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Nietzsche and Lou, Eros and Art:
On Lou's Triangles, Nietzsche's Weather,
and the « Exquisite Dream » of Sacro Monte

Babette BABICH

...
Alma, tell us!
All modern women are jealous. / Which of your magical wands
Got you Gustav and Walter and Franz?

...
Alma, tell us!
How can they help being jealous? / Ducks always envy the swans
Who get Gustav and Walter, / You never did falter,
With Gustav and Walter and Franz.

— Tom Lehrer

“... *the satisfaction of a vulgar curiosity*”

Love has been part of the substance of philosophy from the start, beginning with the pre-platonic philosophers Heraclitus and Empedocles. Indeed, Plato attributes more than one discourse on love to Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. And, in the *Symposium*, Socrates tells us that he borrows his words from Diotima, the Mantinean hetaira and priestess of love, for whose paid companionship Socrates acquires the wherewithal — so we are compelled to ‘calculate’ — from his friends.

It is also from Plato that we deduce love's geometry: its figures and its figuring, for love is all about triangulation. Indeed, we are still reading Plato's Socrates rather than Aristophanes' or Xenophon's when Nietzsche declares Socrates a “great erotic” in the overture to his *Twilight of the Idols*.

Alexander Nehamas has offered us a subtle guide to Plato's seductive irony in a didactic context, as Nehamas illuminates a reader's reading for us, tacking as he does between Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain* and Plato's *Euthyphro*. For Nehamas, the figuring in question always turns out to be all about the reader who is of course and already

and inevitably written into the dialogue as such.¹ This focus on the reader is also Plato's point in the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue on love and on lovers' speeches there articulated as so many seducer's/suitor's suits. Thus Plato sketches the working efficacy of the lover's triangle at more than one ironic level in Lysias's written or "set" or stock speech to Phaedrus tuned by way of Socrates' counter-discourse of love, presented as spontaneously spoken in the context of Plato's written text on the disadvantages of written texts.

Yet and in spite of Socrates' putative and hence celebrated fondness for the boys, a predilection which serves in the *Republic* as the point of departure for more than one metaphor or analogy, and here we do well to note that our initial reference to Diotima is not a reference to a woman, but and instead and in a spirit that runs from Aristophanes to Goethe and Hölderlin to James Joyce and thence to Thomas Mann, never anything more than a set speech placed in the mouth of an imaginary woman (and Diotima is always imagined), filtered in this case through the censor of not only one but two men, that is here between Socrates and Plato himself.

Plato — an equal-opportunity philosopher if there ever was one — also attributes a doubled discourse to Socrates in the *Symposium*, here triangulated contra Alcibiades: a dialogue that is, among other things, a contest or agonistic gamut of lover's discourses. Socrates begins by recalling his conversations with a priestess-prostitute to testify to love's more elevated or rarified heights, starting with Diotima's account of Eros, not as an orphic Phanes, first among the gods, bringer of light, but as a more reduced daemon begotten by Poros or *abundance* upon Penia or *poverty*. Poros is seemingly not quite at his resourceful best at this juncture, for, so goes Diotima's tale, but Poros is simply tricked or *hoodwinked* by Penia — or perhaps we should think again, perhaps this excuse merely serves as his escape clause? If so, this would be common enough, as an all-too masculine recourse: tricking trickery which would

¹ Alexander Nehamas, "Platonic Irony: Author and Audience," chapter one of Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 19-45.

be the meaning of *poros*: thereby assigning all responsibility for the birth of Eros, their joint progeny, to Penia alone, leaving mother and child to survive with the limited resources of poverty. To the range of distractions at work, we are informed that Eros, this child of abundance and indigence, also happened to be conceived on Aphrodite's birthday, prefiguring, as we continue to read the *Symposium*, Alcibiades' satyr-play at the end of the dialogue, where in a feckless demonstration of Parrhesia, the beautiful Alcibiades, drunk as a Lord, testifies to Socrates' seductive allure, declaring his prodigious *sophrosyne* in things homoerotic.

And by then we no longer remember that Socrates spends his time (and his admirer's money) on women.

And, like gossip, we are all interested in such things because we all know or suppose ourselves expert in matters of the heart. It is this familiarity with love and inclination that absorbs us in reading of Lou Andreas-Salomé but also others (just think of Hannah Arendt). In these cases, much of our fascination is a vicarious imagining, a mirrored seduction in which we write ourselves into a relationship with Lou (and her other lovers) — or else as idealized in Plato (and in Hölderlin) as Diotima or modernized as Arendt, although Arendt, arguably, may be too demanding for us in this respect. Thus we seem to require the added frisson of Heidegger's sullied greatness or some such thing. Arendt's first marriage to Günther Anders hardly interests us (perhaps too nice a guy on the personal level and much too inconveniently close to her, theoretically speaking) and her second marriage to Heinrich Blücher (who was personally a bit more thuggish and who presented no competition to Arendt) is also not as interesting.

Something of the same need to heighten the stakes is also at work with Lou Andreas-Salomé who was on first name terms with so many and such great men that if anyone else presumed to take such liberties it might well appear to be mere invention, as Pascale Hummel reminds

us, striking us as somewhat “forced.”² Surely this is name-dropping at its most humanly tawdry level. Indeed, Andreas-Salomé’s familiarities can be over-bland given her laundry list of supposed conquests. But something is clearly at work here and of course, as most commentators emphasize, Andreas-Salomé had such a list for good reason. Hence H. F. Peters can well take the epigraph he affixes to *My Sister, My Spouse* from the *Song of Solomon*: “How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! How much better is thy love than wine!”³ One might think here of Hegel’s praise of sisterly love on the model of Sophocles’ *Antigone* — but the association is a ticklish one in Nietzsche’s case and scholars rarely incline to this model, apart and of course from Peters himself who duly writes on Nietzsche and his own sister.⁴

In what follows I will not be interested in detailing the psychodynamics of brotherly love or conversely, on Lou’s part, of daughterly/sisterly/motherly love. Here it is the iconology, iconography that matters: to wit, the pictures and the role played by these pictures not for us but and much rather for Lou herself, as she deployed them. Lou’s memoirs, her *Lebensrückblick* published by Ernst Pfeiffer in 1951, includes pictures and so too did Ernst Podach’s study.⁵ Indeed, Books on Lou and Nietzsche always include pictures, including that is to say Lou’s first book on Nietzsche written and published, to the dismay of his family and friends during the time of his incapacity (1890-1893) and which included images of Nietzsche and facsimiles of

² Pascale Catherine Hummel, « Le partage du sens », in Lou Andreas-Salomé, *L’heure sans Dieu* (Paris: rue d’Ulm, 2010), pp. 139-174, here p. 140 ; cf. p. 141.

³ H. F. Peters, *My Sister, My Spouse: A Biography of Lou Andreas-Salomé* (New York: Norton, 1962). Here one should refer to the complicated (because universally agreed upon as having been or having had to be a forgery, whereby we uniformly discharge any obligation to engage it) autobiography ‘attributed’ to Nietzsche during his madness, a condition wherein, indeed, anything goes: *My Sister and I*, Oscar Levy trans. (New York: Boar’s Head Books, 1951).

⁴ H. F. Peters, *Zarathustra’s Sister: The Case of Elisabeth and Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1977).

⁵ Ernst Podach, *Friedrich Nietzsche und Lou Salomé, Ihr Begegnung 1882*. (Zürich/Leipzig: Max Niehans, 1937).

his letters.⁶ Hence and importantly well before the internet made this utterly unremarkable, images give us the means to indulge our scopic drive, envisioning the object of our interest and including a cast of the characters into whose places we write ourselves or set against ourselves as object.

Love or eros, qua “sweet-bitter,” as the classicist poet Anne Carson has also underlined it for us, is and *can only be* an erotic figure as a mark of loss — and it matters to note that Carson also underlines the triangulation of desire.⁷ And we, post-feminist⁸ as we are, especially in a post-Lacanian discipline as comparative literature or classical philology and even philosophy tends to be, have gotten used to the power of figures of lack or loss. Thus we are assured a kind of erotic allure in the case of Lou Salomé just because — and this matters hugely — we have never met her. The result is abject fascination and this is so even in the case of the late Rudolph Binion’s psychoanalytic account.⁹ Hence our fascination *survives* Binion’s account as it also survives David Allison’s insightful treatment, which is itself indebted to Ernst Pfeiffer and Curt Paul Janz, all mediated, to be sure, by Charles Andler and Pierre Klossowski and so on and on.¹⁰

⁶ Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken mit 2 bildern und 3 faksimilierten briefen* (Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1894). In English as Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Nietzsche*, trans. Siegfried Mandel (

⁷ Anne Carson, *Eros, the Bittersweet* (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Press, 1998).

⁸ This means, of course, that feminism is a lost or failed cause, even professionally, especially academically. See with respect to philosophy and for further references, Babette Babich, “Great Men, Little Black Dresses, & the Virtues of Keeping One’s Feet on the Ground,” *MP: An Online Feminist Journal*, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (August 2010): 57-78 or for a popularly focused concision, Babich, “Women and Status in Philosophy,” *Radical Philosophy*, 160 (March/April 2010): 36-38.

⁹ Rudolph Binion, *Frau Lou: Nietzsche’s Wayward Disciple* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

¹⁰ Ernst Pfeiffer, *Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul Rée, Lou von Salomé. Die Dokument ihrer Begegnung* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1970), Curt Paul Janz, *Nietzsche Biographie*, in 3 vols. (Munich: Hanser Verlag, rev. 1993). See Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*

Note that it is Charles Andler who manages (*accomplished*, no mean feat, in a *single* footnote!) to analyze almost all aspects of the *staging* of the pathetically triangular and very famous studio photograph of Lou and Rée and Nietzsche. Andler details the puzzle of the 1882 Lucerne photograph, beginning with a crouching Lou Salomé in a garden cart — described by Lou as “little (far too little!)” in her posthumously published memoirs, memoirs brought out owing to the dedicated efforts of Ernst Pfeiffer in 1951 and “revised” by Pfeiffer as her editor (with some bitterness towards Binion’s reading of the same), in 1973.¹¹

A quasi-isosceles sketching, the triangle as figured is surely scalene: it is manifestly *not* about equality. This form is already sketched in Andler with Lou the apex and Friedrich Nietzsche and Paul Rée as the two opposing angles; each fitted with armband traces yoking them to Lou crouching in the cart, holding the two reins in one hand with a small whip festooned, so we have been informed, with lilacs in the other. Andler’s footnote follows Lou’s memoirs down to the detail of the lilacs she mentions while also referring for didactic emphasis (and as a doubled reverse ekphrasis), to Bernoulli’s book on Overbeck und Nietzsche, a book which was itself, hence the overdoubling here, both violently contested by Lou and by Nietzsche’s sister and based on Overbeck’s memoirs.¹²

(Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) for discussion and further references, pp. 112ff. See too Robin Small’s account in his editor’s introduction to his translation of Paul Rée, *Basic Writings* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), pp. xv–xviii.

¹¹ Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Looking Back: Memoirs. The Intimate Story of her Friendships with Nietzsche, Rilke, & Freud*, Ernst Pfeiffer, ed., Breon Mitchell, trans. (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1995 [German original: 1951]), p. 48.

¹² Charles Andler, *Nietzsche sa vie et sa pensée II. Le pessimisme esthétique de Nietzsche. La maturité de Nietzsche* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958 [orig: 1920-1931]), pp. 440-441. The footnote includes references to medieval woodcuts and sculptures depicting Aristotle on all fours and Phyllis on his back. See Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: eine Freundschaft*, 2 volumes (Jena: E. Diedrichs, 1908) — and note that this work in particular has had a history of suppression or “resistance.” See again Allison’s *Reading the New Nietzsche* and Frances



Fig. 1 Lucerne, May 1882. Dorothee Pfeiffer, Lou Salome Archive, Göttingen.

However and for the classically trained, and this is the point of departure for my own reading of the photograph, apart from what seems to be its patent appeal to masculine fancy, as set up in the

Nesbitt Opper, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman* (Lexington: University of Virginia Press, 2005). Cornelius Verhoeven is one of the rare commentators to advert in passing to Kleobis und Biton before returning to an Andlerian reading of the woodcut read forward to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, in Verhoeven's "Do not Forget the Whip: Notes on a Pronouncement of Nietzsche," in: J. M. van Tongeren, et al., eds., *Eros and Eris* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992), pp. 177-187. Hermann Josef Schmidt adds a Wagnerian overdetermination with Fricka in his "Du gehst zu frauen?" in: Ralf Eichberg, Hans-Martin Gerlach, and Hermann Josef Schmidt, eds., *Nietzscheforschung, Bd. 1* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994) pp. 111-134. Jean-Pierre Faye likewise points to Wagner's *Valkyrie* and the description of Fricka in her chariot in more detail than Schmidt in Faye, *Nietzsche et Salomé. La philosophie dangereuse* (Paris: Grasset, 2000).

Lucerne photographer's studio, the triangular tableau of Lou in the cart and Nietzsche and Rée pulling the same corresponds not to etchings or tapestries depicting Aristotle on all fours but much rather and instead to depictions of the famed brothers, Kleobis and Biton: two-footed beasts installed in traces normally reserved for the four-footed kind. (Fig. 2) To boot, Kleobis and Biton were celebrated *kouroi*, a term relevant here as it is also the way Nietzsche and Rée would have seen themselves in spite of their relatively advanced ages (if we only note Greek standards for youth).



Fig 2. Museo delle Terme di Diocleziano, Rome Italy.

Altar with the myth of Kleobis and Biton. White marble, Roman artwork of the Imperial era. Found in Via della Giustiniana in Tor Vergata in Popolo. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen, 2006. Wikimedia Commons.

If the figural array of Kleobis and Biton drawing their mother to the temple of Hera, also happens to install Lou in the position of a particularly maternal family relative, this too makes a certain sense. For it was Lou herself who insisted on a *domestic* and not an erotic

relationship.¹³ Thus the triune disposition reflects Lou's announced intentions toward the two of them: domestically speaking and in every non-erotic sense of domesticity.¹⁴ As for what became of Kleobis and Biton, who when the oxen to draw their mother's oxcart could not be called from the fields to bring her to the festivities to honor Hera, valiantly hitched themselves to her cart in the place of the oxen to carry her to the celebration in honor of the goddess, the story grows darker. Kleobis and Biton drew the cart with such alacrity that their mother arrived in good time for the rites and in her pride and joy, their grateful mother prayed that evening to the goddess of the hearth that they be afforded the highest distinction befitting a mortal. Her prayer did not go unanswered and both her sons died before the dawn.

If it is best of all but *impossible* for mortals *never to have been* born, the second best, and the highest option for a mortal, will be death as soon as possible.¹⁵ I have already noted that this interpretation has the feature of iconic exactitude, featuring three individuals: one woman, two men, along with a two wheeled cart, details lacking in other readings featuring only two figures and no cart, as in the case of the medieval woodcuts and tapestries featuring Aristotle and Phyllis.

The figure of Kleobis and Biton was a popular illustration but it only compounds matters to note that Nietzsche, Rée, and Lou would have had the opportunity, had they wished to do so, to see this figure for themselves in Rome as an altar relief can be found there. (Fig. 2) Given the talk of the triune domestic partnership in the air between

¹³ Lou even recalls that she was called "little mother." Andreas-Salomé, *Looking Back*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Andreas-Salomé describes her vision of such a domestic arrangement in her life with Rée, down to a shared study with books and flowers, but emphasizing "separate bedrooms," and a life shared to and fro, from either side to the center. See *Looking Back*, pp. 45.

¹⁵ Nietzsche, we know, is taken with this diction which he first quotes in *The Birth of Tragedy* and then goes on to invoke Lessing's son, who died the day he was born. Hölderlin uses the Sophoclean phrase in question, *me phynai*, as the motto for the second volume of his *Hyperion*.

them (the “trinity”) together with Nietzsche’s already growing sense of fatality vis-à-vis his own chances with Lou contra Rée (as this also emerges, and this is almost from the start, in his letters), the fatal troika seems to haunt the staging of the photograph in Lucerne.

Nevertheless and owing to the power of Andler’s prodigious footnote and its reference to medieval sculptures/woodcuts, the reading preferred in the literature has not, despite rare exceptions, been to the oxcart triad of Kleobis, Biton, and their mother (a figure, once again inscribing Lou as Nietzsche’s and as Rée’s “little” mother, a position which most domestic relationships between men and women often tend to mirror, one way or another) in a domestic triangulation (now via Hera the metonymically named “holy trinity”), but has tended much rather to trim the three figures to a more manageably erotic duality. Thus we read of Aristotle on all fours with Phyllis on his back — an allegorical depiction, as Andler helpfully explains, of “woman” triumphing over “philosophy” — an interpretation that also works as a wish fulfillment.¹⁶

I have already indicated my preference for the more classic triangle rather than the (hidden) Alexandrian jest (hidden because, this is also where the wish fulfillment comes in, Alexander does not appear) as Andler and more recently as David Allison has ingeniously detailed this scenario for us.¹⁷ And in what follows I further undertake to ask about, as commentators rarely seem to ask about, our “faith” in Lou von Salomé with reference now not to the iconography of staged photographs but and much more crucially with reference to what we know about her relationship to Nietzsche and to Rée and indeed to the many others in her life.

¹⁶ Andler, *Nietzsche sa vie et sa pensée, Vol 2*, p. 441.

¹⁷ Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, pp. 155-157. Allison includes some fascinating tapestries varying and expanding the woodcut scene but Alexander is absent (hiding in the curtains, as Allison argues).

For what is significant here to my reading is simply that *almost everything we know* on such matters, *we know* rather directly from Lou alone. This should at least give us an occasion for questioning.

If Binion remarks of his personal encounters with Ernst Pfeiffer that for Pfeiffer, “in his official estimate Lou was all candor, self-awareness, selflessness, as incapable of a mean motive as of an intellectual error, her every word a blessing and her every act a reverence,”¹⁸ Binion still and nonetheless retraces — and this is in spite of Pfeiffer’s aggrieved defense against Binion’s reading in his postscript appended to his 1973 revised edition of Andreas-Salomé’s *Looking Back* — and just as any review of Lou’s life must, her own self-reconstruction for the simple reason that her notes and diaries determine all such accounts.¹⁹ Lou, who waited until Nietzsche’s collapse to write on Nietzsche (in 1890-1893) and who waited until after Rée’s death to write on Rée, also took extraordinary care with the crafting of her own autobiography, directly and indirectly working along the way to perfect her own legacy. As more than one commentator has observed: she was herself her own legacy. If Nietzsche had wanted to give birth to himself and nearly did, thereby insisting as he did in his *Ecce homo* on a kind of half-mortal existence, “expressed as a riddle,” he writes “I am already dead as my father, while as my mother, I am still living and growing old,” EH, *Why I am so Wise* (§1), Lou systematically secured a still more ambitious project of *immortalization*, writing herself as her own God, God-Man, Child, Glorified Heroine, Self. It is a piece of irony that her self-apotheosis was articulated, as commentator after commentator has noted, via old men, namely by way of her father who was quite old, at

¹⁸ Binion, *Frau Lou*, p. 557.

¹⁹ See for example, Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Lebensrückblick. Grundriss einiger Lebenserinnerungen, aus dem Nachlaß, hrsg. v. Ernst Pfeiffer* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1979 [1951]) as well as Lou Salomé, *Friedrich Nietzsche in seinen Werken* (Vienna: Carl Konegen, 1894) and see, too, Pfeiffer’s edition of *Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul Ree, Lou von Salome, Dokumente Ihrer Begegnung* (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1970). Contrast this with Bernoulli’s *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche*.

51, when she was born, and then via Hendrik Gillot, her teacher, and so on and on.

So biographer after biographer, analyst after analyst tells us that Lou herself invents herself. Nor where the margin of illusion matches that of self-deception can we say to what extent Lou was not taken in by her own invention. Nor is it clear, this side of pathology, what difference this would make. What matters here is that her readers are taken by her, and manifestly so, just as those who met her in life seemingly were, from Nietzsche and Rée to Rilke and Freud. *Even* Freud and that alone should give us pause: philosophy and medicine to poetry and the founder of modern psychoanalysis. It's hard to imagine not being taken in.

Maybe we should, so feminists do argue, count in or include Lou's own name along with Nietzsche and Rée, Rilke and Freud? But this inclusion is a difficult matter. Lou Andreas-Salomé is known through her name taken in marriage to a man she tells us she never slept with, Friedrich Carl Andreas (nor would I, for one, doubt this last claim just because there is nothing so conducive to a lack of sexual contact than marriage). And here I suggest that rather than worrying about the sheer range of men (so very many of whom, so we are informed, promptly proposed marriage upon meeting her) or taking umbrage at the putative sexlessness of her marriage to Andreas, we might do better to take the entire range of her claims, especially given their nicely literary consistency, *cum grano salis*.²⁰

We might begin with Hendrik [Hendrijk] Gillot, her Dutch tutor-pastor,²¹ but also with Nietzsche, as this concerns us most in the

²⁰ As Binion writes, "Lou was literary full-time." *Frau Lou*, p. 27. In this vein, it is significant, as Tracy Strong emphasizes (see note X below), that Nietzsche would send Lou a detailed and elemental listing of stylistic imperatives.

²¹ Binion describes Gillot as an "ultraliberal pulpit orator attached to the Dutch legation in Petersburg" and "hence independent of local church authority," *Frau Lou*, p. 14. Binion also reminds us that Gillot lectured in German rather than Dutch or Russian. In a footnote Binion reminds us that Lou reconstructed his sermons from memory.

current context, and not merely the question of whether she did or did not kiss Nietzsche, or and also, share even more than just a kiss (*nota bene*, this same skepticism might hold no matter whether we are here speaking of Nietzsche or Gillot, etc.). To this I would even add, as Binion has given us good evidence to do so, a salutary skepticism regarding Rilke's primacy as her erotic initiation, even if we concede her virginity to begin with and in any case.



Fig. 3. Hendrik Gillot.

And how we approach Lou on the topic of her first love (God or Gillot) depends to a great extent on who we are ourselves. Thus Biddy Martin advises us that Lou Salomé's "figurations of self and woman refuse the alternatives masculine/feminine, rational/irrational, life/style" and accordingly "cannot be turned into an advocate for one or the other of those hierarchical divides."²² Martin's reading of

²² Biddy Martin "Woman and Modernity: The Life [Styles] of Lou Andreas-Salomé" in: Andreas Huyssen and David Bathrick, eds., *Modernity and the Text: Revisions of German Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 183-199. For additional discussions of Lou's life, see Peters and Binion above, especially Binion's still impressive bibliography, as well as Martin's monograph *Woman and Modernity: The Life [Styles] of Lou Andreas-Salomé* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Ilonka Schmidt Mackey, *Lou Salomé* (Paris: Nizet, 1956), and Raleigh Whiting's introduction to his edition of Lou Andreas-Salomé's ten novellas, *The Human Family: Stories*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. vii-xvii.

Andreas-Salomé's *Lebensrückblick*²³ distinguishes itself from many studies of Andreas-Salomé's life by starting not with Nietzsche, Rilke and Freud,²⁴ but by highlighting the focus of Lou's self-envisioning/revisioning, in terms of religion. Martin particularly attends to Lou's first chapter "My Experience of God" as it begins with Andreas-Salomé's "conception of her own birth as a disappearance, a coercion into *human* being,"²⁵ not only referring to Lou's key (if none-too-frequently-adverted to) relationship with her Dutch Lutheran priest-preacher, Gillot, qua teacher and object of the adolescent Lou's first crush (note that it is Lou who initiates contact) and who was also and all-importantly a *married* man (the twenty-five year disparity in age never disturbs her biographers as much as this latter and very bourgeois detail) and to whom Lou, at least in her own mind, marries herself in spirit at least or in love, in her confirmation ceremony which takes place in Holland, in order, so we are told, as a *sine qua non* for a Russian passport.²⁶

Lou tells us that she moves, as Bidy Martin puts it, from "her God to her teacher/god-man, Hendrik Gillot, by way of Nietzsche to Freud."²⁷ Following Lou's own account of both her love for her first

²³ Andreas-Salomé, *Lebensrückblick. Grundriss einiger Lebenserrinerungen, aus dem Nachlaß hrsg. v. Ernst Pfeiffer* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1979 [1951]). Cf. Andreas-Salomé, *Looking Back*.

²⁴ Indeed and rather than only the famous three, as it were, Martin lists a good Germanist's half dozen in addition: "Rée, Nietzsche, Rilke, Beer-Hofmann, Ledebour, Wedekind, Hauptmann, Tausk, and Freud." Martin, "Woman and Modernity," p. 184. One could also add Max Reinhardt, Wilhelm Bölsche, Arthur Schnitzler, and others as do Lisa Appignanesi and John Forrester in their chapter "Lou Andreas-Salomé: The 'Fortunate Animal'" in their *Freud's Women: Family, Patients, Followers* (New York: Basic Books, 2001 [1992]), pp. 240-271.

²⁵ Martin, "Woman and Modernity" in: Huyssen and Bathrick, eds., *Modernity and the Text*, p. 186.

²⁶ Julia Vickers begins her biography with this confirmation ceremony. See Vickers, *Lou von Salomé: A Biography of the Woman who Inspired Freud, Nietzsche and Rilke* (Jefferson, NC: Macfarland, 2008), pp. 9ff.

²⁷ Martin, "Woman and Modernity" in: Huyssen and Bathrick, eds., *Modernity and the Text*, p. 187.

“friend”²⁸ (and the limits of the same), as most accounts do, Martin gives us not only an important analysis of “the desire of/for others” but articulates the same by way of the listing of names we associate with Lou Andreas-Salomé. Gillot confirms/baptizes Lou as Lou, literally and unmistakably so given the confirmation text from Isaiah 43: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you: I have called you by your name.” [*Fürchte dich nicht, den ich habe dich erlöst: ich habe dich bei deinem Namen gerufen: du bist mein.*] Lou herself scripted the confirmation ceremony, choosing as her reply a word that would recur in their later correspondence, “You bless me, for I do not leave you.” And this would turn out to be true, at least in the unreal fashion that crossed lovers from time-immemorial have understood, especially those whose love is adumbrated in the atmosphere of religious sentiment. The name Gillot gives her, *Lou*, would be crucial for her European life, as opposed to the otherwise unpronounceable, save in a Russian mouth, *Lyolya* (Peters writes *Lohya*, Binion tells us that she was called *Lelia*).²⁹

Here as elsewhere it should matter, though it has rarely troubled biographers that our account, and inevitably so, is *limited* to the story Lou tells us. Christened Louise, we are to suppose that without Gillot, Lou would never have been called Lou.

No doubt, thus we read Lou’s asseveration of her status to him, signed as *your little girl*.³⁰ And why should we not believe this?

²⁸ Gillot is not called by name, but identified as “mentor” or “friend” in Lou’s text. In her chapter, “The Experience of Love,” Andreas-Salomé writes of this “teacher and educator,” attesting to “the extent to which he remained for me as duplicate, a doppelgänger, a revenant of the God of my childhood, first became clear when I proved unable to bring this love affair to a real human conclusion.” *Looking-Back*, p. 13. And who ever said that Freudian psychoanalysis was useless?

²⁹ Andreas-Salomé herself if the source for this “‘Lyola’ [or ‘Lyolya’].” *Looking-Back*, p. 14.

³⁰ As we read in her *Looking Back*, Andreas-Salomé reproduces her oft-cited letter to Gillot to frame her account of her friendship with Rée and Nietzsche. When Binion emphasizes that Lou signs herself „Ihr Mädels“ in correspondence (see

In the case of Lou von Salomé, we believe all kinds of things.

Do we not believe that under Gillot's tutelage she learns sufficient Dutch to read Kant in Dutch translation?³¹ The point bears a bit of reflection just where Nietzsche scholars happily deny that Nietzsche read Kant while Andreas-Salomé's biographers take her at her own word (by contrast with Nietzsche's³² (nor do Andreas-Salomé's writings evidence a particular familiarity with Kant) to have indeed absorbed the entirety of European culture. Not surprisingly, Gillot is routinely remarked to have quite been the teacher. What is certain is that Lou leaves Russia precisely on the occasion of this affair, fleeing both Gillot and scandal.

Gillot is thus the occasion for the scandal as well as the source of her legitimacy in society, thereby confirming the exact nature of their relationship one to another, and for the sake of her flight to Zürich and hence to further studies (he was quite the teacher), he arranges to have her, unconventionally just because diplomatically, privately confirmed in a church of a friend in Holland but thereby permitting her to obtain a Russian passport and so her passage to Switzerland to study, what else? theology.

The flight worked: the scandal dissolved and we "know" of her virginity on the same terms: for Lou tells us so. Here we may note that her relations with the man who became her husband, Carl Friedrich Andreas would constitute a decided exception to her relations to other

Binion, *Frau Lou*, p. 18), he follows Andreas-Salomé's (March 26) letter to Gillot in: Andreas-Salomé, *Looking Back*, p. 45, but which does not include the text of the repeatedly studied letter to the man she calls her "mentor." The letter is signed, "Your little girl." Ibid., p. 46.

³¹ See Pfeiffer's notes to Andreas-Salomé, *Looking-Back*, p. 137.

³² There is quite a bit of controversy on the matter, but by and large scholars enjoy asserting that Nietzsche never read Kant if only because the conclusions he draws from Kant unnerve us to this day. I offer references to the reception of Kant in Nietzsche's writing in Babich, "Ex aliquo nihil: Nietzsche on Science and Modern Nihilism." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*. 84-2 (Spring 2010): 231-256.

men on several levels. But in many ways of course, the relationship with Andreas is more of the same, as it would be triangulated via Gillot, whose picture she carried with her throughout her travels, and whom she asks to travel to Berlin to marry them. The marriage presided over by Gillot, like the confirmation ceremony, is a sacramental encounter with Gillot. Nor does Lou relate to anyone other than Gillot (as she tells him and if we take her at her word).

I have already noted that an unconsummated marriage would not be the rarest thing in the world. But what exactly is consummation in a marriage? What is sexual experience in general? Will it be one encounter or two or three or thirty? A disappointing or bitter experience? Under protest? Unenjoyed? Or an experience subsequently resisted, so that if an encounter had once occurred and were thereafter refused, it would soon become the very thing of which the Germans have a rueful saying, *es ist so lange her, das es schon gar nicht mehr wahr ist*: it is so long ago, it is no longer true.

Lou for her part, later reports her memory of being awoken by the sound of her husband choking for breath, with her hands around his throat.³³ She found herself, so she tells us, strangling Andreas as he tried to take her as she slept — an image of murderous sleep, inversely not unlike Althusser's somnolent crime, not being raped, not raping but killing his wife in her bed.³⁴ The marriage with Andreas if it was not about sex for Lou if we attend to Lou's account — though she does tell us about his nakedness during his nocturnal perambulations (and his encounter with their dog, like the Wagner's dog, a large Newfoundland),³⁵ and his "unblemished body"³⁶ and bathing habits (almost "oriental") — provided on almost every level everything Lou needed in order to live the life she did live and so too Andreas as well.

³³ Andreas-Salomé, *Looking-Back*, p. 126.

³⁴ See further, Geraldine Finn, *Why Althusser Killed His Wife Essays on Discourse and Violence* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

God is the double-echo that will matter in Lou's retrospective account of her own life and it finds expression in the title of her first novel in 1885, *Im Kampf um Gott*, signed with the pseudonym Henri Lou. Recalling that Gillot's first name was Hendrijk, acoustically: Henri,³⁷ Lou seems to have split her name androgynously from the start.

And then there is Rilke, with whom we know, thanks to Lou, that there was, at last, an entrance into some sort of erotic life (I say "some sort" just to the extent that Rilke is not presented, as Andreas-Salomé tells the tale, as an erotic hero). And then there is Freud, not quite an erotic adventure but still an intellectual one, if we trust the analysts Appignanesi and Forrester, who offer us a detailed accounting of the complex array of associations and assessments involved. In the end, the friendship was also a gently contested one, as Biddy Martin observes that Andreas-Salomé's 1928 essay "Consequences of the Fact that it Was Not Woman that Killed the Father" does what Sarah Kofman was to do somewhat differently fifty years later,"³⁸ to wit, to deploy Freud's work on narcissism against him.

Here the complex array of affiliations and appellations and triangles: Lou von Salomé and Hendrijk Gillot, or her pseudonym, Henri Lou, or Nietzsche, Rée, and Lou or Lou Andreas-Salomé and Nietzsche/Rilke/Freud and so on, the entire array matters immensely as the literature on Lou Andreas-Salomé also testifies.

Concentrating on Lou von Salomé and Nietzsche, I have argued that we cannot leave out the context of her life up until meeting Nietzsche and we cannot exclude the religious dimension, however much we think we know about the relation between Nietzsche and his

³⁷ Henri Lou, *Im Kampf um Gott* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Friedrich, 1885). See for a contemporary edition, i.e., not in Fraktur, Andreas-Salomé, *Im Kampf um Gott*, Hans Rüdiger Schwab, ed. (Munich: dtv, 2007).

³⁸ Martin, "Woman and Modernity," p. 192. Martin refers to Kofman's *The Enigma of Woman: Woman in Freud's Writings*, Catherin Porter, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987 [1982]). *L'Enigme de la femme. La femme dans les textes de Freud* (Paris: Galilée, 1980).

God or Nietzsche and religion for and as we shall see, this bears both on her tutelage under and her love for Gillot, as well as her meetings and discussions with Nietzsche and in particular and as we shall see as the context that Nietzsche characterizes as the *weather* “coloring” their sojourn at Lake Orta in their visit to Sacro Monte away from the company of Madame von Salomé and Paul Rée. Religion as I will argue, permeated the “exquisite dream” that was the ecstatic event of their shared, private, excursion on Sacro Monte, as Lou would also later write to Malwida von Meysenbug on the 18th of August in 1882, of Nietzsche’s inherently “religious nature.”³⁹

But it will be erotic details rather than God that matter to us today — which is also what it means to say that God is dead. Hence we have no idea how to read Henri Lou’s *Im Kampf um Gott* except for the hints of what it tells us about Nietzsche and Rée and Lou. In this, we might compare the challenges of reading Lou’s first novel to Nietzsche’s own self-reflective observation that

the worst readers of aphorisms are the writer’s friends if they are intent to guess back from the general to the particular instance to which the aphorism owes its origin: for with this pot-peeking they reduce the author’s whole effort to nothing, and thus they only deserve it when, instead of a philosophic outlook or instruction, they gain nothing but — at best, or at worst — the satisfaction of a vulgar curiosity. (HH II, §129)

Nietzsche’s “pot-peeking” allusion to our desire to satisfy “a vulgar curiosity” is well-placed but it matters to note that as he writes this, Nietzsche has yet to fall even from the lowest heaven as Lou tells us that he will declare himself to fall upon first meeting her in Rome. In what follows — along the path to Sacro Monte as it were — we shall note that the pot-peeking Nietzsche describes seems attendant upon our account of women authors in general, even as we noted to begin

³⁹ Binion emphasizes here that Lou goes on to draw a direct parallel between herself and Nietzsche in this regard. Binion, *Frau Lou*, p. 54.

with authors of as impeccable intellectual credentials and claims to independent regard as Hannah Arendt or Simone de Beauvoir.

Indeed, when Arendt focuses her doctoral dissertation on love in St. Augustine, reviewers we cannot avoid commentators who muse that the theme was inspired by the erotic by its presence and loss in her personal life.⁴⁰ For Arendt's problem, as this has been exigently analyzed by scholar after scholar, was that her lover — and she had had others both then and since, and more than one husband, ah but we only care about the most famous of her lovers — was Martin Heidegger, who was also, like Gillot, married, and a serial womanizer to boot. Where Arendt is popularly condemned for this (more or less so, depending upon the reader in question: How could she love him? Is her dissertation any good? Is it anything more than a response to Heidegger anyway?), Heidegger is not so condemned. And we note that we can repeat the illustration with the de Beauvoir and Sartre.

An invert muse: Lou's own writing only begins after her encounter with Nietzsche and Rée (and it is relevant that both of them serve her as editors,⁴¹ ironically and this should be underlined just to the extent that Nietzsche's primary ambition for her had originally to do with his desire for a helper — as many of his friends also helped him with his writing as amanuensis, reading out loud to him). And it matters that Lou's writing seems, so commentators are united in observing, to be more or less about neither Nietzsche nor Rée but about herself.

Teaching, to paraphrase Nietzsche, is so erotic. But whose eros will this be if it is not the *master's* erotic ideal: whether Lou on Gillot's lap, where she was apparently accustomed to take her lesson,⁴² or in a

⁴⁰ See among other reviews, Brooke Allen's "The Banality of Eros," *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Summer, 2004): 317-324.

⁴¹ See Tracy B. Strong's lecture presented at a 2010 graduate conference on Nietzsche and rhetoric at Northwestern University, "In Defense of Rhetoric or How Hard it is to Take a Writer Seriously: The Case of Nietzsche" http://ucsd.academia.edu/TracyStrong/Papers/192475/Nietzsche_and_Rhetoric.

⁴² Andreas-Salomé, *Looking Back*, p. 156.

triangle of desire and interest between Nietzsche and Rée (let us leave out the complexities of her affairs during her long and, it is always emphasized, *sexless* marriage to Andreas — I am thinking here as one should think of the many affairs men begin by telling their soon-to-be conquests that their marriage are, don't you know it? sex-less, love-less matches: *my wife doesn't understand me*).

What is certain is that Nietzsche himself fits into the company of the teachers. And perhaps as he knew of Lou's receptivity to her first mentor, he proposed to step into his place as her teacher. What is certain is that Nietzsche wrote to Lou of the kind of teacher he was/would be. And we also know that Lou's fondness for her teacher in Petersburg could not have been more apparent: Gillot's picture, as already noted, travelled with Lou wherever she went, as blond icon, man-god.

For his own part to go back to the relationship between Nietzsche and Lou, Nietzsche himself did not, so he assured Lou Salomé in a disarmingly innocent protestation of his "intentions," merely or only want someone to act as his secretary and practical assistant in household affairs, he wanted a — she could be *his* — pupil.

For her part, of course, Lou never wanted to be so lucky. Not by a long shot. Nonetheless, she tells us that she took Nietzsche at his word, as she tells us she had done from the start with Gillot, when she first exposed Gillot's private proposition to public view first in her family and then before society. And just by this triangular means Lou forged her own alchemy, her own trick for turning "muck" into gold, transforming the power plays of a secret dynamic to her own and lasting advantage. And this is no little achievement. The triangulated other in Lou's relationship with Gillot was society itself, the social, public sphere as opposed to the private or intimate world. This same public other would remain, articulating her relationship with men throughout her life.

Gillot's intentions toward her, whatever in fact the private story may or may not have been, were exposed as intentions (not acts) and qua exposed desires, qua rendered to public view, exposed as *base* and the

wish to debase. As Lou herself overtly exposed Gillot, publically denouncing his intentions as such, it was not Lou's desire or affection for Gillot whatever that may have been, or the events that passed between them, whatever these may have been, but Gillot's desire alone, singularized as selfish because designated as intimately oriented, and thus as a non-consummated threat to Lou's position in society as a young girl. The public view served to defend her *threatened* innocence and we note indeed that the same public, social convention would never have avenged the *loss* of her virtue, had Lou admitted to losing it in any way, be it as a result of rape or seduction. Virginity matters and society defends the innocent. Accordingly, Lou would live the life of an innocent throughout the course of her long life (as contrasted with the non-innocent intentions to be ascribed in order to Gillot, Nietzsche, Rée, Andreas, and so on).

Lou similarly denounced Nietzsche's base intentions in Bayreuth as selfish, as intending her destruction as innocent before society, rather exactly as in the case of Gillot. Triangulated not via Rée (and the supposedly "holy trinity") but and much rather via society and public mores, choosing unconventionality *without* veering from the bourgeois path of virtue, Lou's innocence would be preserved, without question, as it is to this day.⁴³

And to this day, and this bears reflection, we believe her.

Building Perspective

I argue that an adequate review of the popular account of the "mystery" or "miracle" of the encounter between Friedrich Nietzsche and Lou von Salomé on Sacro Monte commits us to a reflection upon

⁴³ Martin argues that the bulk of Nietzsche scholars denounce Lou. This is hardly the way I read it; in fact, reviewing Nietzsche scholars, the consensus seems to be that Lou was the love of Nietzsche's life. The only dispute is whether she ought to have been and more distally other debates concern whether Nietzsche was, along with Rée for good measure, gay. See Martin cited above for a preliminary discussion.

a specifically geographic constellation. Locality matters and this is so not only because Nietzsche and Lou met in transit, while travelling for their own purposes, while visiting others, always in the company of others, which is also to say: ecstatically.

Paul Rée, with whom Nietzsche had spent considerable time, both as Malwida von Meysenbug's guests in Rome, had already written to Nietzsche to tell him of Lou. And commentators are fond of quoting Nietzsche's letter to Rée, where he writes:

Greet this young Russian from me if this has any sense: I obsess after this kind of soul. [*Griüßen Sie diese Russin von mir, wenn dies irgend einen Sinn hat: ich bin nach dieser Gattung von Seelen lüütern.*] Indeed, I am about to go off in search of a rape of such — with regard to what I have to do in the next ten years, I am in need of the same. An entirely different chapter would be marriage — at the most, I could consent to a two-year marriage, and this too solely owing to what I have to do in the next ten years.⁴⁴

This reference to marriage is directed to Rée and in general. It is important to add that while quite specifically *not about* Lou (for the rather trivial or ontic reason that Nietzsche had not yet met her and did not run in fact straight to Rome to fulfill a destiny he somehow presciently imagined). Instead, and as Joachim Köhler has notoriously emphasized, it was just then that Nietzsche left Genoa to travel to Messina.⁴⁵

In addition, if we read it, Nietzsche's letter is replete with the complexities we associate with Nietzsche. Thus Nietzsche's thinking is neither about Rée nor about Lou but and exactly about himself and his projects (which thinking and which focus, as Nietzsche emphasizes in his letter, is the sole reason he would even countenance marriage in general, as he did indeed go on to make serial propositions to several

⁴⁴ Nietzsche to Rée (Genoa, 21 March 1882). Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Briefe* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), Vol. 6, pp. 185-186. Binion, *Frau Lou*.

⁴⁵ See Köhler, *Zarathustras Geheimnis: Friedrich Nietzsche und seine verschlüsselte Botschaft* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1989), pp. 317ff.

women, more or less diffidently). But the reference acquires a backwards confessional working when it is contrasted with what Nietzsche says to Lou (so she reports, so she recollects word for word) upon meeting her: “From which stars have we been brought together here?” [*Von welchen Sternen sind wir uns hier einander zugefallen?*]⁴⁶

And the rest we know: from Lake Orta to Lucerne and Tautenburg, recounted again and again from the several studies available of Lou’s life and key to any Nietzsche biography.⁴⁷ And rather in the way that one reviews a love-affair, or mourns a lost friend, we review the details over and over again, scrutinizing the same photographs, repeating the same remarks.

Here I wish to go beyond hermeneutics or literary analysis (and or indeed the role psychoanalysis has already played in the literature) to phenomenological aesthetics in order to illuminate the “mystery” associated with what Nietzsche described (once again: taking Lou at her word) as the “most exquisite dream of his life,” — “Sacro Monte.”⁴⁸ And we ask: What “dream?” What happened? And even as we ask, like schoolchildren, we already think we know: *They must have kissed*. Indeed Lou herself, asked late in her life about the kiss, complicates affairs by telling us that she no longer remembers. Which settles it! as more than one commentator has exultantly concluded: They kissed! What more do we need?

⁴⁶ Lou Andreas-Salomé, *Lebensrückblick. Grundriß einiger Lebenserinnerungen*, p. 80.

⁴⁷ On Lou’s side, we note again, Binion and the other authors listed above to the more popular account by Vickers as well as the accounts by Carole Diethel and Hummel. In addition to biographies of Nietzsche, see for its analysis, David Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

⁴⁸ This words are recorded in the (later emended) diary Lou kept for Paul Rée in Tautenburg, where, dated August 14, 1882 and just at the point of her elision, she writes of Nietzsche’s declaration: “monte sacro/ < sagte er > ‘den entzückendsten Traum meines Lebens danke ich Ihnen’ “ ...” Mazzino Montinari and Giorgio Colli, eds., *Nietzsche. Kritische Studien Ausgabe: Chronik zu Nietzsches Leben* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), Vol 15, p. 125. See Allison, *Reading the New Nietzsche*, for a discussion of the relevance of the missing pages from Lou’s day-book, pp. 275 and pp. 281-282.

We are used to taking the commentators' word for this who, in turn, take Lou's word for Nietzsche's reminiscence. Thus we suppose that the miraculous event, like having a baby, or, more appropriately in the case of lovers and to recall Freud's January miracle of liquifaction of the blood, much more akin to the near-miss that it can be *not to have* a baby, we suppose that the event is an erotic or sensual one. This we take for granted, as we like to imagine Lou and as we imagine her — this is the achievement of triangulation — writing *ourselves* into Nietzsche's/Rilke's/Freud's position) as the singular love of Nietzsche's life. And we do this *when* we do not assume that Nietzsche was gay — again, we recall that trip to Messina, complete with allusive references to the dwelling place of happiness itself written on a postcards sent to Peter Gast in Venice — as Freud would later insist, seemingly inspired by Lou.⁴⁹ What is certain is that Lou von Salomé is our favorite choice for Nietzsche if we have to play matchmaker: much better than his misguided fondness for Cosima Wagner, better than Malwida von Meysenbug or any other (and Nietzsche seems to have had other) such options.

Thus, for a modern example for such a metonymic re-imagining of affections, in the case of Britain's Prince Charles, the popular American mind vastly prefers the late Lady Diana to the current Dutchess of Cornwall, Camilla Parker Bowles. Just so we are unsettled by Sarkozy's morals but we approve, more or less, of his taste. Nothing shows success to an American like a super-model, witness Donald Trump's current and past liaisons, or else an Asian woman, witness the taste of most American male academics, especially of what we call the geek variety (and Woody Allen just happens here to be a convenient example). TV shows like *The Bachelor* play on our vicarious appetites not only for matchmaking but judgment. The recent scandals of the day currently swirling around the names of Dominique Strauss-Kahn

⁴⁹ See for a discussion and for further references, Babich, "Nietzsche und Wagner: Sexualität," in H. J. Bix, N. Knoepffler, S. L. Sorgner, eds., *Wagner und Nietzsche. Kultur — Werke — Wirkung. Ein Handbuch* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2008), pp. 323-341.

and Arnold Schwarzenegger only confirm this same evaluative trend. And as de Beauvoir reminds us, women themselves simply reinforce such judgments, looking at women *as men do*, only more exactly, subjecting women to the same oppressive convention qua object.

This is also the reason Paul Rée is able to write “One wants the woman who is desired by many in order to be preferred over them.”⁵⁰ “Hence too,” as Rée writes, “the fact acknowledged by all, that jealousy makes our love stronger.”⁵¹

Rée includes a number of reflections on the role of the social in the choice of the beloved, in the promise of and the regrets of choosing a wife and so on. “Our love grows if its object also pleases our friends, since our vanity can now triumph as well.”⁵² If Rée is correct in this, Lou, liked by so many, would have had to be the best match for Nietzsche. If only she had seen that, we sigh. And we prefer Lou, as

⁵⁰ Rée, *Basic Writings*, Robin Small, trans. (Bloomington: Illinois Press, 2003), §267, p. 43. Written as if it were an unedited, or unguarded (and so psychologically advantageous), peek into notebook jottings, Rée’s book was published anonymously as the “remains” of a literary estate. Writing someone else’s (or one’s own *Nachlass*) was a popular occupation and we may trace this concern in Lou and in Nietzsche as well as, more obviously perhaps in Kierkegaard. I argue that Heidegger’s *Beiträge* takes this device just a bit further along the same direction Babich, “Le sort du Nachlass: le problème de l’œuvre posthume,” in: Pascale Hummel, ed., *Mémoires / Misbooks. Études sur l’envers et les travers du livre* (Paris: Philogicum, 2009), pp. 123-140. With her own memoirs Lou availed herself of the same practice.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, §265. This aphorism, drawn from Rée’s explicitly anonymous *Psychologische Beobachtungen: Aus dem Nachlass von “*“*. Rée’s observation is of a kind one might well name Nietzschean — if only this did not undo the order of influence (though influence between friends also tends to be mutual, it is only the outsider’s perspective that traces its direction, according to external affinities or enthusiasms). See Robin Small’s introduction to his translation of Rée, *Basic Writings* for a review of Rée’s influence (esp pp. xxxiv ff.) as well as Small’s *Nietzsche and Rée: A Star Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵² The full aphorism continues to highlight this parallel: “Our love decreases if its object is disliked by friends, since our vanity cannot now triumph, and perhaps even suffers.” Rée, *Basic Writings*, §300, p. 48.

propriety demands that we must, not only to the youths of Messina but also to his sister (Nietzsche's affective life was apparently quite complex).

Thus in Nietzsche's case, the "exquisite dream" of their encounter in Sacro Monte, the two of them alone at least, and with no possibility for contravention, can only have been about Nietzsche's affection for Lou and his talk of "Orta-weather" as reflecting his belief, false though it turned out to be, that this affection had, at least at the time, and at least to him, the look of a reciprocal basis.⁵³

Nietzsche himself, master of perspective as he was, elsewhere writes of the dangers of believing in such appearances, not only early on writing on language and rhetoric and tragedy but reflecting on conversation: all light and shadow, artifacts of our own prejudices, convictions, hopes (BGE §192). Thus I call for attention to Sacro Monte itself. And it will matter, so I argue, to recall its' explicitly religiously charged, even literally daemonic spirit qua *genius loci*. This is the exquisite or enchanting dream as Nietzsche affirms it on Lou's report but it is also the weather as Nietzsche speaks of the "weather" associated with Orta and its lake in the northeastern mountains of Italy.

And this atmosphere is not only that of the town of Orta, where the four of them, Nietzsche and Rée in the company of Lou and her mother stayed, but the region itself. For not far away there is the original Sacro Monte at Varallo, just finished, all the rage, "the" Sacro Monte on everybody's lips.

Thus if we know they stayed at Orta, *which* Sacro Monte did they visit?⁵⁴

⁵³ Thus we read Nietzsche's rueful reflections on mutuality in BGE §192, which would confirm the lesson learned from the disappointment with Lou, if we could not also read it in his earlier *Human, all too Human* §374 and §376 and indeed the entire section on "Man and Society."

⁵⁴ See for further background on the history of this question, the occasional periodical, edited by Elena di Filipis, *Sacri Monti. Rivista di arte, conservazione, paesaggio e spiritualità dei Sacri Monti piemontesi e lombardi*, 2/2010 (Varallo, 2010).

And our question, if we ask it seriously, is complicated by every contingency. In addition to forty kilometers of distance — there is the question of unaccounted-for time. Because Nietzsche and Lou took overlong for their return from Sacro Monte, Paul Rée and Lou's mother were quite upset with the delay.⁵⁵

Exactly how long were they gone — and how long does it take to take a walk, to visit a site? In a *Tagesausflug*, just the two of them, on holiday?

And then, after considering the question of time, there is again the question of location. The local Sacro Monte in Orta is almost ridiculously close to town (ah, ten minutes away?) a proximity which would only have weakened Nietzsche's and Lou's explanation for the delay in their return (ah, but that's why *we know* they must have kissed). And then there is the detective work involved, for, as Peters glosses Lou, the two explained that "they wanted to see the sunset on Santa Rosa."⁵⁶ But as Peters reminds us, and as we can note that their

⁵⁵ Here it is significant that Lou's mother fell inconveniently ill and needed her daughter's help just because it left Rée in the — to him — unwelcome position of having to take care of Madame von Salomé in Lou's place.

⁵⁶ See Peters, *My Sister, My Spouse*, p. 99 I note here that Samuel Butler refers to Santa Rosa in the tour between Orta and Varallo as he describes it in passing and on a single page. See Butler, *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1913), enlarged edition. A perfectly overnight sensation, Butler inspired imitations and translations throughout Europe. See Karl Baedeker, *Northern Italy, as far as Leghorn, Florence, and Ancona, and the island of Corsica* (Coblenz: Karl Baedeker, 1868) describes the effective passage from Orta to Varallo across the lake to Pella ("2 fr. With 2 rowers ... At Pella mules may be procured for the journey over the Colma to Varallo," p. 183, noting that at the midpoint, "the prospect of the Alps is beautiful embracing Monte Rosa, the lakes of Orta and Varese and the plain of Lombardy. The entire route is beautiful" pp. 183-184. Baedeker adds that from Varallo, Sacro Monte "is attained in ¼ hour by a path shaded by beautiful trees..." p. 184. In the 1882 version however one may read with respect to Orta that "various points on the hill command charming surveys of the lake while the panorama from the Campanile at the top includes the snowy Monte Rosa, rising above the lower hills..." Baedeker, *Italy: Handbook for Travellers*, p. 172.

companions would also have been well aware, one simply cannot “see Santa Rosa from the top of Monte Sacro [di Orta].”⁵⁷ Just here things get locally complex as a sunset view would, arguably, have been visible (at least at the midpoint of the journey) from Orta over Pella to Varallo.

Varallo, the first constructed of the nine Sacri Monti in the region, enjoyed a then-accolade of one of the “wonders of the world.” What made both Orta and Varallo sacred would not be the mountain sites themselves, despite the pagan and animistic eros of the notion. Rather” these sites were constructed as *sites of the sacred, for the sake of the faithful* at a time when such spectacles would not have been otherwise available, where the ubiquity of billboards, magazines, television, movies, and the internet make such spectacles utterly unremarkable to us.⁵⁸ Yet, then as now, one is simply unprepared for *either Orta or Varallo* as sites built for what Nevet Dolev calls “participant observers.”⁵⁹ These pilgrim sites afford a full-size, real-life vista of another world assuming the direct involvement, not the passivity of the visitor.

Even more significant (and this is where we cannot do without the advantage of phenomenology as a philosophical practice beyond mere readerly research and reflective interpretation) such sites have to be *seen* (and this allows for the possibility of a pilgrim’s experience) because they have to be visited one chapel at a time, where and in the process, walking from oratory to oratory one cannot but take one’s time to take in what is there to be seen. In this sense *both Orta and Varallo* are marvelous occasions for what one could call a miracle of insight into

⁵⁷ Peters, *My Sister, My Spouse*, p. 99.

⁵⁸ But and in addition to illustrated magazines and catalogues, what we may call cinema-scopes of the 19th century kind, including Daguerre’s theatre displays and in addition to special rooms built for the purpose (and what can still see a version of the same at Blackpool Pleasure Beach in Bournemouth), were fairly common attractions in Nietzsche’s day and before, including dioramas and the like.

⁵⁹ Hence the title of Nevet Dolev’s “The Observant Believer as Participant Observer,” *Assaph* 2 (1996): 175-192.

the metaphysical domain: the world above arrayed as part of the world below, the world of the past and the present in the light of eternity which is the fullness of time.



Fig. 4. Entrance to Sacro Monte di Orta. Author's photo: 19 August 2010.

Architecturally distinct, including the design of the landscape and incorporating the mountain itself and its location and vistas, the chapels themselves are of individual interest, each one a treasure trove of perceptual presentation and design, including *trompe l'oeil* paintings on three sides, sometimes including the ceiling and the floor as part of the tableau within and sometimes the tiling on the floor of the anteroom or the portico without. Of further interest to Nietzsche would have been the illustrations both on the outside decorating the small oratories, and in the anterooms, featuring not only religious but also phallic and other apotropaic motifs in addition to depictions of titans and other pagan deities.

It is important to emphasize that in addition to the classical or 'pagan' imagery decorating the walls, the richly colored terracotta figures would not be dissimilar to the polychrome ancient Greek statues Nietzsche invokes as an indispensable corrective to the popular

Winckelmanian and classically white and pure or unpainted vision of antiquity in his public lectures in Basel.⁶⁰



Figs. 5 and 6. Sacro Monte di Orta, Portico ceiling interior detail and Exterior. Author's photo: August 19, 2010.

Thus I argue that, with or without a kiss along the way, Nietzsche and Lou could easily have taken what can otherwise seem to have been an inordinate length of time to visit the nearby Sacro Monte at Orta with its offerings of one spectacle after another, set into an array of bespoke chapels or temples and peopled by perspective-foreshortened studies or perspective adjusted dioramas of what seemingly life-sized statues displayed in perspective-line with painted figures and landscapes in the distance, together with a depiction of the heavenly world above (paralleling the world below), all in the round.

The almost two dozen chapels on the mountain above the lake village of Orta — as compared to the 44 such architecturally distinct oratories in Varallo — permitted visitors to ‘visualize,’ using the best perspective tricks of the Italian Renaissance, worldly and sacred visions. The point here concerns an aesthetic phenomenon, far, far more than but also including a religious dimension, and yet and this is what spoke to Samuel Butler who challenged the excesses of Varallo in the

⁶⁰ See for discussion and loci, Babich, “Skulptur/Plastik” in Christian Niemeyer, ed., *Nietzsche-Lexikon* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), pp. 325-328. See for further references, Babich, “Reflections on Greek Bronze and the Statue of Humanity: Heidegger’s Aesthetic Phenomenology, Nietzsche’s Agnostic Politics,” *Existentia*, XVII 5/6 (2008): 243-471.

epigraph to his *Ex voto*,⁶¹ as almost pagan, exceeding the “sacred” as such. But just this excess would correspond to Nietzsche’s scientific point taken with respect to the Greeks.



Fig. 7. Sacro Monte di Orta, Detail of boy in the street, *The Humiliation of St. Frances*.
Author’s photo: August 19, 2010.

Thus what Lou tells us, in telling us that Nietzsche speaks of an “exquisite dream” fairly corresponds to the sacred perception afforded by such small chapels, crafted as they were to be seen in a particular way, and yielding a veritable world, seemingly in its entirety, a sculpted tableau of a world apart. And whether they travelled the forty kilometers thence (or whether, indeed, they *did not* undertake to do so), Nietzsche and Lou could not but have been conscious of Varallo in the vicinity of Orta, as Varallo, and we will return to this point below, had after centuries of work been finally, triumphantly completed in 1881.

⁶¹ Butler’s epigraph cites the Abbé Mabillon 1698: “Il n’y a que deux ennemis de la religion— le trop peu, et le trop; et des deux le trop est mille fois le plus dangereux.” In: Butler, *Ex Voto: An Account of the Sacro Monte, or New Jerusalem, at Varallo-Sesi* (London: Trübner and Co., 1888).



Fig. 8. Sacro Monte di Orta. Author's photo: August 19, 2010.

Once again, we should ask: just how late were they? Both Nietzsche and Lou refer to Sacro Monte which we take to be a shorthand for a special event that transpired between them alone and hence known only to the two of them. Orta or Varallo?

It is not my purpose here to argue for one Sacro Monte versus another. For Monte Sacro is a word for the verisimilitude of the world of the sacred, a hyperreality, *avant la lettre* corresponding to Jean Baudrillard's sense of the same. Hence either site would lend the visitor a glance into an array of sacred worlds, fully detailed, more perfect than life, no matter whether illustrating scenes from the life of St. Frances in Orta or, in the case of the more numerous oratories of Sacro Monte di Varallo, the life of Christ.

In each case, we are speaking not of just one or two and not just of half a dozen or even a dozen but rather and even at Orta almost two dozen such oratories (double that number for Varallo), all on the top of a mountain and designed to be visited seriatim, with numbers, and a guided tour, indicated by signs on the site as indispensable for a visit.

What complicates matters when one uses the language of a "dream" and its captivation is that because these same vistas, qua three-dimensional were shown in completely enclosed spaces, these were vistas not into the infinitely Euclidean distance of a Brunelleschi or as

in the Renaissance paintings we know to reflect a geometrically, projected perspective but the complete and variously closed or finite world.⁶²



Fig. 9. Franciscans playing St Frances (*Humility*), Orta
Author's photo, 19 August 2010



Fig.10. Creation, Chapel I, Varallo
Author's photograph, 20 August 2010

The question of perspective is complicated and we usually take it as a conventionality that does not vary. To show to what extent this is an error has been the work of art history, especially Rudolf Arnheim but also Heinrich Wölfflin and Rudolf Wittkower,⁶³ and more recently and more precisely still, Patrick A. Heelan, the philosopher of science who has written on perspective, in terms of painterly technique but also in terms of the geometry of human vision.⁶⁴ I mention Heelan's work because we are not merely talking, as Martin Kemp does, of the intersection between science (as if science were always modern) and art (as if art were always underway to the Renaissance or the vision of

⁶² This closed world is the world of the dream: not Dionysus, but Apollo as we recall that the language of the dream is also Nietzsche's term for Apollo, the sculptor god, in his first book *The Birth of Tragedy*.

⁶³ See for a representative collection of writings, *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems of German Aesthetics 1873-1893* (Vischer, Fedler, Wölfflin, Göller, Hildebrand, Schmarsov) Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou trans. (Santa Monica: Getty, 1994).

⁶⁴ See Patrick A. Heelan, *Space-Perception and the Philosophy of Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Vermeer, and so on).⁶⁵ At these sites, the architectural is deployed as part of a *technical device* for generating a closed infinite space.⁶⁶

As Heelan reminds us, and as art historians might also have done (although and to date they have not commonly done so), perspective indications are not only conventions of culture and time but are also dependent upon the specific geometry of vision which turns out to be, inconveniently for geometric projections using straight-edge and curved drawing tools, measurably non-Euclidean, and here I suggest phenomenologically that just this matters in a closed space. The perception in question is an invented or constructed one. We are speaking less of a mathematician's schema for painting or architecturally staging what will become the projective-maps of the modern scientific world than a closed or *completed* world, given in the fullness of space and time.

The statues are not objectively life-sized but are distorted as already noted for perspective effect, with sculpted exaggeration and foreshortening. At Orta, this is the world of St. Francis, a world articulated or aligned with reference to the world *below*, which mirrors the viewer on the one side of the grids through which indeed and often from very specifically indicated loci (e.g., Figs. 9–11) the scenes are meant to be — and oftentimes: *can only be* — viewed using these same grids or grilles in order to catch a glimpse of the world *above*. Hence, in

⁶⁵ See Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). A broader account does not, alas, attend to the discoveries of Heelan's work although it does have the merit of referring to Husserl is Hubert Damisch's *L'Origine de la perspective* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987).

⁶⁶ The very different orientation that is the "invention of perspective" is elegantly detailed in Damisch, cited above. But it is for this reason that we need reference to Heelan's work in order to think of art history and the philosophy together in this sense beyond the modern photo-realist sense as artists such as David Hockney have argued in their own contemporary reflections on perspective. Hockney, *Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001). See also Charles M. Falco and David Hockney, "Optical Insights into Renaissance Art," *Optics & Photonics News*, 11/52 (2000): 52-59.

addition to the dimensionality of space represented in three dimensions and flattening out in the distance to two and thence to one, there is also another, higher level, permitting a representation of worldly space and worldly time, framed or compared to eternity, *quid hoc ad aeternitatem*: exoteric and esoteric.



Fig. 11. Chapel XI, Detail from *The Crucified Speaks to St. Frances*, Orta. Author's photograph.

To suggest that we consider the place in question is an expressly phenomenological, specifically hermeneutic move that takes us out of the texts — and out of our vicarious imaginings of a more or less salacious, more or less chaste, kiss (or some such thing), to the things themselves, in this case the places themselves. But just this local move is hard for us: we who are used to trusting texts, be they letters, be they novellas, or auto-biographies, or commentary.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ This does not mean that we like to go to additional levels in our reading. Thus we read the same thing again and again. This lateral strategy may be responsible for our allergy to footnotes which in turn may indicate an allergy to reading those others who (like ourselves) produce secondary literature. As a result, scholars are often loathe to quote other scholars (or keep such citations to a minimum so as not to confuse the reader or the publisher or, and indeed, their



Fig. 12. Decorative Grille at Sacro Monte di Orta. Author's photograph.

Add to that the problem of the classifying Sacri Monti themselves: Are they art? Are they kitsch? Are they religious sites? Religious kitsch?⁶⁸

For these reasons (and others to be sure), when we read of Nietzsche's and Lou's visit to Sacro Monte (be it the one or the other), commentators when they detail the mountain at all simply refer to "chapels and monasteries" in passing, passing over the contents of those chapels, omitting as well any reflection on how these same sites came to be there in the first place.

Ekphrasis

Rilke's *Archaische Torso Apollons* is a picture-book exemplar of ekphrasis for the modern sensibility. In Gary Shapiro's concise definition:

own thesis thereby). And this makes tracing out such questions, if we bother to ask them, a laborious undertaking.

⁶⁸ See again Dolev's "The Observant Believer as Participant Observer." See Annabel Jane Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem: Relics, Replicas, Theme Parks* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) and, note 41 below for further discussion.

“Ekphrasis is the attempt to give a verbal equivalent of the visual.”⁶⁹ Here we ask, of what statue? *We cannot know ... the glow of the apple, the eyes ... the center that bears the flare of creation ... Hence [Denn da] there is no place that fails to see you....*

It is the “you” — *Du mußt dein Leben ändern* — the personal word, the direction of it, that catches us. Gadamer emphasizes this in his reading of the poem in his *The Relevance of the Beautiful*. Peter Sloterdijk borrows the phrase to title his most recent reflections.

Rilke’s poem ultimately directs us neither to the statue itself, as the statue itself directs us not to itself, not even to the contemplation of the heart of stone that is, as Heidegger says with respect to the temple, “more stone than stone itself,” but and much rather to ourselves. We are talking *about* the torso as it is, as we are, in its presence: in the glow of ancient marble and it matters here that it is specifically *ancient* stone, one property of which is the kind of illumination Rilke invokes: “*sein Torso glüht noch wie ein Kandelaber.*”

Archaic too, as we recognize, the laughing smile — “*...und im leisen Drehen / der Lenden könnte nicht ein Lächeln geben*” — which erotic smile takes us to the same smile that moves us when it comes to Lou and Nietzsche, Lou and Rilke.

But which torso? Which statue? What will it be — and does it matter? Can we simply pick a torso we like? There are so many we have seen, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Florence, Munich? How many did Rilke see? As many? Less? More?

For a full consideration in the case of either Orta or Varallo, which consideration we cannot offer here, we would need not only a review

⁶⁹ Shapiro, “On Schmidt, Twombly, and Geo-Aesthetics,” *New Nietzsche Studies*, Volume 8, Numbers 1 and 2 (Fall 2009/Winter 2010): 171-183, here p. 180. In his review engagement with Dennis Smidt’s *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects*, Gary Shapiro gives a stunning discussion of both the *locus classicus* of ekphrasis, Homer’s description of the shield of Apollo, and Cy Twombly’s *Fifty Days at Iliam*. See further and among his other discussions of ekphrasis, Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 247ff.

of the tradition of Italian polychrome terracotta sculpture,⁷⁰ Renaissance theories regarding the interface between the space within which a fresco in its perspective and a related sculptural group in its perspective was set up to be seen and the quite “bespoke” architecture of the place in question, whichever site we might be talking about as such considerations apply to both.

In addition too we would need to reconsider Nietzsche’s own engaged discussion of the “origin” of the work of art which he drew from his teacher before Friedrich Ritschl, that is to say from Otto Jahn in addition to reading Gottfried Semper, all long before Heidegger’s reflections on the same, consonant as it was both with art history and its contentions, its conventions as Nietzsche took these reflections as substantive for the “science of aesthetics” [*aesthetische Wissenschaft*] (BT §1) as he named the sculptural art of Apollo, the god of light and, as already mentioned: the “beautiful realm of the dream-world,” by contrast with the dynamic, musical art of Dionysos.

Nietzsche called for a reflection on the evolution of form and ability, a reflection on the capacity of the ancients as judged from our modern point of view, as he first described our scholarly convictions or prejudices with regard to what the ancients could and could not represent as Nietzsche argued both in his inaugural lecture in addition to the first of his public Basel lectures, “Das griechische Musikdrama,” and in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*.⁷¹ What can we see, what can

⁷⁰ Bruce Boucher, *Earth and Fire: Italian Terracotta Sculpture from Donatello to Canova* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001)

⁷¹ I discuss Nietzsche’s reflections on this question in the latter pages, again, of “Die Naturkunde der Griechischen Bronze im Spiegel des Lebens” as well as Babich, „Skulptur/Plastik.“ Apart from Nietzsche, see in general, See A. A. Donohue, *Xoana and the Origins of Greek Sculpture* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). The assumptions “built into” the conventionality of “stylistic progress” are addressed in her more recent book, *Greek Sculpture and the Problem of Description* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Although Donohue does not here advert to this, these were the concerns that occupied Nietzsche in his inaugural lecture in Basel on the Homer question and the discipline of philology.

we not see? What is there to be heard in silent words, what can be said of the music of the Greek language itself?⁷²

For it is thus to articulate this vanished, silenced sound and the lost culture of speaking as the highest or most prized art of ancient Greece that is the heart of Nietzsche's efforts in his first book on tragedy and accounts for his repeated emphasis in his letters that the same lost oral tradition was likewise to be seen in the songs of the suppressed troubadours, claiming that in his *The Gay Science* he ultimately sought to reframe the same point he had made with his first book on the tragic art-form, which latter text as we know, and as he wrote in his later preface, "should have sung not spoken," (BT §iii) — for all the good Nietzsche's hint has done for scholars of his work. In a *Gay Science* aphorism entitled *Art and Nature*, Nietzsche recalls to us the importance of the fact that the Greeks went to the theatre not to be entertained with the new or the latest show, but "to hear beautiful speeches," (GS §80) emphasizing that this would demand "of passion, even on stage, that it speak well." (Ibid.) This spoken consonance in the tension of dramatic dissonance is the literally musical secret of the tragic work of art, we recall this from the end of *The Birth of Tragedy*, it is the becoming-human of dissonance, just as in the person of Euripides (and perhaps not less for Nietzsche, in the theorizing of Socrates and Aristotle on tragedy), it is also the reason for tragedy's death at its own hand.

Given all this complexity, the visit to Sacro Monte in May of 1882 took place when both Nietzsche and Lou were vacationing together with Paul Rée and Lou's mother at Lake Orta in the Piedmont region of Italy. We have already indicated that most scholars note that little is known of their visit to Sacro Monte because Nietzsche and Lou went

⁷² Babich, "The Science of Words or Philology: Music in *The Birth of Tragedy* and The Alchemy of Love in *The Gay Science*" in: Tiziana Andina, ed., *Revista di estetica*. n.s. 28, XLV (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2005), pp. 47-78. And see the first three sections of Babich, "Towards a Critical Philosophy of Science: Continental Beginnings and Bugbears, Whigs and Waterbears," *International Journal of the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2010): 343-391.

alone. The private or intimate character of this visit assures its mystery. Whatever happened happened there well apart from texts and documents at the site they visited on the mountain, where the path up and down, as Heraclitus says, is one and the same but which path would have been different for Nietzsche and Lou, where, as we recall, they wanted to see the sun set on the high peak of Santa Rosa.

Note that I am not saying that little has been said of the visit to Sacro Monte (i.e., that they were alone, for the first time, and for such an *extended* time) as this is not in dispute. The case of Sacro Monte is much discussed, on every level, and across the disciplines: philosophy, German studies, psychoanalysis and especially popularly. Even today local guidebooks highlight the fact that Nietzsche and Lou Salomé visited the site, notoriously, delightfully, un-chaperoned. And everywhere and on every level we are also told that both Nietzsche and Lou reported certain transports as a result of the experience (although these accounts also vary in their emphasis of this mutuality).

But I am suggesting that and although the transports in question may have had romantic resonances, in one way or another, on one side or another, it is also necessary to advert, as scholars to date fail to advert, to the atmosphere or ‘weather’ of the place in question. As encountered, in small, enclosed spaces, in chapels of differing sizes, hundreds and hundreds of statues and hundreds and thousands of painted figures telling the life of St. Frances and the life of the soul’s journey in a pilgrim site on a mountain top, overlooking the beauty of Lake Orta, with a little Borromean island to set off its beauty, framed with distant mountains, a visit to Sacro Monte di Orta could only have been an “exquisitely,” “charming dream.” And that enchanting atmosphere would have been transporting, for Nietzsche and for Lou, and both for different reasons, with or without a kiss.

Phenomenology: Perspective and Vision

Religion is here the key. Lou was herself highly, iconically, religious. Nietzsche we know had other preoccupations than the religious in the

conventional sense and these preoccupations had more, so I have argued, to do with his philology, his historical sensibilities, his hermeneutic concerns, than what we ordinarily mean by atheism. Thus we may observe that his early diatribe against “David Strauss the Confessor and the Writer” suggests a hermeneutic phenomenology of religious experience along with his critique of Hegel’s aesthetics as he details this in *Human, All too Human*⁷³ and beyond what the Nietzsche of *The Antichrist* and elsewhere calls “monotono-theism,” which he also expresses with the indignant observation “Almost two millennia and not a single new god!” (AC §19) I would not claim that Nietzsche was a theist or pagan, but it cannot be denied that as a classicist he was inordinately fond of dead and decaying deities. Just another necrotheist to go with all the rest.

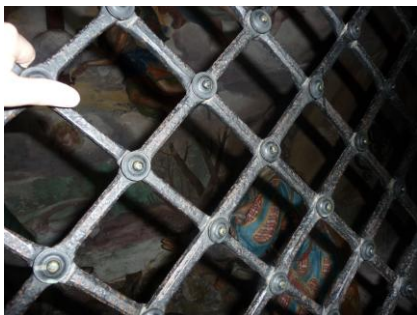


Fig. 13. Grid, Vision of St. Frances, Orta
Author’s photographs, 19 August 2010



Fig. 14. Grid shadow

But religious details matter, not confessionally but phenomenologically speaking. In order to see the full vista of the statues, to take them in, together with their background fresco horizons (be it in Orta or Varallo), one often has no choice but to kneel.

These little buildings are not called oratories for nothing.⁷⁴

⁷³ See for a discussion, Babich, „Zu Nietzsches Statuen. Skulptur und das Erhabene,“ in: Beatrix Vogel and Nikolaus Gerdes, eds., *Grenzen der Rationalität*, Vol. 5: II. (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 2010), pp. 391-421; here pp. 404ff.

⁷⁴ Once again, it is important to emphasize the perceptual experience of this encounter *in the round* and as an encounter with a veritable world in each case.

The posture, the disposition required is for the full effect of a tableau set up to eternity, poised in vibrantly coloured, *more than* life-like three-dimensionality in time and space. I would argue further that the various grids set up between the viewer and the sculpture groups in each chapel reflect this positional focus, invited again via design elements and overtly so via size differentials, sometimes including specific spots through which the viewer can see best and in any case, the effect of the grilles whether wooden or wrought iron is to compel proximity.⁷⁵

Thus each of the oratories are, some more, some less, replete with wall *and* ceiling frescoes. Still more importantly, architecturally: each has specific and identifiable, places at the grids or gratings blocking and thereby guiding the view. In the larger chapels there are even a series of these and in most there are more than one, including larger and in some cases, highly decorative openings, spaced or set into the grids or grilles. Nevet Dolev offers one of the rare art historically sustained discussions of the chapels as a whole and argues that “Originally pilgrims could even enter the chapels and actually mingle in with the biblical protagonists, so that by ‘taking by the hand’ there would be a ‘taking to the heart’. In the seventeenth century, however, grids were placed at the entrance to the chapels, determining the angle of vision in keeping with counter-reformatory values and separating worshippers from actual contact with the sculptures.” Dolev, “The Observant Believer as Participant Observer,” p. 180. The point is in accord with Dolev’s valuable claim regarding the ordinary or every-day and the sacred in terms of the use of ready-mades and ordinary things in a sacred context. But we should take care not to dismiss the art-historical significance of perspective (see references to Heelan and Arnheim) especially given Nietzsche’s classical philological point of view. Dolev notes that the grids were only added later, but this is not exceptional for a long standing project and the grilles are architectural components in several instances. Dolev’s suggestion that the idea of “determining the angle of vision” may be reduced to “counter-reformatory values” also runs the risk of a-historicism and not only because the project itself took centuries to complete, from the fourteenth through to the end of the nineteenth century but because perspective was essential to the project from its inception with Bramante. See below and further note 34.

⁷⁵ See once again, Dolev, “The Observant Believer as Participant Observer” and note that Wharton, *Selling Jerusalem* offers a very different approach in her analysis. Worth noting too is that frames for perception, both conventional and performative, are a frequent theme in Italian and French studies of perception.

For all of this, one must advert to the conventions of perspective experience, as these are always conventions, in play at the time.⁷⁶

Here, speaking of perspective conventionality, we note that Bernardo Caimi's project at Varallo was begun in the close vicinity of Milan's San Satiro, a church featuring the work of the master architect of proportion and perspective, Bramante (1444-1514) and first designed by the painter, sculptor and architect celebrated by Pater, Gaudenzio Ferrari (1470-1546). In the sixteenth century, Charles Borromeo visited the work in progress and added new chapels, and it was he who gave it the name of the "New Jerusalem."

Varallo, just to reframe the parallel once again and precisely as a site that had been quite literally centuries in the making, was thus a site of contemplative and locative, geographic, and thus literally *meteorological* art — ergo the necessary reference to weather. It was this Sacro Monte that happened to have been officially 'finished,' and thus newly opened to the public, complete with an Albergo and a lovely fountain carved and installed and dated in 1881, just prior to Nietzsche's and Lou von Salomé's visit. (Fig. 15)

See for preliminary references to the very extensive literature on Cezanne's and Van Gogh's use of these perspective frames, Heelan's *Space-Perception and the Philosophy of Science*.

⁷⁶ Heelan discusses these conventions or cues in terms of the geometry of vision but also in terms of what he describes as "different spatial intentionalities" leading to multi-stable perspectives in terms of Euclidean and hyperbolic visual space in his *Space-Perception and the Philosophy of Science*, pp. 73 ff; cf. p. 35. As such, these conventions play a hermeneutic role for the viewer, and thus it is part of the conventionalizing process (if it is not only that) that the oratories include what we may call 'aids' to 'right' perception in the form of stylized grids, i.e., 'technologies' for seeing not limited to grids alone but beginning with the architectural framework of the oratory in each case, availing of larger and smaller spaces, and design elements including the intarsia tiling mentioned above. See Rudolph Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004 [1974]), especially his chapter on "Space."



Fig. 15. Detail from the dolphin fountain erected at the public opening of the officially finished Sacro Monte di Varallo, 1881. Author's Photograph, 20 August 2010.

At the original Sacro Monte in Varallo we find the life of ‘man’ telling the story of the gospels beginning with creation. Intriguingly enough, one visually stunning chapel, bearing no less significant a name in every sense for Nietzsche — *Ecce homo* — only adds to the hermeneutic challenge for us and regarding Nietzsche.⁷⁷ For and qua concept, *Ecce homo* as self-conception remained with Nietzsche (as it ought to remain with any good Christian), throughout his entire life. Here I am not talking about Nietzsche’s eponymous book but rather of the echoes of the scene depicted at Varallo, not only as a routine artistic subject but specifically in Nietzsche’s parable of the madman in his *The Gay Science*. (Fig. 16)

In any case and this is so no matter whether we are referring to Varallo or to Orta, we are speaking of extraordinary sites, with Orta taking the prize, as Butler says, for its natural vista (how could it not overlooking as it does the island of San Giulio?). On the other hand,

⁷⁷ This is a stunning chapel on two levels, with the crowd in a square and Christ on a balcony, with frescos on four sides, right left center and above, including on the left, a fresco depicting the release through an entrance in the wall into the square of Barabbas. Chapel XXXIII, Sacro Monte di Varallo. Statues by Giovanni d’Enrico, 1608-9, fresci by Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli (called “Il Morazzone”) 1608-9.

Varallo is consummate for its sculpture and frescoes, demanding as Butler also reflects, a guidebook all its own.⁷⁸



Fig. 16. *Ecce homo*, Sacro Monte di Varallo. Wikicommons Photo.

⁷⁸ Butler, *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino*, see here the Preface to the first edition, November 1881, p. 11. Butler begins his reflections on Varallo enthusiastically quoting in his preface a then-recent magazine article by Alice Green who herself writes “On the Sacro Monte the tableaux are produced in perpetuity, only the figures are not living, they are terra-cotta statues painted and moulded in so life-like a way that you feel that, were a man of flesh and blood to get mixed up with the crowd behind the grating, you would have hard work to distinguish him from the figures that have never had life.” Cited in Butler, *Ex Voto*, pp. vii-viii. Butler’s book on the Piedmont and the Ticino was published just a year before Nietzsche and Rée, in the company of Lou and her mother, would undertake to travel to the same region. It is with reference to such descriptions that I understand Lou’s urgent April 25th letter to Rée as they were planning their collective visit to Orta, “*Have no fear of painted devils*, see to it that the trip comes off —*please, please!*” It is worth adding that Butler also instituted the strikingly durable critical pattern of characterizing the Sacri Monti, collectively speaking and as a religio-artistic cultural phenomenon as a bastion of Catholicism contra Protestantism: “an attempt to stem the torrent of reformed doctrine already surging over many an alpine pass.” Butler, *Ex Voto*, p. 44.

No matter whether one opts for one Sacro Monte or the other, it is important to underline that we do not know and cannot know for certain in this case as in most cases when it comes to the history of past events and past lives. Although much source scholarship is composed as if this were not so, all that positive sources can tell us is what can be said positively, which is to say: the most minimal level. If Nietzsche marks or underlines a text, and if we suppose, as we do that we are sure that they are his underlinings or marks — and this is no kind of exact science (*pace* Montinari and *pace* Brobjer, etc. — this and even still does not tell us anything about the care with which he read the text, not even the loci underlined, not even the places he comments on. Nor, as is famously the case with respect to Kant's critiques (especially the first Critique) does the absence of such a book, or indeed the absence of textual references as we would suppose we recognize them constitute a positive proof of *anything*. For in the absence of such evidence we do not and we *cannot* know that Nietzsche did not in fact read this or that. Real-life events, factual matters are still more elusive, think of the debate which we referred to at the start with regard to Nietzsche's sexuality, and we can add questions of his physical aspect and his height (as David Allison once reminded us there is stunning variation in the reports given of what would seem a straightforward fact just reading the accounts of those who had in fact met him in life: he was medium height, but some called him short, some tall, etc).⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Allison, "Nietzsche's Identity," in; Keith Ansell-Pearson and Howard Caygill, eds., *The Fate of the New Nietzsche* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1993), pp. 15-42, here p. 18. As Allison points out, (pp. 16 ff) the labile character of many interpretations of Nietzsche's works would seem to be mirrored by Nietzsche's own and various identifications as well as by what would seem to be the most objective sources of all, eye-witness testimony, even of such patently non-subjective matters as height, hair and eye color, etc. "His physique is alternately described as 'inclined to corpulence', 'slender', 'stocky', 'strong', and 'delicate'. He is said to have 'a great strong figure' as well as 'not too delicate'. His hair color is said to be 'blond', 'quite dark', and 'completely black'." Etc., p. 18 ff.

“The Church gave eros poison to drink. He did not die from it but degenerated into vice.”

And yet, and after all the above, what persuades me that the conventional assumption that Nietzsche’s Sacro Monte corresponds to Orta rather than the possible Varallo, is less proximity than Nietzsche’s aphorism on the relation between religion and eros in *Beyond Good and Evil* as this would seem perhaps to reflect the erotic contest depicted in *The Temptation of St Frances*, in Orta’s Sacro Monte,



Fig. 17. Chapel X, *Victory of St. Frances over Temptation*, Sacro Monte di S. Francesco, di Orta. Statues by the Dionigi Bussola, Frescos by the brothers Carlo Francesco and Giuseppe Nuvolone (1600-1665). Author’s Photograph, 19 August 2010.

This tenth chapel at Orta is remarkable for the beauty of its statues but not less for the sheer scope of the *scenic*, in the sense of the closed space of the Greek *skene*, and three-dimensional sculptural unto two-dimensional painterly tableau perspective in frescoes above and behind the sculptures. Indeed, the presentation of the figures on the lower

level, given the sheer breadth of the scene seems almost cinematic in effect.

These figures are identified on site as “*Satana – Demoni,*” satans or demons: note the bent leg and cloven foot of the female devil running off to the left in Fig 17 (and we see the figure in detail in Fig. 18). Where the angels on the right, also represented as a pair (Fig. 19), are male (and are accordingly neutered in a good Augustinian theological sense), the painted devils of the sort popular in Italy (the façade of the Gesù in Rome features as sculpted architectural element such a female devil). This sensual concupiscence is the point of the temptation of St Frances. One side of the room is darker, one side is light and we recall the role of Satan, as a divine creature (thus Goethe tells us, Mephistopheles is the one who always wills evil and ever engenders good instead). The challenge is to resist and to triumph over temptation — as St. Frances duly does.



Fig. 18. Detail (on the left).

Fig. 19. Detail (on the right).

Chapel X, *Victory of St. Frances over Temptation*, Sacro Monte di S. Francesco, Orta.

Author's photograph, 19 August 2010.

The thus banished “Satans” may be seen as so many heroically resisted “painted devils” — and we noted above that Lou refers to these ‘painted devils’ already in her letter to Rée in her efforts to ensure Nietzsche’s participation in the planned trip to Orta.

For it’s own part, polychrome terracotta is all about a finish of textures, of matte or of glisteningly smooth, shining color and gleaming gold, and these same textures mirror the modeling of on the right hand, the angels, luminous, beautiful and serene, by contrast with the course and grinning “Satanas,” “demoni,” or devils on the left.

And if we needed more detail in our reading of the *Victory of Saint Frances over Temptation* at Orta, we can note goats going off from left to right in the foreground, with a little hare resting as well, and to the far left, we see the foaming jaws of a lion — or else the firehound of hell? The image illustrates the sentiment Nietzsche expresses with regard to the encounter between Christianity and Eros, the god of love, poison can kill or it can deform: “The Church gave eros poison to drink. He did not die from it but degenerated into vice.” (BGE §168)

I have argued that we know the greater part of what we know about Nietzsche and Lou is from Lou’s own hand and that and in general that Lou is herself the source for much that we know about her. Scholars rarely contradict her account even where they seek to amplify it, or as in Binion’s case, to psychoanalyse it. To say this is to rebuke neither Binion nor the psychoanalytic method, just because psychoanalysis as a method is predicated upon credulity and more credulity — which is why Karl Kraus says of it that is the disease whose cure it purports to be. But psychoanalysis is not to be mistaken for the historical, hermeneutic and indeed phenomenological science Nietzsche called philology.

About Nietzsche and Lou and their visit to Sacro Monte, I have reflected on the significance of the fact that there are two possible local references, suggesting that it matters to know which one we are talking about. Once again, Orta is detailed in the Baedeker guide available to Nietzsche and Lou, clearly indicating the distance to Varallo as a “five hour walk” (and Baedeker also indicates an omnibus and says that

mules may be hired) and I would add that there would have been ferries as well (and there is a train station in Varallo). But staying with Baedeker, a walk, five hours in two directions, with or without mules, while a big deal for us today,⁸⁰ with our cars and our GPS devices, such a hike could have been within the realm of possibility for the youthful Lou and the (merely) middle-aged Nietzsche.

I highlight the point that there are two Sacri Monti in certain proximity to Orta to emphasize that questions often go unasked not because we are bad at questioning but because, we are scholars after all, *we already know*. Thus scholars “just” know that the exceptional, exquisite, loveliest “dream” of Nietzsche’s life has to be, just as Lou tells us that it is, all and only about Lou.

Not about the site of Sacro Monte itself, not about brilliantly painted, life-like statues and not about architecture designed within and without to recreate the particular atmosphere of the Mediterranean world, transposed to the north of Italy for the sake of meditation or contemplation of that same world, as the world of ancient Jerusalem and of ancient Greece.⁸¹ That this “weather” would have captivated

⁸⁰ And in support of distant possibilities, I myself, some twenty-five years ago, walked more than the distance from St. Moritz to Maloja *and back again* in the course of a day: five hours each way, timed — as the Swiss legends insisted, for a grandmother’s energies, annoying as this was to my younger self. I had time to look around Maloja, enjoy a relaxed lunch and take detours on the way back. To be sure, I also climbed well marked paths, the via Engadina, but the region in question in Italy, the Ticino, has similarly well-marked paths (although, I would also add, having been to both sites, that for a walker, the Ticino can be steeper in some cases, easier in others.

⁸¹ Dolev cited above, begins by reflecting on this point in order to make a differently nuanced argument and citing numerous examples of what is argued to be an obligatory distaste for wax museums and diorama. Indeed, Annabel Jane Wharton adds the language of the “theme park” in her discussion of Varallo in her *Selling Jerusalem*, pp. 118 ff. It is too her credit that Wharton reminds us the dates, historically speaking, do not square with Butler’s assertion that the purpose of Sacro Monte of Varallo was to serve “as a dam blocking the flood of heretical ideas flowing through the crevices in the alps” for the historically patent reason that the “Sacro Monte of Varallo was founded a

Nietzsche who worked on the intersection between what texts tell us about antiquity and the world of antiquity itself can seem easiest of all to overlook.

We assume that what moved Nietzsche in his trip to Sacro Monte (whether referring to the site at Orta or Varallo) would have nothing to do with the enduring obsession of his life: the question of science, the science of antiquity and what we might know of it and based on this the further, political question how such a culture might come to life in our own time. Rather than antiquity, the atmosphere of Jerusalem, Rome, Athens, we think of Lou. And thus we know that what Nietzsche experienced in Sacro Monte could only have been an encounter with Lou, more (or less!) chaste. Where Nietzsche — and here it is Heidegger who remains his successor and not Kaufmann and not so many other Nietzsche experts — prided himself on his ability to raise a question *as a question*, today's scholars take it for granted that they know what Nietzsche meant by speaking of the “most exquisite dream” of his life.

And we think, just as Lou by means of her account of it ensured that all of Bayreuth would also think, that Nietzsche had to have had erotic designs on Lou, which, of course, inasmuch as the rumor was one of Lou's making does not sully Lou at all where, as she emphasizes, she turns him down: thus the passion of this Nietzsche's most exquisite dream was a consummately failed effort, an impotence both convicts and calumniates Nietzsche, who is thus presented as having loved Lou as the love of his life, to whom he wished to dedicate his life in marriage, and who lost his bid: just like Lou's first teacher Gillot, just like Rée.

generation before Luther published his Ninety-Five Theses (1517).” *Selling Jerusalem*, p. 119. To say that this is patent does not mean that it is simple but only that we need a more inclusive world-view — beyond the Protestant conviction, paraphrasing Adorno, confident of its exclusive perspective. We may add to this the critical disaffection found in scholarly sensibilities with regard to the supposedly questionable aesthetic quality or “artistic value” of Sacro Monte.

I have also noted that in contrast with Lou's self-announced innocence, the "so-called 'mysterium of Sacro Monte'"⁸² might of course have signified something even more erotically daring (and I thus took note of the 19th century Albergo just at the gate of Varallo, and, of course, so it goes with 19th century travel habits, such options for 'resting' would also have been available in Orta). Hence and even as Nietzsche's ultimate failure goes without saying, commentators are also able to write that Nietzsche "seduces" Lou, a triumph lent by textual means to a man known to have been short, sympathetically so, on such triumphs.

It is thus natural that scholars also take for granted that they know which Sacro Monte was meant, and always and naturally enough: this will have to be the closest one. Yet this same nearby Sacro Monte — and this was for me the point of departure or inspiration for this essay — commentators do not, seemingly, trouble themselves to visit. And right they may be in dispensing with such cheap, ontic details, as David Allison, whom I love to cite as saying this, would say. My own reflections here are no more than phenomenologically styled reflections on possibility, that is to say: classically philosophical "thought experiments" — but I have been there, and recommend the journey.

⁸² The mysteries, of course, refer to the sacred motifs of the oratories. Krell refers to the "so-called 'mysterium of Sacro Monte'" in Krell and Donald L. Bates, *The Good European: Nietzsche's Work Sites in Word and Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 236.