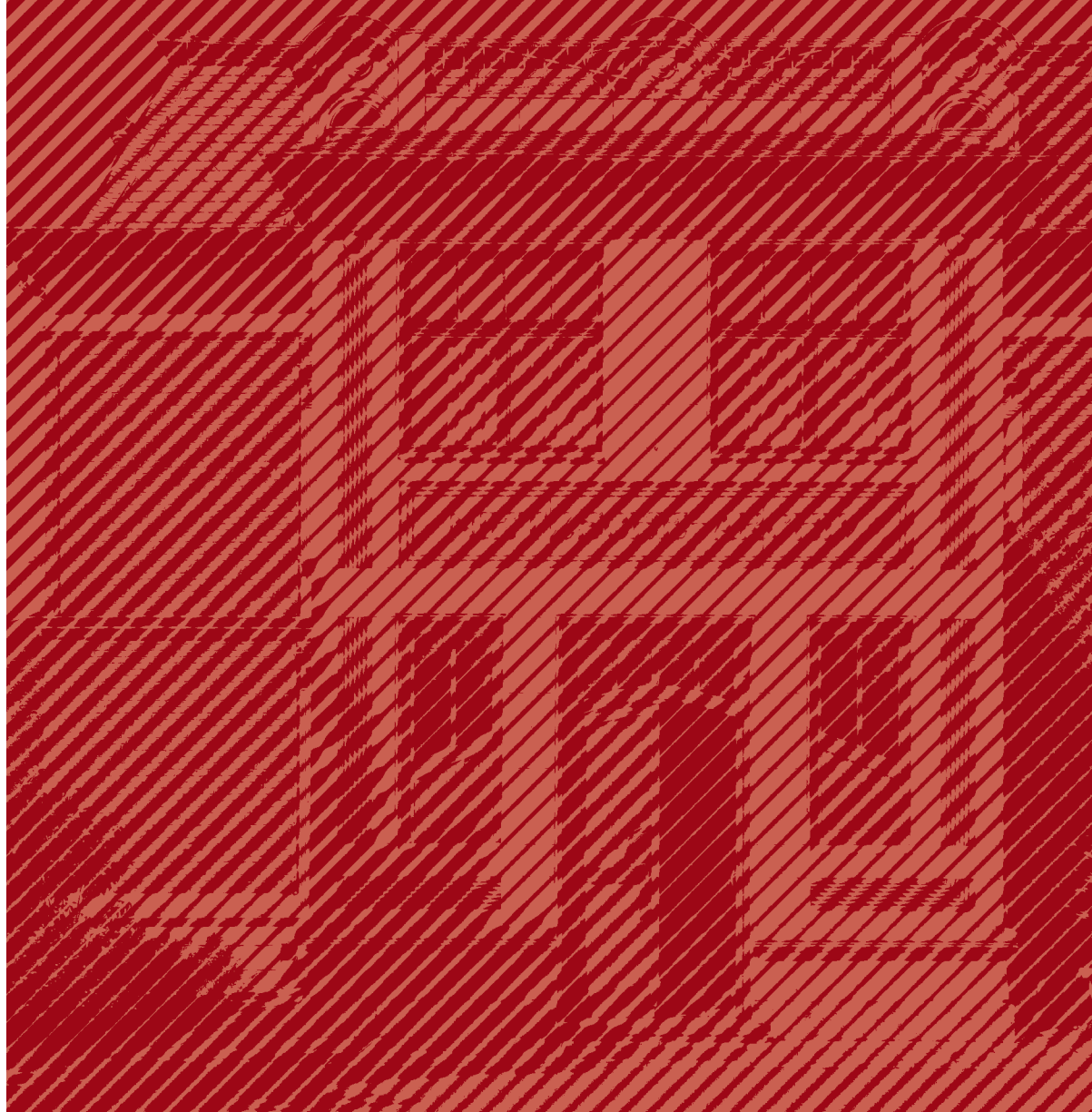


NIETZSCHE IN NATIONAL SOCIALISM



NIETZSCHE
ARCHIV

KLASSIK
STIFTUNG
WEIMAR

Preface

Not only do the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) still generate heated debate and controversy, but the Nietzsche-Archiv, too, is a multifaceted cosmos of its own. In 1991 it re-opened as a research site and museum. The philosopher's biography, oeuvre and body of literary reception, together with the archive and its striking interior design created by Art Nouveau artist Henry van de Velde (1863–1957), still offer a seemingly endless wellspring for scholarly study, art-historical research and artistic approaches. To introduce these to a wider audience, a space was established within the Nietzsche-Archiv in 2020 for small-scale presentations, which are now documented in this series of publications.

Built in Weimar in 1890, the bourgeois residence was purchased in 1897 by the Swiss women's rights activist Meta von Salis-Marschlins (1855–1929) as a home for the philosopher, stricken by mental decline since 1889, and his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche (1846–1935). Originally standing alone on "Silberblick" hill with a commanding view over the city of German classicism, it was ideally situated to become the centre and headquarters of growing international interest in Nietzsche's richly faceted thought. As a woman devoted to the study and memorialisation of the philosopher's legacy, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche stage-managed and instrumentalised her brother and showed great acumen in strategically associating him with Weimar's past intellectual luminaries and the cult-like veneration they attracted. After Nietzsche's death, she arranged his death chamber as a site of pilgrimage and commissioned the Belgian style-reformer Henry van de Velde to remodel the archive rooms as a resplendent *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) in the *Neuer Stil* (New Style).

Today, the historic site is owned by the Klassik Stiftung Weimar, the successor institution to the Stiftung Nietzsche-Archiv (Nietzsche Archive Foundation). The philosopher's literary estate is housed in the Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, while his own book collection and the library of the Nietzsche-Archiv are kept at the Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek. The Directorate of Museums is responsible for maintaining the premises as a museum space, including the historic interiors and all artworks. Visitors have access to the ground floor with its Art Nouveau ensemble designed by Henry van de Velde and, in the former dining room, the permanent exhibition "The Struggle for Nietzsche", updated in 2020 and dedicated to the philosopher's ideas and influence. The upper floors of the building are closed to the public and are used by the fellows of the Kolleg Friedrich Nietzsche, founded in 1999 and likewise owned by the Klassik Stiftung Weimar.

The now-enclosed north veranda is a space for smaller presentations exploring different aspects of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Nietzsche-Archiv, tying in with the Klassik Stiftung Weimar's annual themes. The aim is to spark curiosity, encourage deeper reflection and offer the public ever-new thematic reasons to rediscover Nietzsche's legacy. In light of the success of the small-scale exhibitions and the enthusiastic responses they generate, we are publishing these booklets as a record of the exhibits. The series is produced collaboratively by the Directorate of Museums and the Kolleg Friedrich Nietzsche and made available via the Klassik Stiftung Weimar publications server, where all issues can be downloaded free of charge in both German and English.

Dr. Annette Ludwig, *Director of Museums*
Sabine Walter, *Curator*
Prof. Dr Helmut Heit,
Head of the Kolleg Friedrich Nietzsche

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On 25 August 1900, Friedrich Nietzsche passed away at home in “Villa Silberblick” in Weimar under the care of his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. Although long admired by a small group of intellectuals during his lifetime, he became truly famous in Europe following his nervous breakdown. Reform movements, artists and right- and left-wing agitators claimed him for their own. They recognised their ideology in his works and praised him as a “pioneering thinker”, “prophet” and “herald of modern values”.

After World War I, that “seminal catastrophe of the 20th century”, numerous artists of the avant-garde continued to embrace Nietzschean thinking. German nationalists, anti-republican groups and the burgeoning Nazi party appropriated Nietzsche and cherry-picked fragments of his philosophy to support their worldviews.

In this way, Nietzsche himself was “recast”: the former critic of anti-Semitism and nationalism was transformed into a “German philosopher”. Anti-democratic ideologues seized upon his



View of the north side of the Nietzsche-Archiv
© Klassik Stiftung Weimar

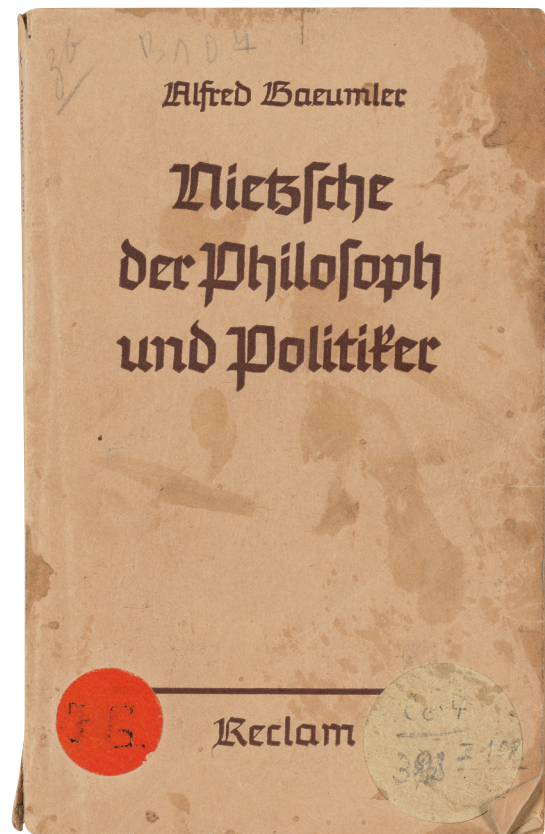
disaffection with imperial politics to rail against the Weimar Republic. The ideal of the non-conforming “Übermensch” (superman) was reinterpreted and heroised as the “Herrenmensch” (member of the master race) and “Aryan”.

Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and her staff at the Nietzsche-Archiv actively supported this reappraisal of Nietzsche, which a community of journalists and academic philosophers readily promoted.

The “Führer” and the ideologues

The “Germanisation” of Nietzsche began long before 1933. In addition to journalists Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Oswald Spengler (*The Decline and Fall of the Occident*, 1919/20) and Alfred Rosenberg (*The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, 1930), the philosopher Alfred Baeumler and his best-selling book *Nietzsche, the Philosopher and Politician* (1931) were especially influential.

Baeumler, who began moving in antidemocratic circles in 1919, co-founded the “Militant League for German Culture” in 1930. After 1933 his close contact with Hitler and Rosenberg gave his career an enormous boost. As one of the leading master-minds behind Nazi ideology together with his colleague and rival Ernst Krieck, Baeumler exploited, falsified and trivialised Nietzsche’s ideas. He identified Nietzsche as a representative of “Germanic civilisation” and “proclaimer” of a “heroic realism”, stating “his doctrine on will is the most perfect expression of his Germanism.” He claimed that “a new German nation would rise from the spirit of Nietzsche and the spirit of the Great War”. This interpretation has since been refuted, and even back then, essayists and academics could not agree on whether Nietzsche was a “champion” of National Socialism or not.



Alfred Baeumler: *Nietzsche der Philosoph und Politiker*. (Nietzsche, the Philosopher and Politician) Leipzig 1931



Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche greets Adolf Hitler at the door of the Nietzsche-Archiv on 20 July 1934 © Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, 180, 320

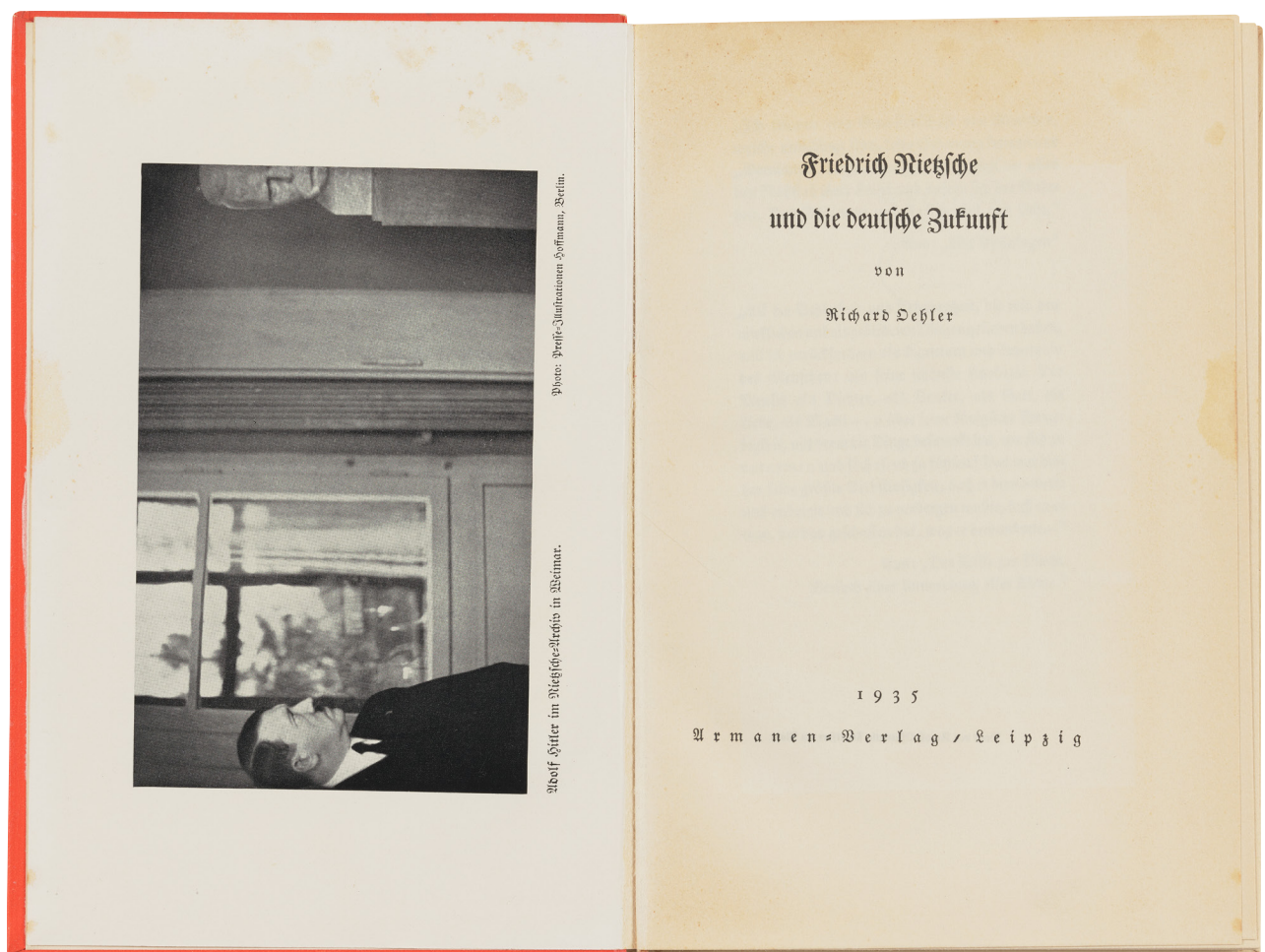
If not intellectually engaging, Adolf Hitler’s visits to the Nietzsche-Archiv were more effective in terms of political symbolism. His first visit came in 1932 following the world premiere of the Napoleon drama *One Hundred Days* by Benito Mussolini at the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar. After visits in 1933 and 1934, Hitler returned one last time as an honorary guest for Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche’s funeral on 11 November 1935. He pledged his own funds to finance a Nietzsche Memorial Hall. However, construction on the cult site was never completed – symptomatic of how Nietzsche was treated under National Socialism. It remains unknown whether Hitler actually gave Nietzsche’s writings any serious thought.

Nietzsche and the dream of a “German future”

1933 began with Hitler's triumph and its joyous celebration by millions of Germans. Declarations of loyalty poured from the press, academia and the art world. It soon became apparent that the educated middle class was overwhelmingly prepared to expend its cultural capital for the new rulers.

With his treatise *Friedrich Nietzsche and the German Future* (1933), Frankfurt library director Richard Oehler, a cousin of Nietzsche's, espoused views that closely aligned with Hitler's policies. As a staunch Nazi supporter,

Oehler saw his dream of “supermen” and the “will to power” come true in 1933 with Hitler's rise: “The Renewer of the German people is carrying out what the philosopher envisioned and longed for decades ago.” The photo of the “Führer” in quiet dialogue with a Nietzsche bust in the Weimar archive supposedly lent credence to this claim. What is particularly interesting is who published the book: the tiny Armanen-Verlag had been publishing short pieces by the neo-pagan esoteric milieu and programmatic writings by the nationalist right-wing since 1924.



Richard Oehler: *Friedrich Nietzsche und die deutsche Zukunft* (Friedrich Nietzsche and the German Future). Leipzig: Armanen-Verlag, 1935. Photo caption: Adolf Hitler examines the Nietzsche bust by Fritz Röll in the Nietzsche-Archiv, 1932

Nietzsche and the dream of a “German future”

Alfred Rosenberg, Nazi ideologue and director of the “Militant League for German Culture” (1928–1934), had been affiliated with the nationalist neo-pagan movement since the 1920s. He became famous with his book *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930). The intellectual core of his ideological pamphlet was a conspiracy-laden, radical anti-Semitism which stigmatised and excluded everything that was “un-German”. This ensured the book’s positive reception in Nazi circles despite slight ideological differences to Hitler’s manifesto *Mein Kampf*.

In January 1934 Rosenberg was appointed the “Führer’s” commissioner for supervising the intellectual and ideological education and training of the Nazi Party. For a time, Alfred Baeumler was a member of his staff. Rosenberg himself showed little interest in Nietzsche and did little to integrate the philosopher into National Socialist ideology. To complicate matters, there was no coherent Nazi ideology to begin with.

And yet in 1934, we see Rosenberg sitting next to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and the Thuringian Minister of Justice Otto Weber. This photo underscored the political influence of the Nietzsche-Archiv. It suggested that Nietzsche and the zeitgeist of National Socialism shared common ground – a premise entirely unsupported by the content of the philosopher’s texts.



Alfred Rosenberg seated left next to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche in the library of the Nietzsche-Archiv; on the right, Thuringian Minister of Justice Otto Weber, 1934
© Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, 72, 1596, p. 463

The ideologisation of Nietzsche

“[Nietzsche] recognises [...] two crucial starting points: Goethe and the Prussian soldiers; precisely that which we consider symbolic of Weimar and Potsdam. Naturally, not the Weimar of 1919, but Goethe’s and Schiller’s Weimar and Frederick the Great’s Potsdam.”

Friedrich Würzbach: *Nietzsche and German Destiny. Radio Presentation in the “Stunde der Nation”* (1933)

“When we see German youth march under the rune of the swastika today, we recall Nietzsche’s ‘Unfashionable Observations’, in which these young people were called upon for the first time [...]. And when we shout to them ‘Heil Hitler’ – we are likewise hailing Friedrich Nietzsche.”

Alfred Baeumler: *Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus* (1934)

“I believe, therefore, at today’s celebratory hour [...] we should be suffused with the knowledge that our time holds the promise of Nietzschean philosophy being fulfilled to a large extent.”

Hans Frank: *Friedrich Nietzsche. Eine Gedenkrede* (1944)

“In a truly historic sense, the National Socialist movement stands before the entire world like Nietzsche once stood facing the brute forces of his time.”

Alfred Rosenberg: *Friedrich Nietzsche. Address commemorating Nietzsche’s 100th anniversary on 15 October 1944 in Weimar*

“The worst readers are those who act like plundering soldiers. They take out some things that they might use, cover the rest with filth and confusion, and blaspheme about the whole.”

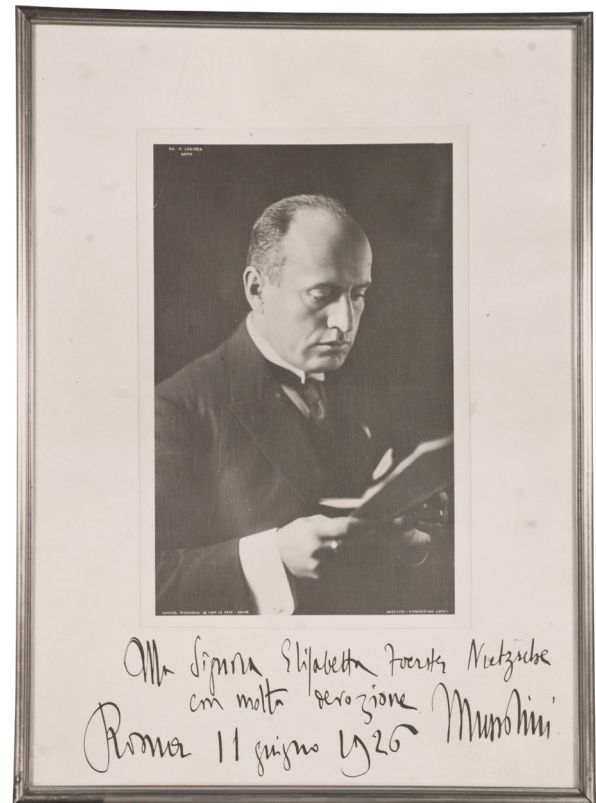
Friedrich Nietzsche: *Human, All Too Human II*, Aph. 137 (1878)

Nietzsche, Mussolini and the “ethics of fascism”

In 1908 a radical Italian socialist published the essay *La filosofia della forza* (The Philosophy of Power). His name: Benito Mussolini. After 1918 Mussolini's views shifted, and he became the leader of the fascist movement. In an interview with Oscar Levy, “Il Duce” mentioned that he had intensively studied Nietzsche's writings: “You are absolutely right in assuming that I learned from him [...]. [His works] cured me of my socialism.”

This comment caught the attention of the Nietzsche-Archiv. Max Oehler, Nietzsche's cousin and right-hand man to Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth, published an essay in the *Gazzetta di Venezia* in August 1925 entitled Mussolini and Nietzsche. *A Contribution on the Ethics of Fascism*, which was later reprinted in a commemorative volume marking the 30th anniversary of Nietzsche's death.

This established the first connection between the archive and Mussolini, that “glorious disciple of Zarathustra” (according to Förster-Nietzsche). The photo and dedication from 1926, shown here, confirmed this new Weimar-Rome axis. Further correspondence and telegrams followed. On Förster-Nietzsche's 80th birthday, the “Duce” made a significant donation to the Nietzsche-Archiv. And at the funeral for the lady of the archive in November 1935, several Italian state officials also participated in the ceremony.



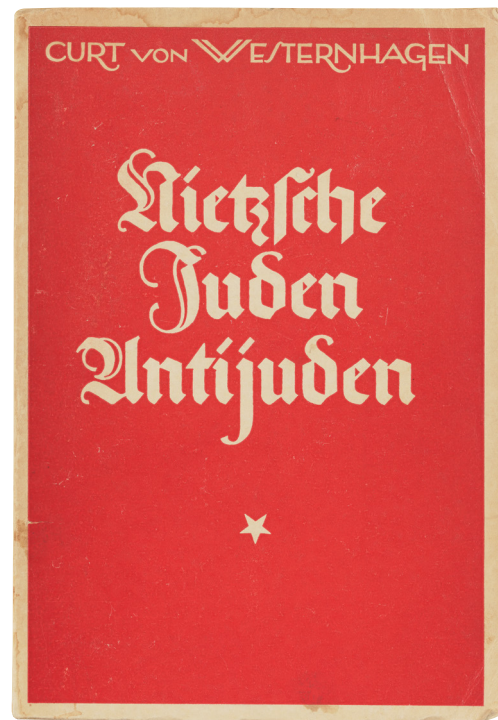
Portrait of Benito Mussolini with a personally signed dedication to Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Rome, 11 June 1926
© Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Goethe- und Schiller-Archiv, 101, 304, p. 1

A Nietzsche institute in Rome was never established as planned. In 1944 Mussolini donated an ancient Dionysus statue for the Nietzsche Memorial Hall in Weimar. Due to the increasing chaos near the end of the war, it was never displayed in the unfinished building and was later returned to the Italian government.

Dissenting voices

The integration of Nietzsche into National Socialist ideology was controversial from the start. Philosophers like Karl Jaspers and Max Horkheimer vehemently rejected his appropriation. For the same reason, Oswald Spengler resigned as chair of the Nietzsche-Archiv, explaining “either one cultivates the philosophy of Nietzsche or that of the Nietzsche-Archiv.” Two readers of Nietzsche from opposite sides of the political spectrum, expressed their qualms even more pointedly.

The dentist and musicologist Curt von Westernhagen was a staunch Nazi supporter, yet warned his fellow comrades about Nietzsche: “In this conflict between Judaism and Germanism, Nietzsche stood in the ranks of Judaism, out of sympathy and calculation, in heart and mind [...] he placed the Jewish spirit above the German spirit.”



Curt von Westernhagen: *Nietzsche Juden Antijuden* (*Nietzsche Jews Anti-Jews*). Weimar 1936



Oscar Levy around 1908 in his flat in London
© Julia Rosenthal-Levy

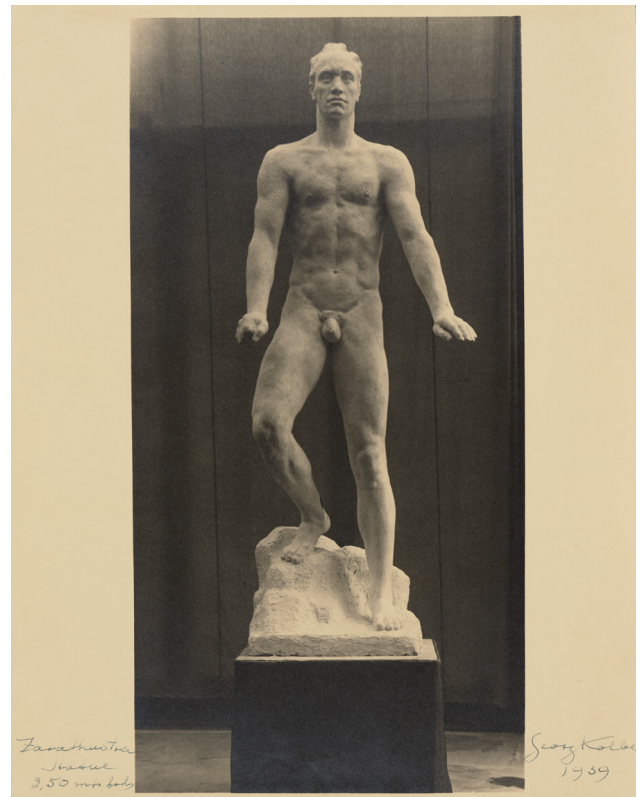
Oscar Levy, a committed European and secular Jew, moved to London in 1892, where he edited the first complete English edition of Nietzsche's works between 1907 and 1913. In Great Britain, Nietzsche was regarded during World War I as the intellectual forefather of German militarism. On account of his support of Nietzsche, Levy was expatriated in 1921, which rendered him stateless, but also a “free spirit” in every sense of the word.

In hundreds of articles in leading newspapers in England, Germany, France and the USA, Levy defended the philosopher for decades against those whom he believed had misunderstood Nietzsche or forcibly reinterpreted his philosophy to their liking. His contact to the Nietzsche-Archiv, which began in 1908, cooled as Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche increasingly embraced fascism and National Socialism. In 1935, referring to Nietzsche's sister, Levy wrote: This “blind Pythia of the Nietzsche cult [...] has falsely remade the ‘revaluation of all values’ into the ‘valuation of all contemptible values’.”

Portraits and projections – Friedrich Nietzsche in the arts

Nietzsche iconography played an important role in the reception of his work. His life and philosophy inspired numerous illustrators, painters and fine artists to create “true” images of Nietzsche, which have since left a lasting impression on our cultural memory. In most of these, Nietzsche is depicted as a prophet, a martyr, a brooding thinker and a hero – in other words, a “singular figure of greatness” – who is also vulnerable and eccentric. Under National Socialism, finding a suitable image of Nietzsche was an endless struggle.

Georg Kolbe, an artist of the avant-garde since 1900, was both acclaimed and controversial during the Nazi era. His sculpture *Zarathustra Rising* (1939) fit the Nazi cliché of a vigorous masculine athlete. It was intended for the Nietzsche Memorial Hall but was rejected by Hitler – possibly because he disliked the artist. The statue was reworked and recast in 1950 and now stands in the garden of the Georg Kolbe Museum in Berlin.



Georg Kolbe, *Zarathustra Rising*, 1939, photographer unknown
© Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Museums, inv. no.: Fo-2021/2



Lissy Eckart, Commemorative medal to Friedrich Nietzsche, 1940
© Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Museums, inv. no.: MM-2022/10291

Lissy Eckart was one of the female artists whom Hitler apparently favoured. In 1934 she had already crafted a medal in his honour, and in 1938 he purchased the painting *In Lissy Eckart's studio* by Carl Heiß. For her Nietzsche medal of 1940, Eckart decided on a less martial theme. The two figures embracing each other are framed by a quote taken from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “But by my love and hope I beseech you: do not throw away the hero in your soul! Keep sacred your highest hope!” In the context of Germany's attack on its European neighbours, one might interpret this quote as veneration for the heroic soldier, but in Nietzsche's text of 1883, it refers to the caring encouragement to not lose hope in oneself and one's ideals.

An intellectual mastermind of National Socialism?

Nietzsche neither foresaw nor invoked National Socialism. Does he bear some responsibility for it nonetheless? Did he contribute to a cultural climate that culminated in the rupture of civilisation? Buzzwords like “Übermensch”, “God is dead”, and “The Will to Power” hit a nerve in numerous cultural circles. Like many of his contemporaries, Nietzsche shared Plato’s misgivings regarding a possible democracy. He mistrusted the state, the majorities and their political organisations. His focus was directed toward unconventional individuals. Based on his critique of Occidental tradition, he dreamt of a post-Christian rebirth. The thought of cultural upheaval and reawakening allowed a diverse array of reform movements to appropriate his philosophy posthumously.

In many ways, however, Nietzsche clearly contradicted central elements of National Socialist ideology. Nietzsche publicly distanced himself from anti-Semitic sentiment and called “to eject anti-Semitic ranters out of the country”. The ideal of a blindly obedient, homogenous “national body” is incompatible with Nietzsche who despised all forms of German jingoism and nationalism.

“Criticism of patriotism: whoever feels values about himself which he takes a hundred times higher than the welfare of the ‘fatherland’, society, blood and racial affinities – values that are beyond fatherlands and races, i. e. international values – would a hypocrite if he wanted to play the ‘patriot’. It is a depression of man and soul that endures national hatred (or even admires and glorifies): the dynastic families exploit this kind of person – and again there are enough commercial and social classes (including, of course, the venal buffoons, the artists), who win their sponsorship when these national dividing waters regain power.”

Friedrich Nietzsche: *Nachgelassene Fragmente*, no. 7 [47] (1886). Translation by Daniel Fidel Ferrer, in: *Nietzsche’s Last Twenty Two Notebooks: complete* (digital publication)

Imprint

NIETZSCHE IN NATIONAL SOCIALISM

A small exhibition on a major topic

A cabinet presentation at the Nietzsche-Archiv

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