

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

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*The Gay Science*

*With a Prelude in German Rhymes  
and an Appendix of Songs*

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## Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>page vii</i>
<i>Chronology</i>	xxiii
<i>Further reading</i>	xxvi
<i>Note on the text</i>	xxvii
The Gay Science	I
‘Joke, Cunning and Revenge’: Prelude in German Rhymes	II
Book One	27
Book Two	69
Book Three	109
Book Four: St Januarius	157
Book Five: We Fearless Ones	199
Appendix: Songs of Prince Vogelfrei	249
<i>Index</i>	261

## Preface to the second edition

### I

This book might need more than one preface; and in the end there would still be room for doubting whether someone who has not experienced something similar could, by means of prefaces, be brought closer to the *experiences* of this book. It seems to be written in the language of the wind that brings a thaw: it contains high spirits, unrest, contradiction, and April weather, so that one is constantly reminded of winter's nearness as well as of the *triumph* over winter that is coming, must come, perhaps has already come. . . Gratitude flows forth incessantly, as if that which was most unexpected had just happened – the gratitude of a convalescent – for *recovery* was what was most unexpected. 'Gay Science': this signifies the saturnalia<sup>1</sup> of a mind that has patiently resisted a terrible, long pressure – patiently, severely, coldly, without yielding, but also without hope – and is now all of a sudden attacked by hope, by hope for health, by the *intoxication* of recovery. Is it any wonder that in the process much that is unreasonable and foolish comes to light, much wanton tenderness, lavished even on problems that have a prickly hide, not made to be fondled and lured? This entire book is really nothing but an amusement after long privation and powerlessness, the jubilation of returning strength, of a reawakened faith in a tomorrow and a day after tomorrow, of a sudden sense and anticipation of a future, of impending adventures, of reopened seas, of goals that are permitted and believed in again. How many and what

<sup>1</sup> Roman winter festival at which usual bonds of social order were thrown off, social roles were reversed, etc.

sorts of things did not lie behind me then! This stretch of desert, exhaustion, loss of faith, icing-up in the midst of youth; this onset of dotage at the wrong time; this tyranny of pain surpassed still by the tyranny of a pride that refused the *conclusions* of pain – and conclusions are consolations; this radical seclusion as a self-defence against a pathologically clairvoyant contempt for humanity, this limitation in principle to what was bitter, harsh, painful to know, as prescribed by the *nausea* that had gradually developed from an incautious and excessively luxurious spiritual diet – one calls it romanticism – oh, who could re-experience all of this as I did? But if anyone could, he would surely pardon even more than a bit of foolishness, exuberance, ‘gay science’ – for example, the handful of songs that have been added to the book this time, songs in which a poet makes fun of all poets in a manner that is hard to forgive. Alas, it is not only the poets and their beautiful ‘lyrical sentiments’ on whom this resurrected author has to vent his malice: who knows what kind of victim he is looking for, what kind of monster will stimulate him to pardon it? *Incipit tragoedia*,<sup>2</sup> we read at the end of this suspiciously innocent book. Beware! Something utterly wicked and mischievous is being announced here: *incipit parodia*,<sup>3</sup> no doubt.

2

But let us leave Mr. Nietzsche: what is it to us that Mr Nietzsche has got well again? . . . A psychologist knows few questions as attractive as that concerning the relation between health and philosophy; and should he himself become ill, he will bring all of his scientific curiosity into the illness. For assuming that one is a person, one necessarily also has the philosophy of that person; but here there is a considerable difference. In some, it is their weaknesses that philosophize; in others, their riches and strengths. The former *need* their philosophy, be it as a prop, a sedative, medicine, redemption, elevation, or self-alienation; for the latter, it is only a beautiful luxury, in the best case the voluptuousness of a triumphant gratitude that eventually has to inscribe itself in cosmic capital letters on the heaven of concepts. In the former, more common case, however, when it is distress that philosophizes, as in all sick thinkers – and perhaps sick thinkers are in the majority in the history of

<sup>2</sup> ‘the tragedy begins’

<sup>3</sup> ‘the parody begins’

philosophy – what will become of the thought that is itself subjected to the *pressure* of illness? This is the question that concerns the psychologist, and here an experiment is possible. Just like a traveller who resolves to wake up at a certain hour and then calmly gives himself up to sleep, so too we philosophers, should we become ill, temporarily surrender with body and soul to the illness – we shut our eyes to ourselves, as it were. And as the traveller knows that something is *not* asleep, something that will count the hours and wake him up, we, too, know that the decisive moment will find us awake, that something will then leap forward and catch the mind *in the act*, i.e. in its weakness or repentance or hardening or gloom, and whatever else the pathological states of the mind are called that on healthy days are opposed by the *pride* of the mind (for the old saying still holds: ‘the proud mind, the peacock, and the horse are the three proudest animals on earth’). After such self-questioning, self-temptation, one acquires a subtler eye for all philosophizing to date; one is better than before at guessing the involuntary detours, alleyways, resting places, and *sunning* places of thought to which suffering thinkers are led and misled on account of their suffering; one now knows where the sick *body* and its needs unconsciously urge, push, and lure the mind – towards sun, stillness, mildness, patience, medicine, balm in some sense. Every philosophy that ranks peace above war, every ethic with a negative definition of happiness, every metaphysics and physics that knows some *finale*, a final state of some sort, every predominantly aesthetic or religious craving for some Apart, Beyond, Outside, Above, permits the question whether it was not illness that inspired the philosopher. The unconscious disguise of physiological needs under the cloaks of the objective, ideal, purely spiritual goes frighteningly far – and I have asked myself often enough whether, on a grand scale, philosophy has been no more than an interpretation of the body and a *misunderstanding of the body*. Behind the highest value judgements that have hitherto guided the history of thought are concealed misunderstandings of the physical constitution – of individuals or classes or even whole races. All those bold lunacies of metaphysics, especially answers to the question about the *value* of existence, may always be considered first of all as symptoms of certain *bodies*; and if such world affirmations or world negations lack altogether any grain of significance when measured scientifically, they give the historian and psychologist all the more valuable hints as symptoms

of the body, of its success or failure, its fullness, power and high-handedness in history, or of its frustrations, fatigues, impoverishments, its premonitions of the end, its will to an end. I am still waiting for a philosophical *physician* in the exceptional sense of the term – someone who has set himself the task of pursuing the problem of the total health of a people, time, race or of humanity – to summon the courage at last to push my suspicion to its limit and risk the proposition: what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but rather something else – let us say health, future, growth, power, life. . .

3

– One might guess that I do not want to take my leave ungratefully from that time of severe illness whose profits I have not yet exhausted even today: I am well aware of the advantages that my erratic health gives me over all burly minds. A philosopher who has passed through many kinds of health, and keeps passing through them again and again, has passed through an equal number of philosophies; he simply *cannot* but translate his state every time into the most spiritual form and distance – this art of transfiguration just *is* philosophy. We philosophers are not free to separate soul from body as the common people do; we are even less free to separate soul from spirit. We are no thinking frogs, no objectifying and registering devices with frozen innards – we must constantly give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and maternally endow them with all that we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and disaster. Life – to us, that means constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame, and also all that wounds us; we simply *can do* no other. And as for illness: are we not almost tempted to ask whether we can do without it at all? Only great pain is the liberator of the spirit, as the teacher of *the great suspicion* that turns every U into an X,<sup>4</sup> a real, proper X, that is, the penultimate one before the final one. Only great pain, that long, slow pain that takes its time and in which we are burned, as it were, over green wood, forces us philosophers to descend into our ultimate depths and put aside all trust, everything good-natured, veiling, mild, average – things in which formerly we may have found our humanity. I doubt that such pain

<sup>4</sup> ‘to make a U out to be an X’ is a standard German expression for trying to pretend that one thing is something completely different.

makes us 'better' – but I know that it makes us *deeper*. Whether we learn to pit our pride, our scorn, our willpower against it, like the savage who, however badly tormented, repays his tormentor with the malice of his tongue; or whether we withdraw before pain into the Oriental Nothingness – called Nirvana – into mute, rigid, deaf self-surrender, self-forgetting, self-extinction: one emerges from such dangerous exercises in self-mastery as a different person, with a few more question marks, above all with the *mill* henceforth to question further, more deeply, severely, harshly, evilly, and quietly than one had previously questioned. The trust in life is gone: life itself has become a *problem*. Yet one should not jump to the conclusion that this necessarily makes one sullen. Even love of life is still possible – only one loves differently. It is like the love for a woman who gives us doubts. . . But the attraction of everything problematic, the delight in an X, is so great in highly spiritual, spiritualized people such as these that this delight flares up like bright embers again and again over all the distress of what is problematic, over all the danger of uncertainty, and even over the jealousy of the lover. We know a new happiness. . .

4

Finally, lest what is most important remain unsaid: from such abysses, from such severe illness, also from the illness of severe suspicion, one returns *newborn*, having shed one's skin, more ticklish and malicious, with a more delicate taste for joy, with a more tender tongue for all good things, with merrier senses, joyful with a more dangerous second innocence, more childlike, and at the same time a hundred times subtler than one had ever been before. How repulsive enjoyment is to us now, that crude, muggy, brown enjoyment as understood by those who enjoy it, our 'educated', our rich, and our rulers! How maliciously we nowadays listen to the great fairground boom-boom with which the 'educated person' and urbanite today allows art, books and music – aided by spirituous beverages – to rape him for 'forms of spiritual enjoyment'! How the theatrical cry of passion now hurts our ears; that whole romantic uproar and tumult of the senses that is loved by the educated mob together with its aspirations towards the sublime, the elevated, the distorted, how foreign it has become to our taste! No, if we convalescents still need art, it is *another kind* of art – a mocking, light, fleeting,



divinely untroubled, divinely artificial art that, like a bright flame, blazes into an unclouded sky! Above all: an art for artists, only for artists! In addition we will know better what is first and foremost needed *for that*: cheerfulness – any cheerfulness, my friends! As artists, too, we will know this – I would like to prove it. There are some things we now know too well, we knowing ones: oh, how we nowadays learn as artists to forget well, to be good at *not* knowing! And as for our future, one will hardly find us again on the paths of those Egyptian youths<sup>5</sup> who make temples unsafe at night, embrace statues, and want by all means to unveil, uncover, and put into a bright light whatever is kept concealed for good reasons. No, we have grown sick of this bad taste, this will to truth, to ‘truth at any price’, this youthful madness in the love of truth: we are too experienced, too serious, too jovial, too burned, too deep for that. . . We no longer believe that truth remains truth when one pulls off the veil; we have lived too much to believe this. Today we consider it a matter of decency not to wish to see everything naked, to be present everywhere, to understand and ‘know’ everything. ‘Is it true that God is everywhere?’ a little girl asked her mother; ‘I find that indecent!’ – a hint for philosophers! One should have more respect for the *bashfulness* with which nature has hidden behind riddles and iridescent uncertainties. Perhaps truth is a woman who has grounds for not showing her grounds? Perhaps her name is – to speak Greek – *Baubo*?<sup>6</sup>. . . Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to *live*: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words – in the whole Olympus of appearance!

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch reports that in a temple in the Egyptian city of Sais, there was a veiled statue of the goddess Isis with the inscription: ‘I am everything that is, that was, and that will be, and no mortal has <ever> raised my veil.’ In his *Critique of Judgement* (1790, § 49) Kant says that this inscription is the ‘perhaps most sublime thing ever said’. In a short historical essay ‘Die Sendung Moses’ the German poet and dramatist Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) speculates on a possible influence of this cult on Moses and thus on the origin of monotheism. Schiller also wrote a poem entitled ‘Das Verschleierte Bild zu Sais’ which told of an Egyptian youth who was especially eager to know The Truth. One night he broke into the temple and violated the prohibition by lifting the veil, but when found the next morning, he could not report what he had seen and died an ‘early death’. The Romantic poet Novalis (1772–1801) gives two further variants (1798–9). In the first the youth left the young woman he loved, Rosenblütchen, to go in search of wisdom, truth, etc. When he arrived at the temple he fell asleep and dreamed that when he lifted the veil of the statue ‘Rosenblütchen sank into his arms’. In the second variant, when he lifted the veil, he saw himself. See also below, § 57.

<sup>6</sup> When the goddess Demeter was grieving for the abduction of her daughter by Hades, god of the underworld, the witch Baubo made her laugh again for the first time by lifting her skirts and exposing herself.

*Preface to the second edition*

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Those Greeks were superficial – *out of profundity!* And is not this precisely what we are coming back to, we daredevils of the spirit who have climbed the highest and most dangerous peak of current thought and looked around from up there, looked *down* from up there? Are we not just in this respect – Greeks? Worshippers of shapes, tones, words? And therefore – artists?

*Ruta near Genoa*  
*Autumn, 1886*