

Walter Kaufmann

# Nietzsche

## Four Unpublished Letters

NIETZSCHE'S life and character have probably excited more interest than those of any other philosopher. Thomas Mann drew inspiration from both for his *Doctor Faustus*, André Malraux embodied an episode from Nietzsche's life in *La lutte avec l'ange*, and Stefan George, Christian Morgenstern, and Gottfried Benn each wrote more than one poem about him.

Hence a good deal of attention has always been focused on Nietzsche's letters, although they contain scarcely any philosophy. The various German collections of the letters are spread over fifteen volumes, but many letters still await publication. In the following pages I want to illuminate Nietzsche's character with the help of four hitherto unpublished Nietzsche letters.

His finest letters are exceedingly personal. Many people write letters mainly in order to write, and then address them to someone almost as an afterthought. Nietzsche wrote into his notebooks when he wanted to try out ideas; when he succeeded in giving adequate form to his thoughts he put them into his books. His letters usually show a pervasive awareness of the person whom he is addressing and speak to *him*, not to the public or posterity. Hence many of Nietzsche's letters are of no great interest except to those who are concerned to establish

some small point about his life; but *some* letters illuminate his relationships to others and show us vividly how he felt.

OUR FIRST LETTER was addressed to Karl Hillebrand (1829-84), a scholar and literary critic to whom the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, devoted half a column. He "became involved, as a student in Heidelberg, in the Baden revolutionary movement, and was imprisoned in Rastatt. He succeeded in escaping and lived for a time in Strassburg, Paris—where for several months he was Heine's secretary—and Bordeaux." He took a doctorate at the Sorbonne, became a professor at Douai, resigned his chair and went to Italy when the Franco-Prussian War broke out in 1870, and died in Florence. "His essays, collected under the title *Zeiten, Völker und Menschen* (Berlin, 1874-1885), show clear discernment, a finely balanced cosmopolitan judgment and grace of style." So far the *Encyclopaedia*. The collection mentioned includes three review-essays on Nietzsche's first three *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*—his earliest books, except for *The Birth of Tragedy*. Like most of Nietzsche's works, the "Untimely Meditations" met with very little response. Here is Nietzsche's letter to Hillebrand, written in April 1878:<sup>1</sup>

*Hochverehrter Herr,*

after a winter of severe illness, my health is waking up again and I am enjoying your four volumes *Völker, Zeiten und Menschen*, delighted as if they were milk and honey.

WALTER KAUFMANN is the author of an edition of Nietzsche's *Will to Power*, with commentary, and a study of Hegel (both published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson). His *Tragedy and Philosophy* is to be published by Doubleday this autumn.

<sup>1</sup> The manuscript belongs to the Princeton University Library.

O books that exhale a *European* air and not nationalistic nitrogen! How good for the lungs! And then: I'd like to see the author who could equal your candour and benevolent sense of justice—or rather: I shall exert myself to discover all authors—but how few they'll be!—who come *close* to you in these great virtues.—How grateful I am to you for collecting these essays! Otherwise you might almost have escaped me, for I read neither newspapers nor magazines and altogether, living on the edge of blindness, read (and write) *very little*. This reminds me that you have spoken of my writings, too: of all the comments on them that have come to my notice, yours are the *only* ones that have truly delighted me. For here it is clearly *superiority* (in experience and taste and a few other things) that passes judgment, and if only he that is judged is no fool he will take sides *against himself* with genuine pleasure. And how gladly one *learns* from you!

Cordially grateful and devoted,

DR. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

*University of Basel, Switzerland*

Don't take amiss a philologist's pedantry: it is *das Sophisma*, not *der Sophismus*—please forgive me!

OUR SECOND LETTER was written five-and-a-half years later, after Nietzsche had finished the third part of *Zarathustra* (which appeared in 1883) and before he wrote the fourth part the following winter in Nice and Mentone. He sent the letter from Mentone in late November 1883, to Paul Lanzky. In 1884, only forty copies of *Zarathustra* IV were printed, privately, but no more than seven were actually distributed among friends. Lanzky got one of the seven; so did Carl Fuchs, to whom the last of these four letters was written.

Since Lanzky was one of the few who were close to Nietzsche during his last creative years, it is not surprising that Nietzsche mentioned him in five of his letters to Peter Gast, in nine to Franz Overbeck, and in sixteen to his mother and sister, not counting three with which the sister tampered before publishing them. While

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the letters to mother and sister, 25 Dec. 1883, and to Gast, 5 March 1884.

<sup>3</sup> Nietzsche's sister seems to have tampered with the first part of this letter but not with this paragraph. (See *Werke*, ed. Schlechta, vol. III, p. 1417.)

<sup>4</sup> Owned by the author.

it has thus long been possible to reconstruct Nietzsche's relation to Lanzky by turning to these three published collections, not one of Nietzsche's letters to Lanzky has been published, and the comprehensive survey of Nietzsche's known letters in the first volume of the *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe* of the letters (1938) indicates that the Nietzsche Archive in Weimar owned only three *drafts* for letters and one draft for a postcard to Lanzky.

On 26 December 1883 Franz Overbeck received a letter from Nietzsche which contains this passage:

There is a new human being who may have been given to me at the right time: his name is Paul Lanzky, and he is so devoted to me that he would like to tie his destiny to mine as soon as possible. Independent and a friend of solitude and simplicity, 31 years old, with a philosophical disposition, even more of a pessimist than a sceptic—he is the first to address me in his letters as *Verehrtester Meister!* (which aroused the most diverse feelings and memories)...<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche was then thirty-nine, and earlier that year Richard Wagner had died, whom his admirers had been in the habit of calling *Meister*.

In November 1884 Nietzsche wrote his mother and sister from Mentone:

Imagine: meanwhile Herr Lanzky waited for me one whole week in the *Pension de Genève* (Nizza); I heard about it two days too late. Then he left for Ajaccio. A touching letter from him reached me today.<sup>3</sup>

A few days later, 28 November, Nietzsche wrote them:

After my last card, until today, a severe attack. Today exhausted.—The Corsican affair is settled: Herr Lanzky will come back from there and spend the winter with me in the same *Pension*. (The result of letters and telegrams.) I will and must stick to Nizza for the sake of my future "colony," which now seems more possible to me (I mean: sympathetic people to whom I can present my philosophy). So alone as I have been here or in the Engadine, I am always sick.

Our hitherto unpublished letter is evidently one of the letters Nietzsche mentions here. The manuscript<sup>4</sup> comprises three small pages, written very neatly:

*Mein lieber Herr Lanzky,*

*Malheur!* You have left a couple of days too early—but that you have come to Nizza

pleases me greatly, and I might even carry my gratitude so far as to come to Corsica now. Send me, immediately, if that is possible, a few details about the How and Where in Ajaccio—addressed here, Mentone, *pension des Etrangers*.

I am not well just now; but walking bravely and making plans for the future of man shall get me over that. Not counting a few attacks of impatience and rudeness.

Again: I feel *cordially* delighted to have heard from you again.

Yours faithfully,

DR. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE  
Prof.

*N.B.*—Give it a try and come to the pier Sunday morning, Nov. 30: perhaps I'll be *there*.

That is the author of *Zarathustra*, about to write the fourth and last part. A few passages from the later letters about Lanzky may round out the picture. December 1884, Nietzsche wrote to his mother and sister:

Herr L. . . . came back immediately when I telegraphed him: *Venez pour Nice. Votre ami N.* He telegraphed back: *Je serai à Nice mercredi. Votre bien heureux Lanzky.*—He has some notion who I am. On the whole, however, to say it in French: *il m'ôte la solitude, sans me donner la compagnie.*—So nothing will come of *Zarath. IV* this winter.

On 21 December, Nietzsche wrote to his mother and sister:

<sup>5</sup> About Dr. Paneth, who in 1884 wrote his friend, Sigmund Freud, a lot about Nietzsche, see my *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (1959), Chapter 16, section 3.

<sup>6</sup> K. F. L. Nohl and R. Pohl were ardent Wagnerians who wrote a great deal about their master; *Kohl* means drivel or twaddle as well as cabbage. The same unholy trinity is encountered in *Ecce Homo*, in sec. 2 of the discussion of *Human, All-too-human*. For further details see my commentary on that passage in my edition of *Ecce Homo*.

Lanzky is not cheerful enough for me. But he takes a lot of trouble and bears with me though occasionally I cannot bear things any longer without becoming rude. . . .

Please send me, for Lanzky's sake, Rohde's pamphlet about *The Birth of Tragedy* (bound in brown leather). . . .

I am sending you an essay Lanzky has written about me, not that I feel like praising it but only because it is the first longish essay about me. That it appeared in a provincial Hungarian journal is another example of the stupidity and clumsiness of my publisher.

The following day Nietzsche wrote Overbeck:

Then Herr Paul Lanzky lives in my *pension*, a great admirer: formerly editor of the *Rivista*

*Europea*, thus *in summa* a journalist. But yesterday when he gave me a long essay about me (printed in a Hungarian journal!), I had no choice but to do what I had done last year with Dr. Paneth,<sup>5</sup> also a great admirer and worshipper: namely, to oblige him not to write about me. I do not have the least wish to see a new kind of Nohl, Pohl and "Kohl"<sup>6</sup> sprout up around me—and prefer my absolute concealment a thousand times to being together with mediocre enthusiasts.

The following month, Nietzsche wrote Overbeck in the same vein: "Lanzky, a considerate man who is very devoted to me, but not

somebody to be together with for a long time. I'd prefer even a buffoon!" And 12 February 1885, he wrote to his mother and sister:

Tomorrow Herr Lanzky leaves me, a very decent man who nevertheless impressed on me again the value and necessity of solitude for me. I shall be careful not to lose another winter in this way. To be sure, I have every reason to be very grateful to him for many signs of good will and consideration; but one thing is a hundred times more important to me than anything else.

A week later, Nietzsche expressed similar ideas to Overbeck:

I have been through a lot; having the very decent Lanzky here (who will leave next Mon-



NIETZSCHE

day) has helped me over a good deal. But on the other side of this account I might say that I have learned how much I still need complete solitude for a good long while (say, five years!). There is too much in me that still wants to grow ripe and come together; the time for "disciples and a school" *et hoc genus omne* has not come yet.

On 21 March 1885, Nietzsche wrote to his mother and sister:

You see, I am more cheerful again; the most essential fact is probably that Herr Lanzky is gone. A man who deserves the greatest respect and very devoted to me—but what do these two things matter to me? To me he means what I call by such names as "overcast" or "German weather." In fact, nobody now living means a great deal to me; the human beings I like have been dead for a long, long time; e.g., Abbé Galiani or Henri Beyle or Montaigne.

The following November *Zarathustra*, Part IV, was completed and privately printed, and Nietzsche wrote his mother from Florence:

The day after tomorrow we (*i.e.*, Herr Lanzky and I) retreat into the wood-, mountain-, and cloister-solitude of Vallombrosa, not at all far from here. The best room is being prepared for me; we'll have quiet; the place is famous: Dante and Milton have glorified it, the latter in his description of paradise.

In December Nietzsche wrote Overbeck that he was once again "experimenting with places to live":

It must be possible eventually to find something independent and suitable for me; but I doubt more and more that I'll find it. Hence I need people who look after me. The unpractical side of my nature, being half blind, and on the other hand being anxious, helpless, discouraged as a consequence of my ill health, often freezes me in situations that almost kill me.

Almost seven years of solitude and for the most part truly a dog's life because I lacked everything necessary for *me*. I thank heaven that nobody has really witnessed it at close range (except Lanzky who is still utterly beside himself about it).

On 9 January 1886, Nietzsche wrote Overbeck:

I have every reason to be grateful that a man like L., a remarkably noble and fine character, albeit unfortunately no "intellect"—crossed my path: in the long run he will probably become

<sup>7</sup>The manuscript belongs to the Houghton Library, Harvard University. The postscripts are written on the margins.

something like my "practical reason," my counsel for home economics, health, etc.

Finally, Nietzsche wrote Gast on 9 December 1888, less than a month before his total collapse, that he had finished his final revision of *Ecce Homo*, and

The day before yesterday, Strindberg wrote me his first letter—the first letter with a world-historical accent ever to reach me. He has some idea that *Zarathustra* is a *non plus ultra*.

Nietzsche felt elated. He had also received a letter from a female admirer in St. Petersburg; Georg Brandes was lecturing about him in Copenhagen; Nietzsche had just sent *Twilight of the Idols* to Hippolyte Taine and hoped for a French translation; perhaps Miss Helen Zimmern would do some English translations (she actually did translate *Beyond Good and Evil* later on); and eventually Lanzky is mentioned again:

Dear friend, I want to get back all copies of the fourth part of *Zarathustra* in order to secure this *ineditum* against all accidents of life and death (I read it recently and almost died of emotion). If I publish it after a few decades of world-historical crises—wars!—only then will the right time have come. Please strain your memory to determine who has copies. My memory yields: Lanzky, Widemann, Fuchs, Brandes, probably Overbeck.

This final reference to Paul Lanzky may give some idea of Nietzsche's solitude during his last years. Paul Heinrich Widemann was a young composer and friend of Gast's. Brandes had discovered Nietzsche and corresponded with him, but they never met.

**B**EFORE WE TURN to Fuchs, let us consider the third of our four unpublished letters. This was addressed to Nietzsche's publisher, E. W. Fritsch:<sup>7</sup>

*Sils Maria, Oberengadin, Switzerland,  
29 Aug. 86*

*Lieber und werther Herr Fritsch,*

Here is the preface for the *new* edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Given this very meaty preface which provides so much orientation, you can launch this book once more—it even seems very important to me that this should be done. All signs indicate that during the

next years people will pay a good deal of attention to my books (inasmuch as I am, if I may say so, by far the most independent thinker of this time who thinks in the great style more than anyone else); people will *need* me and make all kinds of efforts to get at me, to understand and "explain" me, etc. To forestall the worst mistakes, nothing seems more useful to me (apart from *Beyond Good and Evil*, which has just appeared) than the *two* prefaces I took the liberty of sending you: they indicate the way I went—and, quite seriously, if I myself do not offer a couple of hints how I am to be understood, the worst stupidities are bound to happen.

I cannot judge to what extent it might be advisable or inadvisable commercially and from a publisher's point of view to bring upon the market simultaneously several books by the same author. What is essential is that as a prerequisite for the understanding of my *Zarathustra* (an unparalleled event in literature and philosophy and poetry and morality, etc., etc. You may believe me, you lucky owner of this *Wundertier!*) all of my earlier writings must be understood seriously and profoundly; ditto, the necessity of the sequence of these writings and of the development that finds expression in them. Perhaps it would be equally useful to issue now, immediately, the new edition of *The Birth* as well (with the "Attempt at a Self-Criticism"). This "Attempt," together with the "Preface to *Human, All-too-human*," provides genuine enlightenment about me—and the very best preparation for my audacious son, *Zarathustra*.

In December I hope to be able to continue with the prefaces—in Nizza where so far I have never lacked courage and inspiration around that time of year. Namely, *Hum., All-too-hum.*, second volume (comprising *Mixed Opin. and Maxims* and *The Wanderer*), 2. *Dawn*, 3. *Gay Science*.

I think you know, my dear Herr Publisher, how much courage and inspiration is required precisely for such prefaces? and in addition even more "good will"—

Let us assume that by next spring all my works, insofar as they are in your hands, will be ready for another flight with new "wings." For these prefaces shall be *wings!* (Only the 4 *Untimely Medit.* I want to leave as they stand: that is why I have considered it necessary to call attention to them very definitely in the postscript that I sent you

recently for the preface to *Hum., All-too-hum.* Hoping for a brief reply to this address.

Your most devoted,

DR. NIETZSCHE,  
Prof.

Please be good enough to tell me something about the prices of the books that are to appear next. Hermann Credner<sup>8</sup> once told or wrote me that Schmeitzner's prices had been the greatest obstacle on my way to date.

A separate little volume of nothing but prefaces would be a sin against good taste. The dreadful little preface-word "I" is tolerated only on condition that it is not encountered in the book that follows: it is justified only in a preface.

*Sep. 1:* Just now letter and proofs arrived. Has the postscript (sent to you by registered mail) not reached you yet? Lest everything be delayed, I ask you to drop it (not to print it). But this "Self-Criticism" more than ever.

This letter does not need to be placed in the context of other letters. Nietzsche's works were duly reissued with his new prefaces, and that for the new edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* is a masterpiece. So far from singing his own praises, the self-criticism leaves nothing to be desired in sharpness; perhaps no other great writer has ever dealt so harshly with one of his own works in a preface.

Eventually, in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche did commit the sin against good taste of which he writes here. The reviews of his own books in that work are assembled under the chapter heading "Why I Write Such Good Books"—but are redeemed by an abundance of insight and wit.

OUR FOURTH unpublished letter is addressed to Dr. Carl Fuchs in Danzig. Fuchs (1838–1922) received his doctorate at Greifswald with a dissertation entitled *Präliminarien zu einer Kritik der Tonkunst* (1870, "Prolegomena for a Critique of Music"). He was a concert pianist and conductor before he became organist at the Petrikirche in Danzig and from 1887 until 1920 also music critic of the *Danziger Zeitung*. For many years he also served as organist for the synagogue, but according to the *vita* appended to his dissertation he was a Protestant (and his mother's maiden name was Stechert). He published several books on music and in 1904 received the title of pro-

<sup>8</sup> A publisher in Leipzig, discussed in a letter to Overbeck, 20 July 1888.

fessor. Some of Nietzsche's letters to him were printed in *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 1 (1900), but this letter fills an interesting gap in our knowledge of Nietzsche. On 20 July 1888, Nietzsche wrote Overbeck:

Dear friend, nothing has improved, neither the weather nor my health—both remain *absurd*. But today I'll tell you of something that is still more absurd; Dr. Fuchs. Recently he has sent me a whole literature (including one letter of twelve large crowded sheets!). In the process I have slowly turned into a hedgehog, and my old mistrust is complete again. His egoism is so clever and on the other hand so anxious and unfree that nothing avails him—neither his great talent nor the fact that there is a lot in his nature that is *genuinely* artistic.

The account of Fuchs is long and detailed; all of it was omitted when the letter was printed in *Friedrich Nietzsches Briefwechsel mit Franz Overbeck* (1916)—the omission was indicated, but there was no way of telling how very long it was. Now, however, the German text is readily accessible in the third volume of Schlechta's edition of the *Werke* (pp. 1302ff). It will suffice here to cite the end of Nietzsche's comments on Fuchs.

He is also the organist at the synagogue in Danzig. You may imagine how he made fun of the Jewish services in the *dirtiest* way (but he allows himself to be *paid* for it!).

Finally, he wrote me a letter about his *descent*, with so many disgusting and indecent indiscretions about his mother and his father that I lost my patience and in the rudest manner forbade him to send me such letters. I am not in the least inclined to allow my solitude to be disturbed by the contingency of letters.—So far have we come. Unfortunately I know this kind of man too well to be able to hope that this will be the end.

Slechta does not include in his selection Nietzsche's postcard to Overbeck, 26 July 1888,

which was printed in 1916 and begins: "Dear friend, another word regarding Dr. F. He has meanwhile answered my letter—excellently, not merely cleverly."

The very next day Nietzsche wrote Gast to send Fuchs a copy of Part IV of *Zarathustra*, and on the 29th he informed Fuchs of this, "as a sign that everything between us is all right again."

Here is the letter Nietzsche mentioned to Overbeck—calling it a sample of his rudest manner:<sup>9</sup>

Wednesday, July 18, 1888

Lieber Herr Doctor,

Don't feel annoyed, but from sheer necessity I must resist your letter. It is altogether forbidden to me to hear such *privatissima*, *personalissima*: their effect on me is, I dare not say what—it would sound too medical. For just a moment put yourself into the place of one who has my *Zarathustra* on his soul. Once you have comprehended what exertion it has cost me to gain some sort of equilibrium vis-à-vis the whole fact of man you will also comprehend the extreme caution with which I now approach all human intercourse. I want once and for all not to know many things any more, never to hear many things any more—at this price I may perhaps endure.

I have given men the most profound book they own, my *Zarathustra*: a book that confers such distinction that whoever can say, "I have understood six sentences in it, that is lived through them" thus belongs to a higher order of mortals.—But how one has to atone for that! pay for that! it almost corrupts one's character! The gulf has become too great. Ever since, I really do nothing any more but buffooneries to remain master over an intolerable tension and vulnerability.

This between us. The rest is silence.

Your friend,

NIETZSCHE.

<sup>9</sup> Owned by the author.