

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-63159-4 - Friedrich Nietzsche: The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs

Edited by Bernard Williams

Excerpt

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‘Joke, Cunning, and Revenge’ Prelude in German Rhymes

1. Invitation

Dare to taste my fare, dear diner!
Come tomorrow it tastes finer
and day after even good!
If you still want more – I’ll make it,
from past inspiration take it,
turning food for thought to food.

2. My Happiness

Since I grew weary of the search
I taught myself to find instead.
Since cross winds caused my ship to lurch
I sail with all winds straight ahead.

‘Scherz, List, und Rache’ is the title of a libretto written by Goethe and set to music by Peter Gast, Nietzsche’s friend and disciple/secretary. The title itself, like the subtitle ‘Prelude in German Rhymes’, foreshadows the musical playfulness to be found both in the poems and in *The Gay Science*; it also voices the hope that readers will recognize in the German language a medium of grace and style, as seen for example in the writings of Goethe and Nietzsche. *Scherz, List und Rache* was not set to music in the 1780s, though Goethe had intended it for a composer, and he published it in 1790 with his other works. He had endeavoured in the 1780s, after his Italian journey, to reform the German comic opera in the direction of the Italian *opera buffa*.

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3. *Undaunted*

Where you stand, there dig deep!
 Below you lies the well!
 Let obscurantists wail and weep:
 ‘Below is always – hell!’

4. *Dialogue*

A. Was I ill? Have I recovered?
 Has my doctor been discovered?
 How have I forgotten all?
 B. Now I know you have recovered:
 Healthy is who can’t recall.

5. *To the Virtuous*

Our virtues too should step lively to and fro:
 Like the verses of Homer, they have to come *and go!*

6. *Worldly Wisdom*

Stay not where the lowlands are!
 Climb not into the sky!
 The world looks best by far
 when viewed from halfway high.

7. *Vademecum – Vadetecum*¹

My way and language speak to you,
 you follow me, pursue me too?
 To thine own self and way be true:
 Thus follow me, but gently do!

8. *On the Third Shedding*

Already cracks and breaks my skin,
 my appetite unslaking
 is fuelled by earth I’ve taken in:

¹ *Vademecum* is Latin for ‘go with me’, and refers to a book one carries all the time. *Vadetecum* is Nietzsche’s improvement on the idea: ‘go with yourself’.

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This snake for earth is aching.
 Among the stones and grass I wear
 a path from fen to firth,
 to eat what's always been my fare
 you, my snake food, you my earth.

9. My Roses

Yes! My joy – it wants to gladden – ,
 every joy wants so to gladden!
 Would you pluck my rose and sadden?

You must crouch on narrow ledges,
 prop yourself on ropes and wedges,
 prick yourself on thorny hedges!

For my joy – it loves to madden!
 For my joy – is malice laden!
 Would you pluck my rose and sadden?

10. The Scornful One

Much do I let fall and spill,
 thus I'm scornful, you malign.
 One who drinks from cups too full will
 often let much fall and spill – ,
 yet never think to blame the wine.

11. The Proverb Speaks

Sharp and mild, dull and keen,
 well known and strange, dirty and clean,
 where both the fool and wise are seen:
 All this am I, have ever been, –
 in me dove, snake and swine convene!

12. To a Friend of Light

If you want to spare your eyes and your mind,
 follow the sun from the shadows behind.

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13. For Dancers

Slipp'ry ice
is paradise
as long as dancing will suffice.

14. The Good Man

Better an enmity cut from one block
than friendship held together by glue.

15. Rust

Rust must be added: sharpness goes unsung!
Else they will always say: 'He is too young!'

16. Upward

'How do I best get to the top of this hill?'
'Climb it, don't think it, and maybe you will.'

17. Motto of A Brute

Never beg! It's whining I dread!
Take, I beg you, just take instead!

18. Narrow Souls

It's narrow souls that I despise;
not good, not evil, not my size.

19. The Involuntary Seducer

He shot an empty word into the blue
to pass the time – and downed a woman too.

20. Consider This

A twofold pain is easier to bear
than one pain: care to take a dare?

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21. *Against Arrogance*

Don't let your ego swell too much,
a bubble bursts with just a touch.

22. *Man and Female*

'Rob yourself the female, who to your heart appeals' –
So thinks a man; but she won't rob, a woman only steals.

23. *Interpretation*

If I read me, then I read into me:
I can't construe myself objectively.
But he who climbs consuming his own might
bears me with him unto the brighter light.

24. *Medication for Pessimists*²

You whine that nothing pleases you?
Still pouting, friend, and must you mutter?
I hear you curse, and shout and sputter –
it breaks my heart and patience too!
Come with me, friend! A nice fat toad,
if swallowed voluntarily
with eyes closed and summarily –
might lessen your dyspeptic load.

25. *Request*

I know another person's thought
and who I am, I know that not.
My vision is too close to me –
I am not what I saw and see.
I'd use myself more perfectly
if I could move away from me.
Yet not so distant as my foe!
My closest friend's too far off, no –

² Nietzsche's inspiration for the toad as medicine derives from a maxim by Chamfort, to the effect that a toad ingested each morning will make the rest of the day taste better.

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give me instead the middle ground!
 Do you surmise what I propound?

26. My Hardness

I must leave by a hundred stairs,
 I must ascend though I hear your cares:
 ‘You are hard: Are we made of stone?’
 I must leave by a hundred stairs,
 And being a stair appeals to none.

27. The Wanderer

‘The path ends! Abyss and deathly silence loom!’
 You wanted this! Your will strayed to its doom!
 Now wanderer, stand! Be keen and cool as frost!
 Believe in danger now and you – are lost.

28. Consolation for Beginners

See the child, with pigs she’s lying,
 helpless, face as white as chalk!
 Crying only, only crying –
 will she ever learn to walk?
 Don’t give up! Stop your sighing,
 soon she’s dancing ’round the clock!
 Once her own two legs are trying,
 she’ll stand on her head and mock.

29. Stellar Egotism

If I, round barrel that I am,
 did not roll ’round me like a cam,
 how could I bear, and not catch fire,
 to the chase the sun as I desire?

30. The Closest One

The closest one from me I bar:
 Away and up with him, and far!
 How else could he become my star?

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Joy too great you are concealing,
 you engage in dev'lish dealing,
 devil's wit and devil's dress.
 But no use! Your eye's revealing
 piety and holiness!

32. *The Bound Man*

A. He stands and hears: what's wrong, he's thinking?
 What sound provokes his heart to sinking?
 What was it hurled him to the ground?
 B. Like all who once in chains were bound,
 He hears around him – iron clinking.

33. *The Solitary One*

Despised by me are following and leading.
 Commanding? Even worse to me than heeding!
 Who does not scare *himself* can frighten no one:
 The one who causes fear can lead another.
 But just to lead myself is too much bother!
 I love, as do the sea and forest creatures,
 to lose myself a while in nature's features,
 to hide away and brood in secret places
 until, lured home at last from distant traces,
 my self-seduction lets me see – my features.

34. *Seneca et hoc genus omne*³

They write and write their desiccating
 learned la-di-da-di,
 as if *primum scribere*,
deinde philosophari.

35. *Ice*

Yes! At times I do make ice:
 Useful is ice for digesting!

³ Seneca (Roman philosopher) and his lot. The Latin: 'First write, then philosophize.'

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If you had much for digesting,
 oh how you would love my ice!

36. *Juvenilia*⁴

My old wisdom's A and O
 sounded here: what did I hear?
 Now it does not strike me so,
 just the tired Ah! and Oh!
 that youth inspired fills my ear.

37. *Caution*

Into that region trav'lers must not go:
 And if you're smart, be cautious even so!
 They lure and love you till you're torn apart:
 They're halfwit zealots – : witless from the heart!

38. *The Pious One Speaks*

God loves us *because* he created us!
 'Man created God!' – respond the jaded.
 And yet should not love what he created?
 Should even deny it *because* he made it?
 Such cloven logic is limping and baited.

39. *In Summer*⁵

Beneath the sweat of our own brow
 we have to eat our bread?
 If you sweat, eat nothing now,
 the wise physician said.
 The Dog Star winks: what does it know?
 What says its fiery winking?
 Beneath the sweat of our own brow
 our wine we should be drinking!

⁴ Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, hence proverbially the 'alpha and omega' are said to comprise everything.

⁵ Genesis 3:19: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.'

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40. *Without Envy*

His gaze is envyless: and him you praise?
 No thirst for your esteem perturbs his gaze;
 he has the eagle's vision for the long view,
 it's stars he sees, just stars – he looks beyond you!

41. *Heracleiteanism*

Happiness on earth, friends,
 only stems from war!
 Powder smoke, in fact, mends
 friendship even more!
 One in three all friends are:
 Brothers in distress,
 equals facing rivals,
 free men – facing death!

42. *Principle of the All-Too-Refined*

Rather on your tiptoes stand
 than crawling on all fours!
 Rather through the keyhole scanned
 than gazed through open doors!

43. *Admonition*

It's fame on which your mind is set?
 Then heed what I say:
 Before too long prepare to let
 honor slip away.

44. *The Well-Grounded One*⁶

A scholar I? I've no such skill! –
 I'm merely *grave* – just heavy set!
 I fall and fall and fall until
 I to the bottom get.

⁶ *Gründlich* in German means thorough, based on *Grund* (ground).

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45. *Forever*

'Today I come, I choose today' –
 think all who come and mean to stay.
 Though all the world may speculate:
 'You come too early! Come too late!'

46. *Judgements of the Weary*

The sun is cursed by all men jaded;
 to them the worth of trees is – shaded!

47. *Going Down*⁷

'He sinks, he falls now' – thus resumes your mocking;
 in truth, look closely: Down to you he's walking!
 His super-joy became too much to bear,
 his super-light dispels your gloomy air.

48. *Against the Laws*

From now on time hangs by a hair
 around my neck, suspended there:
 from now on stars shine randomly,
 sun, rooster crow, and shadow flee,
 whatever brought time to my mind
 that now is mute and deaf and blind: –
 All nature's still in me, it balks
 at ticking laws and ticking clocks.

49. *The Wise Man Speaks*

Unknown to folks, yet useful to the crowd,
 I drift along my way, now sun, now cloud
 and always I'm above this crowd!

⁷ *Niedergang* means decline, but it is ambiguous because it is formed from *nieder* (down) and the past participle of *gehen* (to go). Compare Zarathustra's 'going under' in the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.