

Nietzsche

Benjamin De Casseres

1926

Nietzsche!

In that word there flashes across the brain the confused vision of stupendous disasters; tempestuous seas loosed from their beds of matter that fall savagely on flaming constellations; sidereal systems wrenched and torn from their ancient grooves and sent hurtling back to chaos; cataracts of lava falling from inconceivable heights on planets that hang limply in space; a massacre of gods and demons; mountains that totter and go to smash in their own abysses; hurricanes that drag with them the débris of ancient outworn hells; flames and lightning flashes that incinerate the empty thrones of all the murdered gods.

Above it all there is heard a frenzied dithyrambic chant that celebrates the nuptials of Death and Life. It is the passionate Dionysiac hymn of Friedrich Nietzsche, mad incendiary, who inherited his insanity from Prometheus.

In the drug stores where one may have a prescription made up for a style while one waits Nietzsche is anathema. Like Hugo, Blake, Whitman, Wagner; like the sea, the tempest, the avalanche, the volcanic eruption, he was a force that swept everything before it.

He was pregnant with a million naked visions. His poems, his paradoxes, his aphorisms came into the world bellowing and trumpeting. His ideas spurted from him like hemorrhages. He wheeled and whirled and turned, bit and snarled and scratched.

His pen was forged by Vulcan. In his inkpot were the viscera of Prometheus. He was a giant thundercloud that rained brimstone and hail.

He composed his books as God composes worlds, with a mighty, withering, haunted chaos of fire and cloud and noxious vapors.

His style is elliptical, broken, labyrinthine. He steps from the dome of St. Peter's to the pinnacle of the Matterhorn. In a single sentence he smashes the skull of Plato against the skull of Herbert Spencer. He tunnels, saps, undermines and then dynamites, but never reasons.

If you ride this wild horse of Tartary, see that you are strapped to its back, or you will be flung to death from an enormous height. Through snows and over the edelweiss you go to the summits of unknown mountains, and then, miracle of miracles! you bound straight into the azure, for wings have sprouted. The wild courser of earth has become Pegasus at the threshold of the empyrean.

There is a wild alarm in his pages. One hears a tocsin sounded by night and day. A thunder of hoofs as in some stupendous cavalry charge. Prodigious fissures open and close before our eyes.

Great gouts of life are hurled at our heads. Litanies that end in screams and sobs. Catafalques of bronze burst and give forth doves and butterflies—so hard, so tender is the soul of this wonderful man.

He says that his “Zarathustra” is the greatest work ever written. I know of no one competent to contradict him unless it be the reputed author of the Old Testament.

Goethe said, “The sense of life is life itself.” That is the secret of “Thus Spake Zarathustra.” Zarathustra leaves his mountain solitude to come down into the valleys where men live to teach them the glory of earthliness.

He comes to redeem them from spirituality, to destroy their belief in God and other phantoms and the itch for the immortality that will not take the body along.

A religion that strikes at the senses, that strikes at the body, that spits on sex is a blasphemy. The priests blaspheme at life. The “Kingdom of Heaven” is a sacrilege. The belief in God is an infidelity. In nature man is the only sick animal. And he is sick because he is apostate to life, to the earth. He believes in a Beyond outside of himself. He denies his own Godhood. He is less than the eagle and the lion. He is a pervert.

The existence of man justifies man. The existence of pain justifies pain. The existence of Death justifies Death. Whatever is right, because it is a rung to something higher. Whatever is wrong, because it must be denied.

Perpetually create new values, new vistas, new heights. Fuse your will and your dream. Empty this minute into the next minute. Put wings on your vices. Let your purpose be a sword. Exalt your pains. Make golden butterflies of your griefs. Be playwright to yourself. Let your brain play Shakespeare to the vicissitudes of your life. Let your supersight be Moliere to your fatalities.

Before every man’s tomb there is a stone which can be rolled away. Every death has its resurrection. The superman is simply a perpetual overcoming of oneself. It is the ascension to newer vistas. It is the instinct of Life for more life. The earth is not a backyard. It is a magical, undiscovered empire as large or as small as your will. And the frozen summits of its mountains are arable.

Are these phrases only? Have they any meaning? They are supreme realities. They are the steps in the evolution of minds of the first order. Goethe, Spinoza, Emerson, Thoreau, Hugo, the Hindu seers, Schopenhauer, Walt Whitman, Nietzsche himself, have been overmen among us. The overman is simply the man who perpetually forges ahead of himself, who never allows his yesterday to walk abreast of his today, whose inner eye breeds wider horizons with each glance. Each new perspective has a summit to be reached. He is a traveler without a destination. He is Power and Eye. That is his justification for living.

To be out of bondage is to be free of yesterday. The past licks your hands and whines for a soul. Dogmas, beliefs, faiths, all your past values garrote you from behind. But you, the dancing changeling, have the mad folly for the new, for the unknown, for the tempestuous, for strange hells and mocking heavens.

“I love him who chastises his God,” says Zarathustra. There is no God, no idol, no image that does not begin to emit an odor after being locked up for a certain time between the walls of the skull. The Goths and Vandals descended on Rome in the nick of time. They cleaned house. The mind needs its Goths and Vandals every day.

And that spot where the senile old God has babbled so long needs above all others chlorides. Our spiritual entrails are foul. The way to salvation lies through an emetic. Every God is a parasite.

Every belief is a vampire. Scourge with a rod of fire everything that lodges in the soul. Be avatar and Phoenix over night. Metempsychosis should be a day-to-day miracle. I wish forever to be on the road to Damascus. I invite lightnings to strike me, and send them back hissing and blazing into the face of my God. We are both Jupiters.

Nietzsche put a barbaric glitter on all he touched. His mind was more Babylonian than Greek. He was born in some spiritual Sybaris, where life was conceived as a flavor.

The world is a backgammon board, and when Destiny throws the dice we pawns are moved. Therefore the free mind will conceive the world as spectacle. Ethical ends are illusive but invaluable as motives for the drama being played under the stars. The æsthetic motive is substituted for the ethical motive. Nietzsche rises beyond good and evil and stands with Apollo and Dionysus, spectator and participator by turns. The fairy spectacle of life and death, the ugly badinage of which we are all the victims, and to justify which priests and lawgivers invent ethical systems—for the Apollonian mind it is a sublime mystery-play. And at the end of each cycle of existence it pleads with the Master of Ceremonies for an encore. For the universe has no meaning except when seen through the eyes of the Eternal Contemplator.

The devil's dance of Humanity which the hoodwinked call "progress" is carried on by series of crimes. The famous "immoralism" of Nietzsche is merely the immoralism of us all. The world is divided into trespassers and bores. The trespassers sometimes go to Calvary, sometimes to St. Helena, sometimes go scot-free and are decorated. But the bores make the laws. Respectability is static. It is the will to immobility. It is elect, baptized in its own feculent piety.

Against the mollusc and the mummy, against the sycophants and parasites the free spirit must play the Cain.

The minds of the masses are sentimental lazarettos. The highwaymen, the world incendiaries, the anarchists must murder the souls of the peaceful and the mediocre. Upset their altars. Teach them ethics of perpetual trespass. Set their brains on fire with visions of revolution. When thirsty, tired and tottering, goad them on with mockeries and taunts, and dynamite the pest-ridden places where they last sought shelter.

Wherever there is vital, pulsating life there is the will to immorality—that is, the will to break idols and shackles, the instinct to deny the thing that is the nearest and to stretch out the hand for the thing that is the farthest. The creator of values, the eternal suspect, listens to the serpent, bites deep into the apple of temptation, and then defiantly hurls the core against the walls of heaven...

Man is instinctively an outlaw. Naturally he is a brigand. When he is straitjacketed by the discipline of social and religious penalties the task is undertaken by other and stronger outlaws—priests and lawgivers. They invent gods and hells and gibbets to immunize themselves. Mohammed, Christ and John Brown, Charlemagne, Torquemada, Bismarck and Napoleon invented the lie ethical in order to save their bacons. The outlaw in the Mills Hotel has a grievance against the outlaw in the Waldorf-Astoria. He invents an ethic called "socialism," and with that nimbus goes forth. Power seeks to gag power.

We are all created in the image of one God: Tartuffe.

Nietzsche was the devil's advocate: that is, he held a brief for Life against the leaden doctrines of despair. He was born of Odin and Frigga, and his name was Balder.

The greatest psychologist that the world has ever known, he cut away the mask that every instinct wears, and showed us the soul of the world: The Will-to-Power.

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