

On The Wisdom of Nietzsche's Musical Departures From Wagner

By Daniel Tate

Kant and His Successors

Dr. Harrison Kleiner

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The Wisdom of Nietzsche

In his masterpiece of literary criticism *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, Harold Bloom, the renowned and perhaps unrivaled contemporary literary critic and Yale Professor, includes Friedrich Nietzsche's insights into the heart of wisdom as among the most important in the history of Western thought, with such formidable company as Shakespeare, Plato, Saint Augustine, and the Jesus of *The Gospel of Thomas*. Throughout his many writings, Nietzsche wholly denies conventional morality. The harmonious qualities with which wisdom are traditionally equated (e.g. in historical figures such as the Buddha, Lao Tzu, Jesus, and Socrates) are lost not only on most of Nietzsche's words but on much of Nietzsche's lived experience, which was often fraught with suffering, contention, and obstinacy. Why, then, would Bloom choose to include Nietzsche, the author of *The Anti-Christ*, alongside the Jesus of *The Gospel of Thomas*, as one of history's most important teachers of wisdom? "Nietzsche's deepest teaching," explains Bloom, "is that authentic meaning is painful, and that the pain itself is the meaning."¹ He points out that, in his reading of Nietzsche, "The world is rich in meaning because it is rich in error, and strong in suffering, when seen from an aesthetic perspective."

Suffering inevitably stains every human life- like the burning tiger that must take the place of Blake's little lamb. But for Nietzsche this suffering can contain the most meaningful dimension of life. Rainer Maria Rilke, arguably the greatest poet of the 20th century, who studied Nietzsche exhaustively in early life, would later treat this Nietzschean sentiment as the most important piece of advise he can offer a struggling young correspondent: "We know little, but that we must trust in what is difficult is a certainty that will never abandon us," Rilke asserts.

¹ Bloom, Harold. *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*. New York: Riverhead Books. 2004. p 210.

“That something is difficult must be one more reason for us to do it.”² When honestly confronted, the difficult embrace of suffering can reveal depths of the human heart that can only be experienced through the sincerity this embrace demands.

With Nietzsche’s assertion that it *is* in fact noble to suffer the ‘slings and arrows’³ of our lives, he also asserts that this acceptance is made tolerable only through art. Bloom, of course, recognizes this centrality of art to Nietzsche’s philosophy: ““we possess art lest we should perish from the truth” [Nietzsche says]. If a single apothegm could sum up Nietzsche on the aesthetic,” says Bloom, “it would be that.”⁴

For Nietzsche, music is the highest art because it is the most visceral. Deeply musical from a very early age, Nietzsche found his spirit’s counterpoint in Richard Wagner when first he ingested the score of *Tristan und Isolde*, perhaps Wagner’s most evocative opera. In this initial experience of Wagner’s music, young Nietzsche already felt that, as Bloom puts it, “strong [art] is difficult, and its memorability is the consequence of a difficult pleasure, and a difficult enough pleasure is a kind of pain.”⁵ As the most visceral art form music is also potentially the most painful. While Nietzsche would retain this aesthetic sense as his philosophy developed, his relationship with Wagner and his work would dramatically change as the young philosopher matured. While young Nietzsche was the most zealous and eloquent of Wagner’s acolytes, the fully developed Nietzsche would be Wagner’s most vituperative dissenter. What was the nature of Nietzsche and Wagner’s relationship? Why did the philosopher eventually abandon the

² Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Vintage Books. 1986. p 68.

³ Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. New York: Dover Publications. 1992. Act III, Scene I, p 53.

⁴ Bloom, Harold. *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*. New York: Riverhead Books. 2004. p 219.

⁵ Ibid. at p 216.

composer? Most importantly, what relevance does Nietzsche's departure from Wagner bear on the philosopher's development as a teacher of wisdom?

The Legacy of Richard Wagner

"In [Beethoven's] works...the romantic impulse...found its first decisive expression."⁶

When Beethoven intimated the emergence of the Romantic period with his late piano sonatas, symphonies, and string quartets, Richard Wagner pursued the master's trail so thoroughly that he would give unrivaled expression to the highest possible realms of Romanticism in his operas, or what he termed 'music dramas.' Wagner's fierce and unrelenting appropriation of the challenge posed by Beethoven's legacy (comparable in scope to the challenge presented to all literary successors to Shakespeare) would establish him as one of the most original, diverse, and influential figures in the history of Western culture; in fact, W.H. Auden would one day refer to him as, "perhaps the greatest genius who ever lived."⁷ However, whether or not Wagner was the *greatest* genius in history, he was certainly one of the most controversial.

Few historical figures have given more confirmation than Wagner to the Belgian symbolist poet Rodenbach's statement that "Geniuses are not so much men as monsters."⁸ Through his life, Wagner was an unrelenting megalomaniac whose ego was so thoroughly inflated that "it is not stretching a point to suggest that he secretly regarded himself as a god."⁹ If we grant Wagner his fantasy, it is more appropriate to associate him with the self-obsessed Norse God *Odin* from his *Ring Cycle* than the omnibenevolent Christian God. Wagner was remorseless

⁶ Solomon, Maynard. *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press. 2003. p 27.

⁷ Magee, Bryan. *Aspects of Wagner*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Back Cover Excerpt.

⁸ Grunfeld, Frederic V. *Rodin: A Biography*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc. 1987. p 375.

⁹ Schonberg, Harold C. *The Lives of the Great Composers*. New York: W.N. Norton & Company. 1970. p 269.

in his desire to augment himself. His second wife, Cosima, was the wife of one of his close friends, the legendary conductor Hans von Bulow, when Wagner began having licentious relations with her. Brahms, the only composer who could compete with Wagner during his life, “repeatedly expressed his appreciation of Wagner’s music, while he seldom – even among his closest friends – said anything in criticism of his works. Wagner however...[always] delivered a covert attack upon Brahms.”¹⁰ Throughout his life, Wagner continually betrayed and manipulated family members, friends, and colleagues. His life was satiated with adultery, vindictiveness, hypocrisy, and bigotry. However, the egomaniacal composer also enriched the lives of many by completely redefining musical subtlety, aesthetic integration, and artistic possibility. Few composers, possibly only Bach and Beethoven, have been more influential than Wagner. As music and art critic James Huneker said, “Richard Wagner [along with Ibsen, Rodin, and Manet]... taught a deaf, dumb, and blind world to hear seen, think, and feel.”¹¹

In short, no composer in history has been as reverentially adored *and* virulently abhorred as Wagner. Over a century after Wagner’s death, Daniel Barenboim caused riotous outrage when he conducted excerpts from Wagner’s operas in Israel in 2001.¹² Many Israelis still associate the composer’s elusive harmonies with Hitler’s appropriation of Wagner’s anti-Semitic philosophies and the tyrant’s feverish love of Wagner’s music. This angry criticism is hardly unwarranted. Adolf Hitler so respected Wagner that he would proclaim, “I recognize in Wagner my predecessor... I regard him as a supreme prophetic figure.”¹³ At times, reading Wagner’s

¹⁰ Geiringer, Karl. *Brahms: His Life and Work*. London: Oxford University Press. 1947. p 84.

¹¹ Grunfeld, Frederic V. *Rodin: A Biography*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc. 1987. p 419.

¹² Gilmore, Inigo. “Barenboim shatters Israel taboo on Wagner.” Telegraph News. Online. (accessed 14 April 2008), <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2001/07/09/wbar09.xml>>

¹³ Jacobs, Robert L. “Wagner’s Influence on Hitler”. *Music and Letters*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (January, 1941) Oxford University Press, 1941. 81.

anti-Semitic, polemical essay *Judaism in Music*, it seems almost necessary to occasionally glance at the cover and remind oneself that the title is not *Mein Kampf* (which Hitler incidentally outlined after Wagner's autobiography *Mein Leiben*).

On the list of Wagner's proud inheritors one does not only find sympathizers of the Third Reich, however. 'The fact that every cultural figure of any standing, from Marx to William Morris, and Ruskin to Tolstoy, had an opinion on Wagner and his music is indicative of the composer's influence, and if that particular quartet remained unconvinced of his genius, there were countless others who took a contrary view.'¹⁴ Franz Liszt, Charles Baudelaire, Claude Debussy, Gustav Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg, and Marcel Proust, were but a few of the 'countless other' cultural giants who openly admitted to their incalculable debts to the artistic genius. Leonardo da Vinci is perhaps the only historical figure that readily comes to mind when attempting to recall a cultural icon whose talents and cultural contributions were more diverse. In a century of burgeoning artistic individualism, rapidly proliferating knowledge, and inestimably inventive possibilities, the legendary achievements and innovations of Richard Wagner provoked the imaginations of innumerable young minds.

Nietzsche's Beginnings with Wagner

One such young mind, itself brimming over with prodigious possibilities, was that of one Friedrich Nietzsche. Born in 1844, Nietzsche immersed himself in music, literature, and poetry at a very young age. Displaying extraordinary sensitivity, talent, perspective, and eloquence, so unusual and rapidly-developing did Nietzsche's gifts prove to be that he was offered a philology

¹⁴ Millington, Barry: 'Wagnerianism' *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 8 April 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

professorship at the University of Basel at the remarkable age of 24, without having even obtained a Ph.D. or having written a dissertation. Nietzsche's own talents notwithstanding, when he met Wagner in November of 1868, a highly gifted beginning professor at Basel who had yet to make any meaningful philosophical or cultural contributions, Wagner had already established himself not only as the preeminent operatic composer of his time, but also the most important living European artist. Despite Nietzsche's comparable gifts in numerous areas, admiration for the master composer soon turned toward idolatry. Art, and specifically music, had from an early age been the nucleus of Nietzsche's experience of life and would remain a pillar to which Nietzsche's philosophy would always retain an umbilical connection. When Nietzsche had first obtained the score of Wagner's seminal work *Tristan und Isolde* several years prior to meeting the composer, Wagner's opulent chromaticism, undulating harmonies, and unending unifying melodies- or leitmotivs- immediately arrested him. It was perhaps to be expected, then, that Nietzsche would adopt an idolatrous opinion of Wagner when he was to meet the master.

Wagnerian Opera

Before examining Nietzsche's attraction to Wagner's music, it is necessary to establish familiarity with the nature of Wagner's works. The music dramas of Richard Wagner (1813-83) represent the culmination of German romantic opera. Wagner was the first composer in the history of Western music to successfully integrate poetic, dramatic, musical, and philosophical talents to formulate singular and original artistic inventions in theatrical productions. While virtually every other reputable operatic composer, such as his Italian contemporary Verdi, had made operatic creation a combined effort, Wagner, true to his characteristic megalomania, insisted that his was a one-man show. Infused with a deep passion for literature, and in

particular the works of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schopenhauer, Wagner served as his own librettist for all of his works. Though many of his works drew on firmly established mythological subject matter, he consistently distorted the original meaning of the sources he drew upon to serve his own musical, dramatic, social, philosophical, or political agenda.

Tristan and Dionysius

In *Tristan und Isolde* (1859), which many reputable musicians consider to be the greatest opera of all time, Wagner exemplifies everything that Nietzsche values in music. The four-hour work is one of the deepest examinations of the psychology and spirituality of passion, sexuality, and physicality in Western cultural history. In terms of historical significance, the work can be compared to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Michelangelo's *David*, or Goethe's *Faust*. Not only did the opera have no historical operatic counterpart, but arguably no opera since has approached the orgiastic sensuality that pours through the harmonically ambiguous, imaginative colors of the colossal orchestra.

Very broadly speaking, *Tristan* is the story of an accidental love between a king's knight, Tristan, and the king's bride-to-be, Isolde. A chambermaid gives a love potion symbolic of unwitting attraction to them, and their attraction moves them toward inescapable obsession and guaranteed defeat. The deliberate and never-quite-resolved progression of the musical score ensures that the audience is physiologically infused with a sensation similar to sexual anticipation. Tristan and Isolde slowly dig their graves.

Four hours of harmonic tension are finally released when, upon Tristan's fatal injury after being discovered by the King's knights, Isolde mourns over his mortally wounded body. She cries out arguably the most evocative aria in the history of Western music as the orchestra hammers the audience with anxiously awaited harmonic resolutions- one after another- symbolic, of course, of sexual orgasm and the union of Tristan and Isolde's souls. Isolde's final aria is aptly christened *Liebestod*, or Love-Death. As the orchestra magically fades toward pianississimo and an open-ended heavenly realm, Isolde dies of grief- now merged with her Beloved Tristan. No moment in art makes a more persuasive argument for Kierkegaard's conviction in *Either/Or* that as with "insects that die in the moment of fertilization... so it is with all joy: life's highest, most splendid moment of enjoyment is accompanied by death."¹⁵ No moment in art more fully expresses Nietzsche's insight that at the moment of the fierce embrace of suffering, our lives can be infused with the deepest meaning.

Though *Tristan* is an epic drama, the element that makes it a masterpiece is decisively the music. Nietzsche, especially, felt this way. The power of Wagner's theatrical embrace of life in *Tristan* is made convincing by the musical tapestry with which the story is threaded. Nietzsche, for his part, could have done without the theatrical component, later stating: "It is plain that I am essentially anti-theatrical: confronted with the theater... I feel that profound scorn at the bottom of my soul which every artist today feels."¹⁶ It is in the music that Wagner fully embraces suffering. It is the music that makes *Tristan* 'difficult' and therefore strong art. Even after he eventually departed from Wagner, Nietzsche still maintained that because "Wagner is one who

¹⁵ Andrews, Robert. *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations*. England: Columbia University Press. 1992. p 487. Online edition. (accessed 12 April 2008), <<http://books.google.com>>

¹⁶Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*. The Portable Nietzsche. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954. p 685.

has suffered deeply--- [precisely] that is his distinction above other musicians. I admire Wagner wherever he [authentically] puts himself into music.”¹⁷ It was the painfully physiological musical sensuality in *Tristan* that so intoxicated Nietzsche, and it was an afterthought in his passion for the work that the subject matter in *Tristan* happened to coincide well with his philosophy.

Thus, the fundamental characteristic of Wagner that Nietzsche valued was that the composer’s life and music resonated with the young Nietzsche’s philosophy that it is the *Dionysian* in art that is most meaningful- that most fully embraces life in all of its dimensions. What does this mean? Drawing on a generous interpretation of Greek mythology, Nietzsche draws the distinction between *Dionysian* and *Apollonian* aesthetics in his first important work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. The Dionysian he associates with *drunkenness* and the Apollonian with *dreams*. Dionysian drunkenness, in its purest form, embraces life with reckless abandon; while Apollonian dreaming draws a veil over life in order to bring order to the mind. Nietzsche feels that society has became imbalanced in favor of Apollonian ideals, and sees in Wagner the possible avatar of the restoration of Dionysian values in society. The Dionysian in art is expressed through music, which by its very nature can sweep one into a kind of drunkenness; while the Apollonian in art can be seen in the ‘plasticity’ of theatre or the visual arts. While it is important to acknowledge the necessity of both dimensions, it is through the Dionysian that Nietzsche feels one can surrender to life. “Saying yes to life even in its most strange and intractable problems, the will to life, celebrating its own inexhaustibility by *sacrificing* its

¹⁷Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*. The Portable Nietzsche. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954. p 664.

highest types,” Nietzsche would write in *Twilight of the Idols*, “That is what I [call] Dionysian.”¹⁸

Nietzsche’s Musical Departures from Wagner

As time progressed, however, Wagner’s embrace of life and suffering weakened, and Nietzsche starkly began to depart from Wagner’s increasingly political and ideological stance toward art. While with *Tristan* Wagner had made the music the integrative adhesive for the production, the foundation from which all else arose, musical integrity became less important to the composer as he aged. Wagner was no longer interested in providing the audience with a meaningful view of suffering, so much as providing them with the effect of a meaningful view of suffering. This is not any different from the common course of successful artists today. Few people, for instance, would say that the second or third Matrix movies had more substance than the first, but they did have more effect. Wagner, near the end, wanted “*effect*, nothing more. *Espressivo* at any price, and music in the service, the slavery, of poses – *that is* [now Wagner’s] *end*.”¹⁹ Wagner now manipulated his talents, and his works began to take the focus of merely providing himself with the opportunity to give poetic voice to his concepts and ideologies through a “kitschy reliance on the theatricality of big, popular effects.”²⁰

As we said earlier, it was the visceral experience of music that contributed to the summation of Nietzsche’s aesthetic view, namely that ‘*we possess art* lest we should perish from

¹⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols*. Trans. Richard Polt. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. p 91.

¹⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*. The Portable Nietzsche. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954. p 667.

²⁰ Barret, Terry. *Why Is That Art?* New York: Oxford University Press. 2008. p 29.

the truth.²¹ It is then decidedly *not* the purpose of art to supply us with *more* concepts or interpretations of truth, but to give aesthetic expression to the complete submission to suffering and thereby make it more bearable. In *Tristan* Wagner had done this, perhaps eclipsing even Nietzsche's life-affirming philosophy with his aggressively and intoxicatingly sexual musical score. In Wagner's later work, *Parsifal*, for which Nietzsche expressed the deepest disgust, the music serves only the concepts. Contradicting his earlier sentiments, Wagner now felt that “‘where music can go no farther, there comes the word’ (the word stands higher than the tone).” Nietzsche would always express precisely the opposite, feeling that ‘that for which we find words is something already dead in our hearts. There is always a kind of contempt in the act of speaking.’²² No matter how masterfully nuanced at some moments, the music backdrop of *Parsifal* was largely inauthentic because it served as a mere means to an ideological end. Not only was the purpose of the work primarily conceptual, but also its ideologies hypocritically contradicted the composer's former philosophy of embracing life and suffering. J.W.N. Sullivan observed that, “Wagner, the great apostle of the pride of life, finds, as the bright world slips past him, that he is left alone with his yearning and his pain.”²³ Instead of embracing this pain, as Isolde had done, and as Nietzsche advocated, he now formulates ideologies that help him to rationalize and mitigate it.

In *Parsifal*, Wagner paints a sanctimonious and distorted picture of Christianity by drawing on the legend of the Holy Grail. While parts of the score reflect Wagner's authentic compositional talent, such as its moving prelude, much of the score relies on effect in order to manipulate the audience toward Wagner's bigoted philosophy. “Wagner's great fault was to

²¹ Bloom, Harold. *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*. New York: Riverhead Books. 2004. p 219.

²² Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books. 1998. p 741.

²³ Sullivan, J.W.N. *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*. New York: Vintage Books. 1927. p 42.

abuse his gifts, by resorting to romantic fantasy and Christian ideology, and by turning his back on life,” writes biographer Derek Watson. “He had exalted the will in *Tristan*, and then annihilated it in *Parsifal*. He meted out illusion and false values.”²⁴

In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche attacks Wagner’s refuge in *Parsifal*’s duplicitous and falsely pious distortion of Christianity. “Melancholy of whatever degree,” Nietzsche bitterly writes,” is better than romantic retreat and desertion of the flag.”²⁵ Nietzsche was harshly critical of those who were moved by the formulaic effects of the composer’s final work, acrimoniously raising the question, “On whom are such effects achieved? On those whom a *noble* artist should never impress,” he answers. “On the mass, on the immature, on the blasé, on the sick, on the idiots, on *Wagnerians!*”²⁶ If it was true that the majority of those who attended it generously praised *Parsifal*, Nietzsche was not the only person to criticize Wagner’s counterfeit Christianity. Thomas Mann, who maintained an ambivalent posture toward Wagner’s work, abrasively ridiculed the composer’s last work, as observed by Lucy Beckett in her controversial study on *Parsifal*. ‘In his mocking and distancing description of *Parsifal* as a typically romantic bizarre concoction masquerading as a religious drama, Mann is at the same time conceding and laughing at Wagner’s own serious intentions in *Parsifal*.’²⁷

Wagner’s ultimate abandonment of his role as the “great apostle of the pride of life,” and the refuge he later took in what Nietzsche knew to be ideological biases and illusions, inspired

²⁴ Watson, Derek. *Richard Wagner: A Biography*. USA: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979. p 283.

²⁵ Westernhagen, Curt von. *Wagner: A Biography*. Trans. Mary Whittall. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978. p 535.

²⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*. The Portable Nietzsche. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1954. p 667.

²⁷ Beckett, Lucy. *Richard Wagner: Parsifal (Cambridge Opera Handbooks)*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981. p 119.

Nietzsche to make the important differentiation between the Dionysian artist, who embraces every dimension of life, and the romantic artist, who may experience life first and foremost emotionally, contrary to the Apollonian, but nonetheless lives in illusion. “There are two kinds of sufferers,” explains Nietzsche. “First, those who suffer from an *overfullness* of life [The Dionysians]… and then those who suffer from the *impoverishment* of life [the Romantics].” The Dionysian embraces suffering without attempting mitigation. The Romantic experiences suffering falsely, either merely for effect or with the aid of an ideology that distorts the potentially transformative power of the pain. While the Wagner of *Tristan* had appeared to be the former, the Wagner of *Parsifal* clearly degenerated into the latter.

The Wisdom of Nietzsche’s Departures from Wagner

In Wagner, Nietzsche initially thought he had found a man who understood the deep value of facing life fully and honestly, without drawing on the mitigating aid of the “naïve, narrow, rationalistic, mechanical conception of man which was the heritage of the eighteenth century.”²⁸ Nietzsche’s insight into the value of sincerely embracing life in all of its dimensions has been of inestimable value to the development of modern and postmodern philosophy, psychology, poetry, literature, music, and art. This possibility of finding meaning in life’s darkest corners is perhaps most poignantly echoed in the late poetry of Rilke. At the culmination of his masterpiece *The Duino Elegies*, Rilke grips his suffering in such an overwhelming embrace that its Nietzschean wisdom is perhaps equaled in overflowing aesthetic radiance only by Isolde in her *Liebestod*, exclaiming:

*Someday, emerging at last from the violent insight,
let me sing out jubilation and praise to assenting angels.*

²⁸ Bentley, Eric. *A Century of Hero-Worship*. Boston: Beacon Press. 1944. p 158.

*Let not even one of the clearly-struck hammers of my heart
fail to sound because of a slack, a doubtful,
or a broken string. Let my joyfully streaming face
make me more radiant; let my hidden weeping arise
and blossom. How dear you will be to me then, you nights
of anguish. Why didn't I kneel more deeply to accept you,
inconsolable sisters, and, surrendering, lose myself
in your loosened hair. How we squander our hours of pain.
How we gaze beyond them into the bitter duration
to see if they have an end. Though they are really
our winter-enduring foliage, our dark evergreen,
one season in our inner year-, not only a season
in time-, but are place and settlement, foundation and soil
and home.²⁹*

If Rilke in the end found home in his ‘hours of pain,’ he had Nietzsche in some measure to thank for having achieved difficult but profoundly liberating recognition. It is understandable that Wagner ultimately found comfort in deviating from his harsh embrace of suffering toward an ideological end that felt more tolerable in old age. But while Nietzsche’s full embrace of life carried some of its own destructive repercussions, it is interesting to note that Wagner’s falsely pious and bigoted ideology in later life proved in time to leave a much more destructive legacy than his fierce embrace in *Tristan*. Not all of Nietzsche’s writings leave the reader with an

²⁹ Rilke, Rainer Maria. ‘The Duino Elegies’. *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*. Trans. Stephen Mitchell. New York: The Modern Library. 1995. p 389.

impression of profound wisdom, indeed many don't; but his call for a clear and immediate, and potentially deeply transformational, relationship with suffering can help sensitive readers like Rilke cope with the inevitable 'slings and arrows' of life. For Harold Bloom, Nietzsche will remain "a superb wisdom writer [---] but this is wisdom at the edge, poised before an abyss into which it must tumble."³⁰

³⁰ Bloom, Harold. *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*. New York: Riverhead Books: 2004. p 210.