketched in an article (*War Thoughts*) [*Gedanken im Kriege*], published in 1914. The Allies defend democracy and civilization, that is to say, well-being and material comfort, technological progress, which can be the same in all countries. Thomas Mann and Germany, for their part, are defending something higher than civilization, that is to say, culture, or the quality of the soul, proper to each country, which forms and educates individuals, by means of poetry, music, and art. Thomas Mann thus develops, on the basis of this Nietzschean distinction between civilization and culture, an entire critique of that modern civilization which is leading, little by little, to the death of Man *via* the smothering of culture.

Thomas Mann was later the subject of much criticism for the conservative statements that appear throughout the pages of his work. They have been contrasted with the crusade for democracy that Mann undertook after 1933. Yet he always maintained that there was no discontinuity in his views throughout his life. First of all, it is true that the book itself is extremely complex: one senses in its foreword that the author is already distancing himself from his work, treating it with a certain irony. Above all, however, Thomas Mann seems to have remained faithful all his life to what was, for him, the core of the book, apart from the tragic circumstances of the War, as he expressed it in its final pages: "The human question is never, never to be solved politically, but only spiritually-morally."¹¹⁴ In other words, it is not a problem of civilization, but a problem of culture.

There are many almost literal points of contact between Bertram's work and Mann's. In both cases, there is an attempt to understand "Germanity," or the essence of the German soul, and first of all the tendency, already well observed by Nietzsche, that the Germans have for self-criticism with regard to what is German. Bertram

113 [Thomas Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen*, Berlin: S. Fischer, 1918; *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, trans. Walter D. Morris (New York: Ungar, 1983). Hadot draws the reader's attention to the introduction of the French translation, *Considérations d'un apolitique* (1975), with its introduction by J. Brenner.]

114 Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, p. 434.

evokes one aspect of this self-criticism: “this deep culpability toward themselves—the true original sin of the German character—,”¹¹⁵ which he detects, for instance, in Hölderlin and Nietzsche, who criticized the Germans for having chosen “nationalism” instead of Napoleon. This self-criticism leads them to cosmopolitanism: “I am not completely forgetting,” Thomas Mann says, “that it is almost part of higher German culture to present oneself as un-German or even anti-German; that a tendency toward a cosmopolitanism that undermines the sense of nationalism is, according to German authoritative judgement, inseparable from the essence of German nationality; that perhaps, without some foreign admixture, no higher German character is possible; that precisely the exemplary Germans were Europeans who would have regarded every limitation to the nothing-but-German as barbaric.”¹¹⁶

Bertram, for his part, develops the Nietzschean theme: “To be a good German means to de-Germanize oneself.”¹¹⁷ And he insists, perhaps more than Mann does, on that other Nietzschean motif of the anxiety,¹¹⁸ the incompleteness of the German soul, which means that, as Bertram notes, the Germans remain “the profound and lasting unease of all their neighbours, to their helpless and shameful consternation.”¹¹⁹

Also interesting for understanding the fundamental tone of Mann’s soul is the page where he writes: “If I have Schopenhauer’s morality—a popular word for the same thing is ‘pessimism’—as my basic psychological mood, that mood of ‘cross, death and grave’ [...].”¹²⁰ These lines echo a text by Nietzsche which Bertram quotes in his chapter on *Knight, Death, and Devil*: “What appeals to me in Wagner is what appeals to me in Schopenhauer, the ethical atmosphere, the Faustian odour, cross, death, and crypt.”^[121] This is what Nietzsche elsewhere calls “the Germanic seriousness toward life” [*dem germanischen Lebensernst*].^[122] It is also expressed in a letter from Mann to Bertram which affirms that this expression “cross, death, and crypt,” is for him “the symbol of an entire world, my world, whose opposition to the prevailing social ethic has now become acute.”¹²³

In his *Reflections*, Mann goes on to express, with great perspicacity, his own specificity, as well as Nietzsche’s: “If, however, this same basic mood made me

115 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 178.

116 Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, p. 48.

117 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 61. [*Human, All Too Human*, “Assorted Opinions and Maxims,” §323, in *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 287; KSA 2, 511.]

118 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 64.

119 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 63. Compare Thomas Mann, *Reflections*, p. 52 on “the tortuous problem of the German soul” [or, as Mann put it, *das Problem des Deutschtums*].

120 Mann, *Reflections*, p. 54.

121 [Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 39; cf. Nietzsche’s letter to Erwin Rohde of October 1868: Mir behagt an Wagner, was mir an Schopenhauer behagt, die ethische Luft, der faustische Duft, Kreuz, Tod und Gruft usw. (KSB 2, 322).]

122 [Nietzsche, letter to Richard Wagner of 22 May 1869; KSB 3, 9. Cited in Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 39.]

123 See Thomas Mann’s letter to Ernst Bertram of 3 April 1917 (*Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, ed. Jens, p. 46). Compare his *Reflections*, p. 399: “The Nietzsche [...] who singled out from all plastic art one picture with lasting love—Dürer’s “Knight, Death, and Devil”; the one who had told Rohde of his natural pleasure in all art and philosophy in which “ethical air, Faustian smell, cross, death and grave” could be detected: a phrase I immediately seized upon as a symbol for a whole world, my world, a northern-moral-Protestant, *id est*, German one that is strictly in opposition to that world of ruthless aestheticism.”

into a psychologist of decadence, then it was to Nietzsche to whom I looked as a master, for from the start he was not so much for me the prophet of some kind of vague 'superman,' [...] as rather the incomparably greatest and most experienced psychologist of decadence."¹²⁴

An echo of the chapter *Knight, Death, and Devil* can be found almost word for word in the passage where Mann, following Bertram, evokes the Protestant resonance of Nietzsche's soul, "the son of the pastor from Naumburg," the moral atmosphere that Nietzsche loved in Schopenhauer: "cross, death, and crypt," Dürer's engraving that expresses this atmosphere, his enthusiasm for Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, and finally the asceticism and Christianity that formed a secret part of his personality.¹²⁵ Elsewhere, as in the chapter on *Arion*, we find the theme of Luther as a lover of music (which is "close to theology,"¹²⁶), who is thus responsible for the close association between music and German culture.

These points of convergence are interesting. Above all, however, one should try to understand what Thomas Mann meant when he said that Bertram's book seemed to him to be the "redemption" of his own book. This could, I suspect, offer material for a lengthy study. Let me suggest, very cautiously, the following hypothesis. Perhaps, for Thomas Mann, Bertram's book—as a book, and a realization—was the living response to the anxieties and questions of the *Reflections*. This anxiety is expressed in the work's preface. Would the triumph of the Allies, that is, of democracy and civilization, destroy the German spirit? "Richard Wagner," says Thomas Mann, "once declared that civilization disappears before music like mist before the sun. He never dreamed that one day, for its part, music would disappear before civilization, before democracy, like mist before the sun. This book dreams of these things—in a confused, difficult, and unclear way—but this and nothing else is the content of its fears: '*finis musicae*.'"¹²⁷ Yet in the eyes of Thomas Mann, wasn't Bertram's book, which he is supposed to have wanted to entitle "The Music of Socrates", the proof that music, the *mousikê* of the Greeks—that is, in his view, culture and the intellectual life—was still alive in Germany, and would continue to live? After the publication of the book, Mann wrote to Bertram: "The expectation of your future offerings is a genuine incentive to life for me."¹²⁸ Perhaps, too, the idea of a Germany understood as a Platonic Idea, as a hope and a demand, responded to his own concerns.

Bertram's *Nietzsche* was given an enthusiastic reception in its time,¹²⁹ and it exerted a long-lasting influence on Nietzsche studies. In his monumental and unrivalled work on Nietzsche, Charles Andler expresses on several occasions his

124 Mann, *Reflections*, p. 54-55.

125 Mann, *Reflections*, p. 104.

126 Bertram, *Nietzsche*, p. 89; Mann, *Reflections*, p. 232.

127 Mann, *Reflections*, p. 23.

128 See Thomas Mann's letter to Ernst Bertram of 21 September 1918 (Mann, *Briefe 1889-1936*, p. 152; *Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, ed. Jens, p. 78).

129 See, for example, the reviews by Josef Hofmiller in the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* (1919/[1920]) [p. 382] (part of which is quoted by Buchner in his "Nachwort des Herausgebers," pp. 412-413), which concludes: "This book is, in its kind, not merely original, but unique"; by A. Drews in the *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 1919, p. 477-481 (which criticized Nietzsche for being, because of his own critical attitude towards the Germans, responsible for the hostility of foreigners towards Germany). One can also find in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 1933, July-September, Supplement, pp. 5-6, an anonymous review of Pitrou's translation that is extremely positive.

admiration, while voicing his reservations about its methodology.¹³⁰ He speaks of the “dazzling essays that constitute Bertram’s book.” “It provides,” he says, “in-depth insights without subjecting itself to any division into periods.” He evokes the “magnificent passages in this book,” mentioning the chapters on *Justice*, *Philoctetes*, and *Socrates*. He admires their “profound psychological insights and beautiful literary form.” The judgment of Karl Jaspers was much more severe.¹³¹ He admits that the symbols Bertram uses can “have something shrewd about them,” for example “in the symbol of *Judas*, to interpret the dialectical negativity that runs through all his work, or in *Knight, Death, and Devil*, to expound his courage that knows no illusions.” Yet in Jaspers’ view, they suppress the dynamics of Nietzsche’s thought. Here, however, there is a misunderstanding. Bertram’s book does not claim to be a philosophical study that reconstructs the system and the dynamics of thought of the author of *Zarathustra*. It is, as we have said, a resolutely literary and psychological work, a kind of psychoanalysis in the broad sense of the term, or an exploration of the Nietzschean imaginary. It is thus entirely to be expected that it speaks more to poets than it does to philosophers. This is why Gottfried Benn, even after having read Jaspers’ book, held Bertram’s *Nietzsche* to be “the most grandiose” [*großartigste*] of all the literature on Nietzsche, precisely because, in a sense, it went beyond philosophy which, in his view, was not what was most interesting in Nietzsche.¹³² Moreover, Bertram’s chapter entitled *Anecdote* rightly insists on the “anecdotal,” and hence non-systematic, character of Nietzschean thought.¹³³ Gottfried Benn said that he was always rereading Bertram’s book, and that it accompanied him everywhere.¹³⁴ It is interesting to note that it had a profound influence on Benn’s aesthetic conceptions.

After the appearance of the great works devoted to Nietzsche in the course of the twentieth century, Bertram’s book retains all its value and its relevance. It is a sort of monument, set up to commemorate a tragic destiny: a precious witness of the way that a particular age looked at Nietzsche, and a work of art that was able to attain the mysterious timelessness of a masterpiece.

Epilogue

From 1910 to 1921, Thomas Mann and Bertram had been completely unanimous about political issues, and particularly, after the War, in their disapproval of the attitude of France and the French towards defeated Germany, whether it was the

130 Charles Andler, *Nietzsche, sa vie, sa pensée*, 6 vols (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1920-1931): vol. 2, p. 17; vol. 3, p. 14.

131 Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche; Introduction à sa philosophie*, Paris: Gallimard, 1950, p. 15. [*Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of his Philosophical Activity*, trans. Charles F. Wallraff and Frederick J. Schmitz, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965, Nietzsche: *Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1936).]

132 Bruno Hillebrand, *Artistik und Auftrag: Zur Kunsttheorie von Benn und Nietzsche* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1966): 65. [See note 134 below.]

133 Hillebrand, *Artistik und Auftrag*, p. 67.

134 Cited by Buchner, “Nachwort des Herausgebers,” p. 410, n. 6 [referring to “Nietzsche—nach fünfzig Jahren” [1950], in Gottfried Benn, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Dieter Wellershoff, 8 vols. (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1968): vol. 4, *Reden und Vorträge*, pp. 1046-57 (p. 1047); and “Bücher, die lebendig geblieben sind,” published in *Die literarische Welt*, 5/9 (1929), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 7, *Vermischte Schriften*, p. 1659: *welche Bücher ich immer wieder lese, Bücher, die mich überall begleiteten*].

French authorities occupying the Rhineland, or writers such as Maurice Barrès.¹³⁵

Gradually, however, their paths began to diverge. Thomas Mann supported the Weimar Republic, unlike Bertram, who became increasingly chauvinist. He even went so far as to suspect the circle around George of being pro-Western, “more and more Communist,” and of being no more than “a clique of Jews.”¹³⁶

It is interesting, for example, to see a disagreement arise between the two friends on the subject of Charles du Bos. In 1926 Thomas Mann had proposed inviting the French writer to join the board of the Nietzsche Society: he presented him to Bertram “as a friend and expert on the German mind.”¹³⁷ Bertram refused categorically, giving this reason: “So long as the French continue to forbid [[as they would until 1932]], any German scholar from participating in any conferences—even today, after Locarno—¹³⁸, and so long as the ban on German literature is enforced in the occupied zones, [...] we have no need to welcome any French into this society. [...] Obviously the Nietzsche-Society does not have the right not to be European in spirit, but one is no longer European when one is simply deprived of one’s dignity.”¹³⁹ In his “Translator’s Preface,” [...] Robert Pitrou expresses his surprise at Bertram’s silence in response to his requests for further explanation. This silence is probably also explained by Bertram’s attitude toward the French.

Bertram greeted the rise of National Socialism with joy, whereas Thomas Mann, precisely because of that rise, was forced into exile, first to Switzerland in 1933, and then, definitively, to the United States in 1938. It is a remarkable testimony to his faithfulness that, despite their political differences, Bertram, even in this era of hatred, continued to send Thomas Mann books, letters, and presents until 1935.

After the War had ended, in 1948, Mann was contacted from Germany and asked to intervene on behalf of Bertram, who, because of accusations relating to his attitude during the Nazi period, had been deprived of his right to teach and of all his pensions. Among the novelist’s correspondence, one may read the letter of 30 July 1948 that he wrote to Werner Schmitz on this subject.¹⁴⁰ It is a letter of great dignity, which recalls the numerous words of warning that he had given his friend, but which defines with great precision and fairness Bertram’s responsibility, his romanticism of a Germanist, his complete lack of self-interest, his purity of intent. It is true that Bertram was not a member of the Party, but he was a fervent National Socialist, doubtless in his own way: one that was mythical, idealistic, and lost in dreams.

Mann also alludes to Bertram’s links with Stefan George. Bertram, Mann maintains, never really belonged to this Circle. “His Protestantism and his Germanism protected him from the tendencies to Roman imperialism and Jesuitism in this sacred

135 See Jens, “Nachwort,” p. 296.

136 See Jens, “Nachwort,” p. 300.

137 [See Mann’s letter to Bertram of 3 February 1926, in Jens (ed.), *Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, p. 149.]

138 [The Locarno Pact was concluded in 1925 at a conference held in Locarno, Switzerland, by the powers of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium, with a view to guaranteeing peace in Europe.]

139 See Bertram’s card sent to Ernst Glöckner on 7 February 1926, cited in Jens, “Anmerkungen”, in *Thomas Mann an Ernst Bertram*, p. 268.

140 See Mann, *Briefe 1948-1955 und Nachlese*, pp. 38-40.

Pierre

Hadot

translated by:

Paul

Bishop

inner circle.”^[141] There were also too many Jews in it, for his taste. Mann protested against the ban on publishing that had been declared against Bertram. It would be a loss for Germany if the great book on Stifter that Bertram had been planning could not be published. Similarly, the withdrawal of his pension seemed to him unjustifiable.

In 1949, Thomas Mann participated in a collective petition made on Bertram’s behalf by three Nobel Prize winners—himself, André Gide, and Hermann Hesse.¹⁴² In the end the decision was reversed, and Bertram received his retirement pension and the authorization to publish.

For his part, Bertram had written to Mann on 26 July 1947, to inform him of his distress and his bitterness.¹⁴³ The correspondence between the two friends began again. They saw each other in Cologne on 25 August 1954 at a lecture given by Mann¹⁴⁴, and on this occasion Bertram gave him three of his works as a gift.

One of them, entitled *Moselvilla*, bears as an epigraph a stanza taken from Hölderlin’s poem entitled “The Poet’s Courage” (*Dichtermut*):

When at night fall a man like him, of our kind, comes
 Past the place where he sank, many a thought he’ll give
 To the site and the warning,
 Then in silence, more armed, walk on [¹⁴⁵]

Above it, in Mann’s copy, Bertram had written:

All that has been is merely a symbol,
 (Alles Gewesene ist nur ein Gleichnis)

the opening phrase of his introduction to his *Nietzsche*.¹⁴⁶ He thus evoked their past, their friendship, and their shared passions of former times, but also the meaning of their lives¹⁴⁷ and the final redemption in *Faust, Part Two*: “All that has been—and all that happens—is merely a symbol.”

141 [Mann, *Briefe 1948-1955 und Nachlese*, p. 39.]

142 See the article in the Swiss newspaper, *Die Tat*, of 6 March 1949, which, after having criticized the measures taken against Bertram (“a patriot, but not a Nazi”), quoted the letters of Thomas Mann (“a man of extraordinary intellectual level who has for many years been my best friend”), of Hermann Hesse (“this judicial error must be rectified”), and André Gide (“I would like to make a personal commitment to proving his innocence and the unjust treatment to which he has been subjected”).

143 See Jens, “Anmerkungen,” pp. 286-88.

144 See Jens, “Anmerkungen,” p. 290; Katia Mann, p. 169 [*Meine ungeschriebenen Memoiren*, p. 155].

145 [*Dichtermut, Erste Fassung* [“The Poet’s Courage,” First Version], in Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, trans. Hamburger, pp. 206-07:

Wenn des Abends vorbei Einer der Unsern kömmt,
 Wo der Bruder ihm sank, denket er manches wohl
 An der warnenden Stelle,
 Schweigt und gehet gerüsteter.]

146 Jens, “Anmerkungen,” p. 290.

147 See the monograph on Bertram by Hajo Jappe, entitled *Ernst Bertram: Scholar, Teacher, Poet* [Ernst Bertram: *Gelehrter, Lehrer, Dichter*] (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1969).