**Writings from the Late Notebooks**
Friedrich Nietzsche; ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge
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Nietzsche famously wrote most of his later books while he was out on long walks in the Swiss Alps or in the towns of the French and Italian Riviera. He carried notebooks with him, and would write down his thoughts as they occurred to him, often in an almost illegible handwriting that he (or his amanuensis, Peter Gast) would later have to decipher. These notes would then serve as the basis for his published works. "Give no credence to any thought that was not born outdoors while one moved about freely," Nietzsche advised in his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*; "The sedentary life is the real *sin* against the holy spirit" ("Why I am So Clever," §1). Many, if not most, of these notebooks have survived, and are currently housed in the Goethe-Schiller archive in Weimar, Germany. The existence of these unpublished notes (the *Nachlass*), however, has sparked controversy among Nietzsche's commentators, largely over the question of whether it is legitimate to make use of the notes in interpreting Nietzsche, or whether one should rely exclusively on his published texts.

In *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, editor Rüdiger Bittner has published a generous selection of excerpts (about one third of the total) from the notebooks Nietzsche kept between April 1885 and August 1888, shortly before his collapse in January 1889. In his introduction to the volume, Bittner has provided a persuasive justification for publishing a translation of these selections. From 1885 onward, he notes, just after the completion of *Zarathustra*,

> the disparity between what Nietzsche wrote in his notebooks and what he brought to a definitive form for publication grew radical. In fact, Nietzsche sensed that he was becoming alienated from the medium he had hitherto relied on. "My philosophy, if that is what I am entitled to call what torments me down to the roots of my nature, is no longer communicable, at least not in print," he wrote to Franz Overbeck on 2 July 1885. Writing down ideas in his notebooks, in contrast, seemed "less impossible." The notebooks became the field where Nietzsche was still able if not to communicate, then at least to express, his ideas (x).

To be sure, Nietzsche continued to publish during this period, despite his doubts: *Beyond Good and Evil* appeared in the spring of 1886; its sequel, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, came out a year later. The former book had been subtitled "Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future," and the philosophy of the future for which both these books were preparatory sketches was to be presented in a major new work. At the end of the *Genealogy* (III 27), Nietzsche

had even announced its title: *The Will to Power: Attempt at a Revaluation of All Values*. But this is where the controversy begins. The notes from the years of 1885 to 1888 were to form part of this new work, and the notebooks contain various plans on how Nietzsche intended to organize the material. On 13 February 1888, Nietzsche wrote to Peter Gast, telling him that the first draft was finished, although he was not satisfied with it ("I do not yet in any way have the courage for it. Ten years from now I will do it better"). Yet he continued writing and reorganizing through the spring and summer of 1888 eventually retitling the work, simply, *Revaluation of All Values*. By September, however, he had given up on his plans for a major work, and instead compiled *Twilight of the Idols* (published January 1889), which was a selection from the notes, and wrote the *Antichrist* (published 1895), which was now presented as merely the first book of the *Revaluation*. Following Nietzsche's collapse in 1889, Nietzsche's notebooks passed into the hands of his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. In 1901, she and Peter Gast published a selection from the notebooks under the title *The Will to Power*, suggesting (wrongly) that it was the execution of a plan that Nietzsche had been prevented from fulfilling because of his illness. A larger collection followed in 1906, and it was this version that was eventually translated into English in 1967 by Kaufmann and Hollingdale.

But *The Will to Power* was, in a sense, a false book. By the time of his collapse, Nietzsche had abandoned both the title and the organizational plan; moreover, the editors suppressed many of the texts Nietzsche had intended to include in the book (about a quarter), and altered numerous others. Although Elisabeth had great merits, and did much to ensure the diffusion of her brother's ideas (we owe to her the very existence of these notebooks), she deliberately falsified Nietzsche's texts, and ultimately committed the highest treason by placing Nietzsche in the service of National Socialism. It was not until 1967 that a complete and reliable edition of Nietzsche's writings was compiled, the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke* (KGW), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967 onward), which finally allowed readers and scholars to consult Nietzsche's texts in close to their original form, freed from Elisabeth's distortions.

If this history of Nietzsche's notebooks is worth recounting here, it is precisely because it shows the importance of this new collection. For the first time, English-language readers are able to read Nietzsche's notebooks directly, freed (almost) from editorial intervention. The selections are organized chronologically, so that readers can now follow the development of Nietzsche's thought during this crucial period on its own terms, and draw their own conclusions concerning its merits. The translation, by Kate Surge, is fluid and accurate, and has been made from the Colli-Montinari edition. Many of the notes are appearing here in English for the first time; others were previously translated in *The Will to Power*, but are now restored to their chronological context.

Inevitably, one can voice some minor hesitations about the selections. Bittner explains that

> the chief criterion for including a text here was its philosophical import—and not its historical or, more particularly, biographical interest. My aim was not to offer information about the development of Nietzsche's thought in this period, or about the changes in his plans for a major work. Instead, the present collection is intended to serve those readers wishing to know what Nietzsche has to say on a number of topics and also whether what he says is true. (xiv)

But "philosophical import" is an unavoidably evaluative and idiosyncratic criterion. Excluding Nietzsche's organizational plans, for example, implies that his "thinking" appears only in the isolated fragments, and not in the linkages he ultimately sought to establish between them. Bittner himself refers to three such plans in his introduction (x–xii), and, at the very least, some of these might have been included for the reader's perusal. Similarly, Bittner has systematically—and rather off-handedly—excluded Nietzsche's reflections on "men and women, or on 'peoples and fatherlands,'" claiming that "Nietzsche had nothing of interest to say on either of these matters" (xv)—despite the fact that these are the titles of entire sections in Nietzsche's books, and that he ascribed to them an obvious importance (however remote from current sensibilities). But every such textual selection necessarily passes through the perspective and bias of the editor, and Bittner has not hesitated to wear his preferences on his sleeve.

The usefulness of this collection in the classroom may depend on the context. However dubious its philological reliability, one advantage of *The Will to Power* is that the fragments are organized thematically. If one chooses to approach Nietzsche through the *Nachlass*, it is not clear to me that *The Will to Power* has been superseded as a teaching tool, especially for students approaching Nietzsche for the first time. Advanced students pursuing a more serious study of Nietzsche will, of course, find *Writings from the Late Notebooks* to be a more reliable and indispensable resource. One drawback of the collection, however, is that it does not contain a critical apparatus (at the very least, identifying which notes are also included in *The Will to Power* would have saved some readers much flipping back and forth.) For this reason, *Writings from the Late Notebooks* must be seen as a provisional collection. Stanford University Press has embarked on an English translation of the Colli-Montinari edition, which (though the project is now proceeding at a glacial pace) will eventually provide English-language readers with a complete critical version of the notebooks. Until then, *Writings from the Late Notebooks* has provided us with a wealth of new material from Nietzsche's notebooks, and we can only be grateful to the efforts of Rüdiger Bittner, Kate Sturge, and the Cambridge University Press in making it available to a wide audience.

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