

FOREWORD BY WALTER KAUFMANN

WHEN A research committee asked me long ago whether a comprehensive study of Lou Andreas-Salomé deserved support, the answer was easy to give: Of course. After all, she was a fascinating woman, and her successive friendships with Nietzsche, Rilke, and Freud clearly deserved investigation. Asked many years later to read the manuscript that had grown out of this project, I was astonished by its vastness. Was Lou really *that* important? The brief first chapter reinforced my doubts. For all my admiration for Freud, I do not care for books that substitute psychoanalytical speculations for painstaking scholarship. But the long second chapter, which deals with Lou's encounter with Nietzsche, represents a triumph of sustained research and offers fascinating discoveries of major importance. It also sets the tone for the rest of the book. Rarely has such a comprehensive grasp of all the relevant materials been fused with such a lively mind.

The bulk of this volume is not out of proportion to the importance of its subject, for *Frau Lou* is more significant than Lou's own books. In the case of most biographies the opposite may be taken for granted, but in this case the author's reach exceeds the woman whose biography he offers us—in two ways.

First: not only does he deal with Nietzsche, Rilke, and Freud; we also encounter an amazing array of other German and Austrian writers and scholars. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Lou's friendships approximate a Who Was Who of Central European intellectual life during the half-century between 1880 and 1930.

It would have been relatively easy to write a much shorter and rather superficial book, capitalizing on the human interest of brief vignettes of famous people, going along with the fashionable journalistic prostitution of biography and history. In an age in which masses of irrelevant detail so often hide a lack of insight and the absence of all power to interpret, Rudolph Binion offers us a book of stunning richness that throws new light on a great many interesting men.

The whole literature on Lou's troubled relationship to Nietzsche and Paul Rée is dated by *Frau Lou*. Making use of a large quantity of hitherto unpublished documents and letters, Binion proves that Lou, like Nietzsche's sister, falsified the story. That the sister's ac-

Foreword

count was mendacious has been known for a long time, but everyone who discussed this episode without relying on the sister has invariably relied on Lou. Thus Binion makes a major contribution to the study of Nietzsche's life and character.

The point of the book, however, is by no means to turn a widely admired woman into a villain. Binion shows what her relationship to Nietzsche did to Lou, and he shows how it was not by any means, as had been widely supposed, significant for Nietzsche only and at most a passing fancy for Lou. He demonstrates its lasting impact on her life and work, and shows how her fiction and some of her later friendships represent repeated attempts to cope with her rejection by Nietzsche.

What one might take merely for a biography of a woman whose stature does not brook comparison with that of her most famous friends turns out to be a highly sensitive, imaginative, and erudite essay in intellectual history. Even so, the book has another whole dimension; it is also a psychoanalytical study. The author aims to show that the findings of psychoanalysis are fruitful for biographers and intellectual historians who are not in search of shortcuts but who wish to make the most of the abundant documentary materials they have studied.

Often scholars say of some large work that it seems excellent except for those parts in which they are specialists. I am in the happy position of being full of admiration for the long chapter on Nietzsche, in which I have been able to check the evidence. And considering how controversial both Nietzsche and Freud were and still are, I have no qualms about saying that the author's psychoanalytical interpretations strike me as the most controversial part of his book. To this, however, two points must be added.

Probably no previous psychoanalytical biography has been based on such thorough research. So far, criticism of the use of psychoanalytical ideas in such contexts has usually come down to the discovery that the author did not know his subject sufficiently. Professor Binion makes it possible at long last to discuss the problem on a higher level.

Moreover, the introduction of psychoanalysis into a study of Frau Lou is peculiarly pertinent. After all, she herself became a lay analyst, and her friendship with Freud and his dominant influence on her thought lasted far, far longer than her encounters with Nietzsche and Rilke. Readers who find Binion's psychoanalytical terminology and explanations uncongenial ought to keep in mind that Lou herself came to accept these ways of thinking.

Foreword

The final portions of the book are as moving as any. In the last chapter we see the old Lou writing her memoirs, rewriting her life once more, fashioning a final version of events that she could not face as they had actually happened. Then we still get an account of the author's source materials and the obstacles he faced when he visited her archives. It would be a rank abuse of his hospitality to tell this story in the Foreword, but it provides the perfect link between those last years in which Lou tried to forge her myth and this book in which the myth is finally exposed. Only after having read those pages can one fully appreciate Rudolph Binion's immense accomplishment.

Here is scholarship that involves all the excitement of detective work. The central story line is clear and simple: the life of Lou, the development of her mind and myth, the contrast between fact and fancy, the pathology of brilliance. But we are given far more than this. The book is so full of ideas and discoveries that, having finished it once, one turns back to it again and again. For this volume is a rich mine and harbors more treasures than any single reading could bring to light.