

## Diskussionen

Robert C. Holub

# Placing Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche in the Crosshairs

**Abstract:** In the postwar era Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche has been held responsible for the reputation her brother acquired during the Third Reich as a prophet of National Socialism. In scholarly writing and popular accounts Förster-Nietzsche's manipulation of her brother's writings and letters, as well as her philologically unsound editorial practices, has led most observers to the hasty assumption that she intervened in his texts in order to fashion the image of Nietzsche as a German nationalist and anti-Semite. Recently Christian Niemeyer has renewed these attacks on Nietzsche's sister, fearing that contemporary scholarship has forgotten the violations of her brother's legacy. His philological accounts are flawed, however, and his arguments are contrived and unpersuasive. In fact, if we look closely at the evidence and Förster-Nietzsche's editorial practices, we find that she consistently included letters and passages that demonstrated Nietzsche's intense opposition to the anti-Semitism of his era and to conservative Wilhelmine politics. In Niemeyer's article Förster-Nietzsche is once again unfairly blamed for Nietzsche's favorable reception as a proto-Nazi.

**Keywords:** Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, anti-Semitism, National Socialism, Nationalism.

**Zusammenfassung:** In der Nachkriegszeit machte man Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche für den Ruf ihres Bruders als eines Propheten des Nationalsozialismus während des Dritten Reichs verantwortlich. In wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten und in der breiten Öffentlichkeit führten Förster-Nietzsches Manipulationen der Schriften und Briefe ihres Bruders und ihre philologisch fragwürdigen Editionspraktiken die meisten Beobachter zu dem übereilten Schluss, dass sie in Nietzsches Texte eingriff, um ihren Bruder als Nationalisten und Antisemiten darzustellen. Zuletzt hat Christian Niemeyer diese Vorwürfe gegen Nietzsches Schwester erneuert, in der Besorgnis, die Entstellungen des Erbes ihres Bruders seien in der gegenwärtigen Forschung vergessen worden. Niemeyers philologische Methode ist jedoch nicht akzeptabel, und seine Argumente scheinen weit hergeholt und nicht überzeugend. Schaut man sich die Texte und Förster-Nietzsches Editionspraktiken genauer an, findet man in der Tat, dass sie mit großer Regelmäßigkeit Briefe und Passagen veröffentlichte, die gerade Nietzsches heftige Gegnerschaft gegen den Antisemitismus seiner Zeit und gegen die konservative Wilhelminische Politik bewiesen. In Niemeyers Aufsatz wird Förster-Nietzsche wieder einmal unfair die Schuld für die bereitwillige Rezeption Nietzsches als Proto-Nazi gegeben.

**Schlagwörter:** Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Antisemitismus, Nationalsozialismus, Nationalismus.

## Elisabeth's Postwar Reputation

The reputation of Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche has not fared well since the Second World War. Beginning in the 1950s and extending to the present day, she has been blamed by almost everyone who mentions her name for Nietzsche's reputation in National Socialism. Specifically she is held responsible for fashioning an ultra-nationalist and anti-Semitic version of Nietzsche that allowed him to be appropriated so successfully during the Third Reich, and that deceived much of the rest of the world into believing that this appropriation had a solid basis in his thought and writings. Chiefly responsible for the attacks on Förster-Nietzsche are Walter Kaufmann in the United States and Karl Schlechta in Germany, both of whom had a stake in a Nietzsche cleansed of any Nazi affiliation. Each of these Nietzsche scholars published numerous books or articles on the philosopher: Schlechta edited the popular three-volume collection of Nietzsche's complete works in the 1950s, and Kaufmann edited and translated multiple writings into English, including the hugely successful *Portable Nietzsche*. For Schlechta and Kaufmann, Förster-Nietzsche was the villainous and dishonest sister, a German chauvinist and anti-Semite by marriage and conviction, who misused her brother's works, profited from them, and consciously molded him into a hero for the murderous National Socialist regime.<sup>1</sup>

Förster-Nietzsche's corruption of Nietzsche's writings for National Socialism has been a refrain in almost all the scholarship in which her name appears. A few examples should suffice to document this widespread phenomenon. Henning Ottmann, author of an excellent study of philosophy and politics in Nietzsche's writings, claims that Nietzsche's appearance in the "ancestral chain of the fathers of anti-Semitism" is a "*chronique scandaleuse* in its own right." At the source of this "scandal" are Förster-Nietzsche and her falsifications, which included not only inaccurate presentations of his works, but also literal falsifications of texts – although Ottmann adds parenthetically that they occur mostly in the form of "fabrications and manipulation" in the correspondence. Relying on the research of Karl Schlechta, who had worked in the Nietzsche Archives during the Third Reich, Ottmann asserts that among the falsified

---

<sup>1</sup> Unlike later scholars, both Kaufmann and Schlechta were fairly circumspect in their accusations, perhaps because they knew that Förster-Nietzsche's editorial practices, although substandard and manipulative, did not really make Nietzsche into a proto-fascist. See my *The Elisabeth Legend or Sibling Scapegoating: The Cleansing of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Sully of His Sister*, in: Jacob Golomb / Robert S. Wistrich (eds.), *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of Philosophy*, Princeton 2002, pp. 215–34.

letters were some that appeared to make concessions to anti-Semitism and that even praised Förster-Nietzsche's husband, Bernhard Förster, as an "honorable personality."<sup>2</sup> Ottmann's endeavor to make Förster-Nietzsche the primary cause for Nietzsche's inclusion among the forerunners of fascism is one of many such attempts in the postwar years. In the *Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, for example, the volume's editors refer to "Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, and her fascistic and racist compatriots," claiming Förster-Nietzsche's edition of *The Will to Power* was arranged in a fashion emphasizing themes that appeared "friendly to the ideals of National Socialism."<sup>3</sup> Later in the same volume R. J. Hollingdale, repeating the canards of earlier scholarship, abuses Förster-Nietzsche for her commercialism (although he himself enjoyed obvious commercial success with his various Nietzsche translations), and contends that "as far as she could she imposed Förster's values," that is, anti-Semitism and proto-Nazism, on the Nietzsche Archives "and adapted Nietzsche in accordance with them."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most virulent assault on Förster-Nietzsche, however, occurs in an essay by Weaver Santaniello, who labels Förster-Nietzsche a "proto-fascist," "a virulent Christian anti-Semite," and "a staunch supporter of Hitler and the Nazis."<sup>5</sup> According to Santaniello there is a direct line from Wagner and Förster-Nietzsche to the Third Reich; the "process of manipulating Nietzsche [...] began with Elisabeth and culminated with Hitler."<sup>6</sup> The extent to which Elisabeth's Nietzsche is equated with the most pernicious aspects of Nazism in the mind of the wider reading public, especially in the Anglophone world, is perhaps shown best in Paul Strathern's *Nietzsche in 90 Minutes*, when he asserts that after Nietzsche's mental collapse Förster-Nietzsche began "doctoring her brother's unpublished notebooks, inserting anti-Semitic ideas and flattering remarks about herself."<sup>7</sup> Even writers for the *New York Times* uncritically parrot these views: Simon

<sup>2</sup> Henning Ottmann, *Philosophie und Politik bei Nietzsche* (Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung, Bd. 17), 2<sup>nd</sup> expanded ed., Berlin/New York 1999, pp. 249–50. For the record we should note that Nietzsche did occasionally make positive statements about Förster in his correspondence. In October of 1885, for example, Nietzsche writes to Franz Overbeck that Förster "was not unsympathetic," and that he has "something sincere and noble in his being." He goes on to compliment him on his practical abilities: "Es überraschte mich, wie viel Dinge er fortwährend erledigte und wie leicht ihm das wurde" (Nr. 636, KSB 7.102).

<sup>3</sup> Bernd Magnus / Kathleen M. Higgins, *Nietzsche's Works and Their Themes*, in: Bernd Magnus / Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 21–68; here p. 57. The original editions of *The Will To Power* appeared well over a decade before there was a National Socialist party.

<sup>4</sup> R. J. Hollingdale, *The Hero as Outsider*, in: Magnus / Higgins (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, pp. 71–89; here pp. 86–87.

<sup>5</sup> Weaver Santaniello, *A Post-Holocaust Re-Examination of Nietzsche and the Jews: Vis-à-vis Christendom and Nazism*, in: Jacob Golomb (ed.), *Nietzsche and Jewish Culture*, London 1997, pp. 21–54; here p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Santaniello, *A Post-Holocaust Re-Examination of Nietzsche and the Jews*, p. 23 and p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Strathern, *Nietzsche in 90 Minutes*, Chicago 1996, p. 42.

Romero, reporting on Nueva Germania today, describes Förster-Nietzsche's post-South-American activities: "While Nietzsche derided anti-Semitism and expressed disdain in correspondence with his sister for the anti-Semitic character of Nueva Germania, she went on to reinvent his legacy after his death in 1900, transforming the philosopher into a kind of prophet for the Nazi propaganda machine."<sup>8</sup> From scholarly treatises to newspaper accounts, Förster-Nietzsche has been censured not only for falsifying her brother's writings, but for making him more palatable to the worst parts of National Socialist ideology, in particular anti-Semitism.

What unites most of the postwar remarks on Förster-Nietzsche's transgressions is that they were penned by authors who rarely access and reference the primary material. By "primary material" I do not necessarily mean the manuscripts located in the Nietzsche Archives in Weimar, but simply the editions of letters and writings that appeared under Förster-Nietzsche's supervision starting in the mid 1890s, or even the essays and books composed by her after she returned from Paraguay in 1893. Those individuals who have been more intimately involved with archival material, including manuscripts, have continued to support the notion of a National Socialist falsification by Förster-Nietzsche, although there are few in-depth analyses of the letters or the works. Most scholars thus proceed from the assumption that the postwar thesis about Förster-Nietzsche is accurate and then color their presentations to support this assumption. When a dissenting voice appears, it is accused of being blind to obvious facts or denigrated as an attempt to rehabilitate a person whom Nietzsche scholarship has all but branded a perpetrator of Nazi war crimes.

One of the most recent essays of this genre is Christian Niemeyer's "'die Schwester! Schwester! 's klingt so fürchterlich': Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche als Verfälscherin der Briefe und Werke ihres Bruders – eine offenbar notwendige Rückerinnerung," which appeared in *Nietzscheforschung* in 2009 (vol. 16, pp. 335–55). Obviously upset at the mammoth study by Domenico Losurdo,<sup>9</sup> who believes there is greater reason to accuse Förster-Nietzsche of covering up her brother's proximity to certain tendencies that would become canonized in the Third Reich, as well as by favorable reviews of Losurdo's book and other writers who do not sufficiently condemn the evil sister, Niemeyer believes he must set the record straight – again. His article will convince the true believers, of which there are many among Nietzsche scholars, but the skeptical will remain unpersuaded – for good reasons.

There are a number of issues in Förster-Nietzsche's activities dealing with her brother's writings, but the two most important are (1) her editorial practices and (2) the intention she was following in implementing those practices. Establishing that

<sup>8</sup> Simon Romero, German Outpost Born of Racism in 1887 Blends Into Paraguay, in: New York Times (6 May 2013), p. A4.

<sup>9</sup> Domenico Losurdo, Nietzsche, der aristokratische Rebell: Intellektuelle Biographie und kritische Bilanz, trans. Erdmute Brielmayer, ed. Jan Rehmann, 2 vols., Berlin 2009.

her editorial methods were deficient or dishonest still leaves open the question of the reason for this deficiency or dishonesty. With regard to Förster-Nietzsche's editorial activities, it is evident that she often took liberties with the manuscripts in her possession. The extent of these liberties, however, should be a matter of considerable dispute. In the blindness that accompanies the anti-Elisabeth position, scholars often assume that anything she touched was something she corrupted. For example, there are a great number of letters Förster-Nietzsche claims that her brother wrote to her while she was in Paraguay, but that exist only in her transcription and not in Nietzsche's original hand. While it is conceivable that every word in each of these letters is an invention of Förster-Nietzsche, it is also quite possible that portions of letters or even entire letters were actually written by her brother. In most cases, we simply have no way of knowing for certain. With regard to his writings, we can determine that Förster-Nietzsche, perhaps along with her editors, falsified certain passages in *The Antichrist*, and that the compilation of aphorisms from various notebooks into a volume entitled *The Will to Power* was an unauthorized and therefore philologically unsound undertaking. Of course, Nietzsche had written frequently about publishing a book under this title, and almost everything that appears in this volume is a faithful transcription of something that is included in the now standard Colli-Montinari edition. But scholars are right to condemn these practices as faulty philology. The exclusion of negative sentiments about Elisabeth and her mother from *Ecce homo*, however, is a philological decision that has arguments pro and con. Certainly these sentences should be included somewhere among Nietzsche's writings and literary remains, but whether Nietzsche would have authorized them in the final version of *Ecce homo* is something we cannot possibly ascertain. Förster-Nietzsche obviously had a good reason to exclude them, since she did not want it to appear that her brother had written such nasty things about her – and also about their mother; however, if we judge by the practices Nietzsche exhibits in many of his letters, for which we occasionally have drafts, we can see that he frequently deletes more acerbic and offensive formulations in his finished products. We know, therefore, that Förster-Nietzsche committed philological felony, but the extent of the crimes against her brother's correspondence and writings cannot be determined with the accuracy that many Nietzsche scholars, including Niemeyer, pretend to possess.

The justified accusation of faulty philology should not be confounded with the far more egregious offense attributed to Förster-Nietzsche: fashioning an image of her brother that accounts for his easy appropriation by National Socialism. And it is in making this accusation that the Nietzsche philologists, in their fury to condemn Förster-Nietzsche politically, become themselves philologically faulty. We will examine some of these improprieties in Niemeyer's essay, but first we should note that the editions of letters and works that Förster-Nietzsche supervised, and for which she is so summarily censured, appeared more than a decade before the National Socialist Party emerged as a force on the German political scene. Förster-Nietzsche therefore could not have been complying secretly with Nazi dictates, because there were none.

At most she could have constructed – through manipulation of letters and texts, as well as through outright falsifications – a version of Nietzsche that was appealing to National Socialists of a later era. The two main pillars of Nazi ideology with which Förster-Nietzsche was purportedly involved in her shoddy editorial work are ultra-nationalism and anti-Semitism. If we examine the facts, however, we find that her image of Nietzsche at times accommodated the former, but that Förster-Nietzsche, despite her own earlier connections with anti-Semitism, did not make her brother into an anti-Semite. Indeed, she possessed evidence that could have connected him with anti-Jewish sentiments, but in almost every instance she chose not to use it.<sup>10</sup>

## Nietzsche's letter to Elisabeth from 26 December 1887

Let us return to Niemeyer's essay to see how the vilification of Förster-Nietzsche plays out in practice. One technique entails simply not providing enough detail and context to allow the reader to make a decision on Förster-Nietzsche's motives. We encounter such an instance in the initial paragraph of Niemeyer's article. Niemeyer bemoans the fact that Förster-Nietzsche's philological shenanigans are no longer as widely known as they were in earlier times. Indeed, they are ignored by friend and foe alike, since even those who recognize Nietzsche's opposition to anti-Semitism still use philologically questionable material. At issue here is a letter from 26 December 1887, which is called without qualification "a falsification by Förster-Nietzsche." This letter, along with eighteen others, was included in Förster-Nietzsche's edition of her brother's correspondence with her in 1906, but since it exists only in a transcription, not in the original, Niemeyer assumes it is invented – or at least he gives that impression to the reader of his essay. In the Colli-Montinari edition, the editors are less definitive. They develop a special section and rubric for these letters – they are called "Urabschriften" – and they are carefully isolated from verifiable portions of the correspondence. But the editors note that

---

**10** For example, in connection with the reception of *The Birth of Tragedy* and Wilamowitz's attack on that book, Nietzsche and his friends have frequent recourse to anti-Jewish slurs about Wilamowitz and his assumed backers. Far from using this information to make the case for her brother's anti-Semitism, Elisabeth asserts that he only employed anti-Jewish sentiments to please Wagner. Nietzsche, Elisabeth maintains in her biography, took on positions embraced by Wagner, "wenn auch manchmal nur äußerlich. Zum Beispiel ist mein Bruder niemals Antisemit gewesen, dazu war er nicht überzeugt genug, daß Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles gehe; immer hat er anerkannt, daß die Juden sich um die geistige Bewegung in Deutschland, vorzüglich zu Anfang dieses Jahrhunderts, große Verdienste erworben haben." Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsches*, Leipzig 1904, vol. 2, part 1, pp. 207–08. Förster-Nietzsche thus maintains in her biography that Nietzsche was unsupportive of both ideological pillars of National Socialism: jingoism and racism.

the letters are based on things that Nietzsche actually wrote, either as drafts or notes or letters destined for his mother, and that they are therefore not complete fabrications.

The letter in question from 26 December 1887 is one for which there is apparently little philological evidence regarding origins. It is perhaps the most significant of these purgatorial letters since it deals explicitly with Nietzsche's sentiments regarding anti-Semitism:

Eine der größten Dummheiten hast Du mein armes Lama gemacht – für Dich und für mich! Deine Verbindung mit einem antisemitischen Chef drückt eine Fremdheit gegen *m e i n e* ganze Art zu sein aus, die mich immer von Neuem mit Groll oder Melancholie erfüllt. Du sagst zwar, Du habest den Colonisator Förster und nicht den Antisemiten geheirathet und dies ist auch richtig; aber in den Augen der Welt wird Förster bis an sein Lebensende der Antisemitenchef bleiben.

If this letter or these particular formulations were fabricated after Förster's death, it is possible that Förster-Nietzsche was providing herself with a partial excuse for her marriage to an anti-Semite, namely that she conceived of him as a colonizer and not a racist. In the letter Nietzsche (or his sororal ghost-writer) continues:

Weißt Du, mein gutes Lama, es ist eine Ehrensache für mich, nach Seiten des Antisemitismus hin absolut reinlich und unzweideutig zu sein, nämlich *a b l e h n e n d*, wie ich es in meinen Schriften thue. Man hat mich in den letzten Zeiten mit Briefen und antisemitischen Korrespondenzblättern heimgesucht; mein Widerwille vor dieser Partei (die gar zu gern ihren Vortheil von meinem Namen haben möchte!) ist so *a u s g e s p r o c h e n* wie möglich, aber die Verwandtschaft mit Förster, ebenso wie die Nachwirkung meines ehemaligen antisemitischen Verlegers Schmeitzner, bringen immer wieder die Anhänger dieser unangenehmen Partei auf die Vorstellung, ich müsse wohl zu ihnen gehören. Wie sehr mir das schadet und geschadet hat, kannst Du Dir kaum vorstellen. Die gesammte deutsche Presse schweigt meine Schriften todt – seitdem! sagt Overbeck! Es erweckt vor Allem Mißtrauen gegen meinen Charakter, wie als ob ich öffentlich etwas ablehne, was ich im Geheimen begünstige, – und daß ich nichts dagegen zu thun vermag, daß in jedem antisemitischen Korrespondenzblatt der Name „Zarathustra“ gebraucht wird, hat mich schon mehrere Male beinahe krank gemacht. – Verzeihung! Es ist unrecht Dir das zu sagen und unbillig das arme Lama für die Gesinnung dieser Partei verantwortlich zu machen. Aber ich bin nicht immer „billig“ gesinnt.<sup>11</sup>

Once again we might suspect that Förster-Nietzsche fabricated the final sentences to exonerate herself from the anti-Semitism her brother obviously despises, but we must remember that there is no evidence for this supposition except Förster-Nietzsche's obvious desire in her writings and manipulations to appear more closely allied with her brother than she actually was.

This letter may have been fabricated; it may have been stitched together from notes or drafts of other letters; it may also have been an actual letter Förster-Nietzsche

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, Leipzig 1909, Nr. 479, vol. 5, part 2, pp. 753–55.

received. We can confirm, at the very least, that the themes Nietzsche broaches around anti-Semitism resonate with other authentic drafts written around this time and with correspondence from 1887. Nietzsche makes reference to the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*, three issues of which he had received from its publisher, the noted anti-Semite Theodor Fritsch, in March of 1887. Nietzsche's two response letters to Fritsch leave no doubt that he opposed anti-Semitism and that he resented having his name or his works associated with this movement. In a letter to Overbeck Nietzsche had written in a similar vein about the misuse of Zarathustra: "In der „antisemitischen Correspondenz“ [...] kommt mein Name fast in jeder Nummer vor. Zarathustra „der göttliche Mensch“ hat es den Antisemiten angethan; es giebt eine eigne antisemitische Auslegung davon, die mich sehr hat lachen machen." (24 March 1887, Nr. 820, KSB 8.48) In a draft letter to his mother in late December 1887 he comments on the damage he has suffered through his association with anti-Semitism: "Diese Partei hat der Reihe nach mir meinen Verleger, meinen Ruf, meine Schwester, meine Freunde verdorben" (Nr. 967, KSB 8.216). And in the draft of a letter intended for Elisabeth, Nietzsche rails against the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*, which he claims has been sent to him regularly despite his protests, and cites it as the chief reason for his alienation from her: "Seitdem habe ich Mühe, etwas von der alten Zärtlichkeit und Schonung wie ich sie gegen Dich so lange gehabt habe zu Deinen Gunsten geltend zu machen, die Trennung zwischen uns ist ja nachgerade damit in der absurdesten Weise festgestellt." After telling Elisabeth that Förster is his antipode, he continues: "Nachdem ich gar den Namen Z<arathustra> in der antis<emitischen> Correspondenz gelesen habe, ist meine Geduld am Ende – ich bin jetzt gegen die Partei Deines Gatten im Zustand der No t w e h r. Diese verfluchten Antisemiten-Fratzen sollen nicht an mein Ideal greifen!!" (End of December 1887, Nr. 968, KSB 8.218–19) Nietzsche received the *Antisemitische Correspondenz* in March and responded quickly; the matter appears to have been settled for him at that point. It is difficult to ascertain why he takes up the journal again at the end of the year. The most likely reason is that he was reminded of Fritsch's publication and his fate at the hands of the anti-Semitic press by a lengthy and uncomplimentary review of *Beyond Good and Evil*, written by Fritsch under the pseudonym of Thomas Frey, in the November and December issue of the *Correspondenz* from 1887. He was pleased, as he writes in the draft letter to his mother, that "this party" has now "declared war on me" (Nr. 967, KSB 8.216–17), but he was again reminded that racist demagogues were ruining his reputation.

These sections of the letter thus ring true with Nietzsche's state of mind and with authentic documents he composed in 1887. Whether this letter – in part or in toto – was genuine or not is irrelevant, however. What is important is that Förster-Nietzsche included it in her edition of Nietzsche's correspondence. Niemeyer and others have claimed consistently that Förster-Nietzsche sought to present an image of her brother that was susceptible to appropriation by National Socialism. They have stated bluntly that she endeavored to make Nietzsche an anti-Semite or sympathetic to anti-Semitism. But if Förster-Nietzsche were trying to construct the image of Nietzsche as an



anti-Semitic racist, why would she “invent” and print a letter in which Nietzsche clearly rejects anti-Semitism and blames her for marrying a leading anti-Semite? Since the letter exists only in her hand, why didn’t she simply destroy it, or reject it for the edition, or rewrite it to reverse Nietzsche’s views and make them accord with the motivation that Niemeyer and others repeatedly impute to her? It seems evident that the intentions Niemeyer and others ascribe to Förster-Nietzsche are either inaccurate, or that she violated them on this occasion, as well as on many others.

## Nietzsche and Wilhelm II

Later in his article Niemeyer claims to uncover an illicit attempt by Förster-Nietzsche to “authorize” Nietzsche as “the philosopher of Wilhelminism.” At issue here is a “falsified” letter Nietzsche wrote to his sister. Niemeyer cites the following passage: “Unser neuer Kaiser aber gefällt mir immer mehr: [...]. Der Wille zur Macht als Prinzip wäre ihm schon verständlich.”<sup>12</sup> Niemeyer accurately identifies the sentence regarding the will to power as Förster-Nietzsche’s unauthorized insertion. The text from which Förster-Nietzsche drew this statement (Nachlass 1887, 9[188], KSA 12.450) does not mention Wilhelm II; rather it deals with “the Germans of today.” But Niemeyer is undoubtedly correct in concluding that it is likely that Förster-Nietzsche adopted the sentence from Nietzsche’s notebooks, and that Nietzsche would never have asserted that the new Kaiser had the ability to relate to one of his key philosophical concepts.<sup>13</sup> But Niemeyer is wrong in leading the reader to believe that the positive attitude Nietz-

<sup>12</sup> I am reproducing the citation exactly as it appears in Niemeyer’s essay on p. 339.

<sup>13</sup> It is unclear, however, whether Förster-Nietzsche doctored the text in the notebook, or whether an editor was unable to correctly decipher Nietzsche’s almost illegible handwriting. The word “schon” was deciphered by Köselitz as “schwer,” but even in the Colli/Montinari edition the difficulty of deciphering is indicated by the inclusion of the word as “sch<we>r.” In short, Förster-Nietzsche may not have falsified this word, although it was certainly illegitimate to lift the sentence from the notebooks and include it in a letter where it did not belong. Köselitz points out that Förster-Nietzsche had included the excerpt from the letter already in her biography (vol. 2, part 2, p. 890) and that she was eager to make her brother appear to be a supporter of Wilhelm II. Köselitz admits that the text was very difficult to decipher, but concludes that it must be “schwer” and not “schon.” But he also states that it was a previous editor, Ernst Horneffer, who deciphered the word as “schon,” not Förster-Nietzsche, who insisted on this word (Kommentar, KSA 14.743). We might also note that Nietzsche himself was not uninterested in impressing the young Kaiser as late as December of 1888 – although perhaps not with his loyalty to him and his regime. We possess drafts of two letters Nietzsche composed to him, which appear to be meant to accompany *Ecce homo*. Nietzsche could be challenging the Kaiser and may have wanted to offend him: in the draft of a letter to Bismarck, signed “The Antichrist,” at around the same time, he announces his “enmity” and asks him to show the book to his sovereign. But the drafts to Wilhelm II, although strange and probably the product of a deranged mind, do not declare enmity. (Beginning of December 1888, Nr. 1171–1173, KSB 8.503–04)

sche expresses toward Wilhelm II was a distortion of his views. Niemeyer cites Nietzsche's remark after the death of Friedrich III that the regime of Stöcker would now come into power, referring to the social conservative and anti-Semitic Court Chaplain, whom he feared would now acquire additional influence in German affairs (Nietzsche to Köselitz, 20 June 1888, Nr. 1049, KSB 8.338–39). But the fears Nietzsche expresses in his letter to Köselitz in June of 1888, just days after Wilhelm II ascended to the throne, altered considerably in the autumn. The same favorable sentiments toward the Kaiser in the “falsified” letter to his sister can be found in letters to both Overbeck and Köselitz in mid September. To Overbeck Nietzsche writes:

Bei der Berufung Harnack's habe ich sehr Deiner gedacht: dieser junge Kaiser präsentirt sich allmählich vortheilhafter als man erwarten durfte, – er ist neuerdings scharf anti-antisemitisch aufgetreten und hat den Beiden, die ihn in der rechten Zeit von der compromittirenden Gesellschaft Stöcker und Co. taktvoll auslösten (Bennigsen und dem Baron v. Douglas) jetzt vor aller Welt seine große Erkenntlichkeit dafür ausgedrückt. (14 September 1888, Nr. 1115, KSB 8.433)

A few words of clarification are probably needed to understand why Nietzsche's fears about Wilhelm II were temporarily allayed during this four-month period. Harnack refers to Adolf von Harnack, a Protestant theologian and church historian, who was appointed to a chair in Berlin over the strenuous objections of conservative church officials. When he heard of this appointment, Nietzsche obviously thought of his friend Overbeck, who held similar views, but his point here is that the young Emperor opposed conservative church authorities in approving Harnack. Bennigsen is Rudolf von Bennigsen, one of the leaders of the National Liberal Party, whom Wilhelm II appointed to be Upper President of Hanover as one of his first official acts. Baron v. Douglas is Hugo Sholto, an industrialist and close friend of Wilhelm II, whom the Kaiser ennobled on 20 August 1888. The appointment of Harnack and the honors given to Bennigsen and Sholto obviously convinced Nietzsche that Stöcker and his Christian-Socialist views would not predominate in the new government.<sup>14</sup>

We find the identical sentiments in a letter written to Köselitz two days later. The relevant passage begins with a reference to the epilogue from *The Case of Wagner*, in which Nietzsche wrote of the “unaesthetic concept of the Christian Junker” (WA, Epilog, KSA 6.52):

---

<sup>14</sup> In Nietzsche, “the Last Antipolitical German”, Bloomington 1987, Peter Bergmann supplies another reason for Nietzsche's altered attitude toward the young Kaiser: “When Wilhelm II permitted traditional conservative spokesmen to express this distance to the ‘Waldersee Assembly’ of the year before, Nietzsche's attitude softened. He now found the young sovereign more appealing” (p. 176). The claim is plausible, but I can find no evidence that Nietzsche's change of heart was related to the “Waldersee Assembly” from 1886. The name Alfred von Waldersee does not appear anywhere in Nietzsche's correspondence.

Daß ich unsern jungen deutschen Kaiser als einen „unästhetischen Begriff“ bezeichnet habe, wird man schon heraushören ... Übrigens gefällt er mir immer mehr: er thut fast jede Woche einen Schritt, um zu zeigen, daß er weder mit „Kreuzzeitung“, noch mit „Antisemitismus“ verwechselt werden will. (16 September 1888, Nr. 1119, KSB 8.439)

The message here is mixed. But the aesthetic shortcomings of the Emperor, whom Nietzsche apparently equates with “the Christian Junker,” are more than compensated for by his stance against conservatism (*Kreuzzeitung*) and racism. The specific actions undertaken by Wilhelm II, which appear in the letter to Overbeck, are not mentioned here, but the net evaluation in both letters resembles closely the remark in the “falsified” letter to Förster-Nietzsche. Both the letter to Overbeck and Köselitz contain an explicit mention of Wilhelm’s opposition to anti-Semitism, which is obviously essential for Nietzsche’s altered assessment of the Emperor. We may wonder why a similar remark is absent from the missive to his sister. The answer is that it is not missing; Niemeier simply elliptically excludes it in his account. The complete “falsified” passage reads: “Unser neuer Kaiser aber gefällt mir immer mehr: sein Neuestes ist, daß er sehr scharf Front gemacht hat gegen die Antisemiterei und die Kreuzzeitung. Mach’ es ebenso, mein tapfres Lama! Der Wille zur Macht als Prinzip wäre ihm schon verständlich.”<sup>15</sup> It is odd that someone who is so concerned about Förster-Nietzsche’s manipulation of letters by illicit exclusions and insertions would here fail to include two sentences that are so revealing about Nietzsche’s attitude toward anti-Semitism, or, if they are inventions of Förster-Nietzsche, about the way in which she wanted Nietzsche to be perceived.

Now that we have produced the complete citation from the “falsified” letter and have examined the background to other letters Nietzsche composed at approximately the same time, we can discern three important features of Förster-Nietzsche’s editorial work. (1) Despite the final sentence connecting Wilhelm II with the ability to relate to the will to power – which is almost certainly a fabrication – the sentiments in the rest of the passage in this letter accord well with what Nietzsche wrote to friends. Nietzsche acquired an optimism about the new Kaiser in the fall of 1888 based on a series of actions he attributed to him and his regime, and he freely expressed his admiration. Even the Colli/Montinari commentary gets this wrong in its comment on this letter: “diese Fälschung steht im extremen Gegensatz zu Ns sonstigen Äußerungen über Kaiser Wilhelm II. von Ende 1888” (KGB III 7/3,1.42). While it is true that Nietzsche revises again his views on Wilhelm II during the last month of his sane life, his remarks to Overbeck and Köselitz in mid September indicate a period of hope

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 5, part 2, Nr. 502, pp. 801–02. Significant for the argument here is that the Kaiser’s rejection of anti-Semitism and conservative nationalism – and Nietzsche’s approval of this rejection – is also contained in Förster-Nietzsche’s biography (vol. 2, part 1, p. 890).

and appreciation.<sup>16</sup> (2) In the correspondence edited by Förster-Nietzsche, the Kaiser is not viewed as the typical conservative Prussian monarch, but as the friend of a more liberal German tendency, one to which Nietzsche had also adhered in the 1860s. If Förster-Nietzsche was trying to ingratiate herself with Wilhelmine authorities in making her brother a champion of the new Kaiser, then she was also referencing the Kaiser as a liberal monarch, as an adversary of the conservative *Kreuzzeitung* and as an opponent of racism. She was not trying to make her brother appealing to a jingoist, Judeophobic regime. If Nietzsche is fashioned as the “philosopher of Wilhelminism,” as Niemeyer would have us believe, then Wilhelminism in the hands of Wilhelm II was being fashioned in turn as something much more liberal than it actually was. Only when Wilhelminism reveals its true character as a conservative, anti-Semitic mentality, does Nietzsche reject it disdainfully. (3) Once again we see that Förster-Nietzsche, who purportedly wanted to make her brother appear more sympathetic to anti-Semitic tendencies in Germany, includes a letter in her edition that clearly indicates Nietzsche’s contempt for anti-Semitism and his approval of individuals who oppose it. The authenticity of the letter is unimportant for this argument; its inclusion is the only issue. And if Förster-Nietzsche did invent its contents wholesale, then she could much more persuasively be suspected of manipulation that exonerates Nietzsche from accusations of anti-Semitism rather than distortions that make him appear anti-Semitic.

## Nietzsche and Gobineau

These two instances should put us on notice to view Niemeyer’s claims with skepticism. Once he begins discussions of letters that Förster-Nietzsche allegedly falsified in order to enhance her brother’s racist profile, we should be careful to verify the facts surrounding his philological faultfinding. Niemeyer asserts: “Förster-Nietzsches Brieffälschungen kommt auch die Verantwortung zu für die im ‘Dritten Reich’ bei nationalsozialistischen Nietzsche-Verehrern populär gewordene Lesart Nietzsches als neuer Arthur Gobineau.”<sup>17</sup> Gobineau was, of course, the author of the notorious *Essai*

---

**16** It is interesting to note that in *Ecce homo*, where Nietzsche states he would not let the new German Kaiser serve as his coachman (Warum ich so weise bin 3, KSA 6.268), he gives one reason for his now negative view of Wilhelm II: “In diesem Augenblick zum Beispiel nennt es der deutsche Kaiser seine „christliche Pflicht“, die Sklaven in Afrika zu befreien: unter uns andren Europäern hiesse das dann einfach „deutsch“ (EH, WA 3). Nietzsche is referring to a speech made by Wilhelm II at the opening of the Reichstag on 22 November 1888. It is revealing that an act of pure humanity, even if inspired by Christian beliefs, would turn Nietzsche against the Emperor, and that he would denigrate the liberation of slaves and identify himself as “another” type of European.

**17** Niemeyer, “Schwester! Schwester!”, p. 339.

*sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853–1855), and although it may be true that racist Nietzsche enthusiasts drew comparisons between the two men, we can hardly hold Förster-Nietzsche responsible for every fatuous comment made by later ideologues. The letter in question is the same one in which Nietzsche mentions his newfound admiration for Wilhelm II. The sentences relating to Gobineau read as follows: “Ich bin also wieder in meiner guten Stadt Turin, diese Stadt, welche auch Gobineau so sehr geliebt hat – wahrscheinlich gleicht sie uns Beiden. Auch mir thut die vornehme und etwas stolze Art dieser alten Turiner sehr wohl. Es giebt gar keine größere Verschiedenheit, als das gutmüthige, aber gründlich vulgäre Leipzig und dies Turin.”<sup>18</sup> It is perhaps necessary to mention that Gobineau died in Turin on 13 October 1882, so that Nietzsche’s identification with him as mutual lovers of the Italian city was not unfounded. From this passage we can discern an invidious comparison between Turin and Leipzig, a preference for nobility and pride in the citizens of Turin, and a supposition regarding shared admiration for the city and its inhabitants ascribed to Gobineau. It is hard to read more into these few sentences, but evidently not if you are inclined to view everything Förster-Nietzsche touched as nefarious. Niemeyer provides the following gloss: “Der Sinn dieser Fälschung liegt auf der Hand: Förster-Nietzsche wollte dem Leser suggerieren, Nietzsche habe nichts anderes zum Ausdruck bringen wollen als seine Zufriedenheit über seine Übereinstimmung mit Gobineau in der positiven Wertschätzung von Ungleichheit.”<sup>19</sup>

We have no evidence of Nietzsche reading Gobineau. There are no copies of his books in Nietzsche’s personal library; his name does not appear in any published or unpublished writing, and he is mentioned only once, as we shall see, in an “authentic” letter. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche did contrast the notions of “Aryan” and “Semitic,” and they could have come from a reading of Gobineau, but, as Léon Poliakov notes, this opposition “was already a part of the intellectual baggage of all cultivated Europeans” by 1860.<sup>20</sup> It is likely that Nietzsche read something about or by Gobineau in the *Bayreuther Blätter*, but he does not reference it anywhere. The single verifiable mention of Gobineau in his correspondence occurs on a postcard sent to Köselitz on 10 December 1888, thus shortly after the “falsified” letter to Elisabeth.<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche is writing to Köselitz to thank him for his recent contribution in the *Kunstwart*, defending *Der Fall Wagner*: “Aber das ist ja herrlich, was Sie geschrieben haben, lieber Freund! Das ist ja der berühmte „Anfang“, von dem man sagt, daß er schwer ist ... Es ist nicht nur Alles richtig, es ist auch ausgezeichnet gesagt, –

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 5, part 2, Nr. 502, p. 800.

<sup>19</sup> Niemeyer, “Schwester! Schwester!”, p 340.

<sup>20</sup> Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe*, New York 1996, p. 255.

<sup>21</sup> This letter was known to Elisabeth and appears in her edition of her brother’s letters, Nr. 273, vol. 4, p. 429.

die Erinnerung an Graf Gobineau und überhaupt der Accent auf das Französische ist ein Meistergriff.” (Nr. 1182, KSB 8.516) What had Köselitz written that Nietzsche found so much to his liking? Köselitz portrayed Nietzsche as the foremost authority on Wagner, but as someone who had undergone a transformation that carried him past the tendencies found in the Meister: “Seine antiromantische, antichristliche, antirevolutionäre, antidemokratische Kultur, kurz seine Vornehmheit, scheidet ihn (und schied ihn) für immer von Wagners Sache.” Then Köselitz compares his friend with Gobineau: “Wenn er früher darüber sich täuschte, so war er in demselben Irrtum, in welchem sich Wagners Freund Graf Gobineau befand, als er (der guten Geschmack genug hatte, sich vom Parsifal wegzuwenden) in den Nibelungen seine Ahnen, seine alten Wikinger wiedererkennen wollte.” (KGB III 7/3,2.1075) Nietzsche approves of this comparison with Gobineau: it is not based on an admiration for his theory on the inequality of races, but on a similarity in their relationship with Wagner. Although Nietzsche did not latch onto Germanic myths to the extent that Gobineau did, both Nietzsche and Gobineau – in Köselitz’s account – were deceived by Wagner and changed their views with the appearance of *Parisfal*. With regard to Niemeyer’s claim: Nietzsche may not have written to his sister and included a casual reference to Gobineau, but nowhere does he in his correspondence – authentic or falsified – indicate that he concurs with his theories on race. The probable reason is that if he knew about these theories, he did not agree with them, since Nietzsche does not value the purity of races, as Gobineau did, but rather a mixture of races. Resemblances attributed to them by Nazi Nietzscheans in their views on race were not fostered by Förster-Nietzsche through falsification or in any written documents from Nietzsche’s hand.

## Nietzsche’s “Anti-Semitic” Correspondence

In matters relating to anti-Semitism Niemeyer accuses Förster-Nietzsche of promoting a “suppression of documents” in spite of the numerous instances we have already encountered where she included (or “invented”) letters in which Nietzsche announces his opposition to this racist movement. First on Niemeyer’s agenda are the lengthy citations in Förster-Nietzsche’s biography of her brother drawn from letters Josef Paneth wrote to his bride in 1884. Paneth was a member of the circle of young Viennese Jewish admirers of Nietzsche. A physiologist by training, he had traveled for his research to the zoological station at Villefranche, near Nice, and he evidently took the opportunity to contact Nietzsche, who was spending his winter in the southern French city. They met and conversed on many occasions over a three-month period in early 1884, and Paneth reported their conversations in letters to Sofie Schwab. It is uncertain whether Förster-Nietzsche had access to the complete letters, but if we assume that she did, and that she made editorial decisions about what to include in her book, we can note with Niemeyer that Paneth reports Nietzsche referred to anti-Semitism as

this “Schweinerei,” while Förster-Nietzsche substitutes the more neutral term: “diese Bewegung.” She also does not include a sentence in which Nietzsche reports that his sister and brother-in-law belong to this movement, and that if he had committed suicide in the last few years, it would have been due in large part to the tortures he has suffered because of anti-Semitism.<sup>22</sup> If these omissions were the only references to anti-Semitism in these letters, we could agree that Förster-Nietzsche was perpetrating an ideological message regarding her brother’s attitude toward the Jews. But the letters make no secret of Nietzsche’s opposition to anti-Semitism, and Förster-Nietzsche incorporates these statements in their entirety. Nietzsche claims that he had been free of race and religious prejudice since his youth, and that in a forthcoming book he will take up anti-Semitism. No one reading Förster-Nietzsche’s extensive citations from these letters could believe that her brother supported anti-Semitism, and that he was not a resolute opponent of this racist political movement. If we assume that Förster-Nietzsche had access to the complete letters,<sup>23</sup> then she appears to have excluded references to her husband’s anti-Semitism and to any mental instability in her brother (the mention of suicide). But she does not suppress Nietzsche’s claim that he has always been fundamentally opposed to racial bias and to anti-Semitism.<sup>24</sup>

Niemeyer locates the final complex of philological transgressions in Förster-Nietzsche’s handling of her brother’s correspondence with Theodor Fritsch. We have already referred to these letters above in connection with Förster-Nietzsche’s alleged falsification of the Christmas letter from 1887. There is no dispute over the sentiment expressed in Nietzsche’s letters: he opposed Fritsch, his journal, and the anti-Semitic movement. After he received Nietzsche’s rude response, Fritsch became an adversary of the philosopher, since he recognized him as an opponent of anti-Semitism. For Niemeyer this position places him in opposition to Förster-Nietzsche as well, since, despite the evidence, he conceives of her editorial policies as fostering an image of Nietzsche as a proponent of the racist movement. It is difficult to make any sort of case for Förster-Nietzsche’s mischief in regard to Fritsch and their brief exchange. The letters Nietzsche wrote to Fritsch were not in her possession and were used by Fritsch only in 1926 in inner-party circles to discredit Nietzsche. They became available to the general public only in 1960.<sup>25</sup> We do not possess the letter (or possibly letters) Fritsch wrote to Nietzsche; Niemeyer attempts to discredit Förster-Nietzsche by noting that

<sup>22</sup> Förster-Nietzsche, *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsche’s*, vol. 2, part 2, pp. 487–88.

<sup>23</sup> The letters pertaining to Nietzsche are printed in Richard Frank Krummel, Joseph Paneth über seine Begegnung mit Nietzsche in der Zarathustra-Zeit, in: *Nietzsche-Studien* 17 (1988), pp. 478–95. Förster-Nietzsche may have had in her possession only the excerpts she reproduces.

<sup>24</sup> Whether Nietzsche was completely candid with Paneth is another matter, of course. There is good reason to believe that he tailored his views to make his position on anti-Semitism and on the Jewish Question more palatable to Paneth.

<sup>25</sup> Anton Groos, Nietzsche und die “Antisemitische Correspondenz,” in: *Deutsche Rundschau* 86.4 (1960), pp. 333–37.

Fritsch's letter is "verloren," the scare quotes obviously suggesting that Nietzsche's sister had a hand in suppressing it.<sup>26</sup> There is no evidence, however, for that suggestion. We should note that there is nothing in Nietzsche's responses to Fritsch with regard to anti-Semitism that does not accord with statements Nietzsche makes in other correspondence – real or "fabricated" – but Niemeyer still considers these letters a "Damocles sword" hovering over Förster-Nietzsche. He writes as if Förster-Nietzsche had suppressed any evidence of Nietzsche's opposition to anti-Semitism – which, as we have seen from numerous examples, is patently false – and therefore Förster-Nietzsche had to fear that the release of the letters would expose her manipulations.

Similarly precarious for Förster-Nietzsche, according to Niemeyer, is the letter Nietzsche wrote to Overbeck about the incident. The actual letter was not published until 1916, since it was in Overbeck's possession, so that Förster-Nietzsche had to use a draft for her edition. When we compare the version in the *Gesammelte Briefe* of 1906 with the letter from the Colli-Montinari critical edition, we find they are nearly identical in the paragraph dealing with Fritsch's *Antisemitische Correspondenz*. Niemeyer, however, tries to convince the reader that Förster-Nietzsche induced significant changes to an original she did not possess. He reproaches Förster-Nietzsche for not using the original letter, although it was in Overbeck's possession, and then continues: "Vielmehr erweckte sie mittels kaum sichtbarer chirurgischer Eingriffe den Eindruck, Nietzsche habe Overbeck mitgeteilt, er stehe Fritsch' [sic] Versuch der Indienstnahme für die Sache der *Antisemitischen Correspondenz* mit Wohlwollen gegenüber."<sup>27</sup> Actually the letter in either version contains some ambiguity: Nietzsche expresses amusement that his works, especially *Zarathustra*, have received such a positive reception in the anti-Semitic press. There is a hint of pride and satisfaction that he is exercising an influence, and that his writings are being received in a wide variety of circles. He contends that he has experienced a reception in "all radical parties" and lists socialists, nihilists, anti-Semites, Christian orthodox groups, and Wagnerians, in what is certainly an exaggeration of his prominence. He also contends that his name appears in "almost every issue" of the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*, which is likewise a hyperbolic claim.<sup>28</sup> He adds: "Zarathustra „der göttliche Mensch“ hat es den Antisemiten angethan; es giebt eine eigne antisemitische Auslegung davon, die mich sehr hat lachen machen." In Förster-Nietzsche's version he then pokes fun at the anti-Semites: "Das Problem des „Gesetzgebers“ dämmert diesen Köpfen, die ge-

<sup>26</sup> The letter Fritsch wrote, however, would have presumably made a case for Nietzsche's connection to anti-Semitism. Thus the implicit accusation of suppression on the part of Förster-Nietzsche is odd and contradictory. Why would she have suppressed something that would have strengthened the bond between her brother and anti-Semitism if that was indeed her goal?

<sup>27</sup> Niemeyer, "Schwester! Schwester!", p. 343.

<sup>28</sup> His name was mentioned in three issues, and there was no extensive discussion of him or his writings. He was never among the anti-Semitic authors cited in the frequently printed reading lists in the *Antisemitische Correspondenz*.



wohnt waren, auf Stimmen-Majoritäten ihr Heil zu setzten.”<sup>29</sup> And in both versions he tells Overbeck of his snide suggestion to Fritsch: “Beiläufig: ich habe „an zuständiger Stelle“ den Vorschlag gemacht, ein sorgfältiges Verzeichniß der deutschen Gelehrten Künstler Schriftsteller Schauspieler Virtuosen von ganz- oder halbjüdischer Abkunft herzustellen: das gäbe einen guten Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutschen Cultur, auch zu deren Kritik.”<sup>30</sup> From his description to Overbeck in both versions we gain the impression that Nietzsche was not – or perhaps not yet – irritated by his inclusion in the anti-Semitic journal, that he was more entertained than outraged (and perhaps a bit surprised or even pleased regarding his influence), and that in his response to Fritsch, he was simply playing with him as a humorous diversion.

What are the differences between the two versions that raise Niemeyer’s hackles? We have already seen that a sentence about Zarathustra as a law-giver exists in the draft and not in the letter, but it does not alter the tenor or the meaning of the missive. Niemeyer points out that the initial sentence in the final version is absent in Förster-Nietzsche’s edition: “Anbei ein komisches Faktum, das mir mehr und mehr zum Bewußtsein gebracht wird.” In the draft the next sentence reads simply: “Ich habe nachgerade etwas wie „Einfluß“,” while in the final form it is slightly altered: “Ich habe nachgerade einen „Einfluß“, sehr unterirdisch, wie sich von selbst versteht.” These are the only salient differences between the two versions, and from them Niemeyer draws the odd conclusion: “Der unbedarfte Leser sollte denken, Nietzsches Lachen sei nicht ein sarkastisches gewesen, sondern eines resultierend aus Freude über seinen Erfolg bei den Antisemiten.”<sup>31</sup> It is unclear whom Niemeyer expected to misconstrue this letter, since any reader of Nietzsche’s letters in Förster-Nietzsche’s edition would also have been exposed to numerous instances, as we have seen, where Nietzsche unequivocally opposes the anti-Semitism of his era. Besides, there is some truth to the observation that at this point Nietzsche seems amused and not especially angered by the reception he was receiving in the anti-Semitic press, as well as among other groups he similarly disdained. Later his “ironic benevolence,” as he described his reaction to Fritsch (29 March 1887, Nr. 823, KSB 8.51), would become a mixture of despair, infuriation, and frustration; but his mood in the letter to Overbeck is playful and sardonic in both versions. There is thus nothing in the minor and inconsequential modifications Förster-Nietzsche made – if, indeed, she departed from the draft available to her – that allows us to surmise that her “surgical” interventions distorted her brother’s basic message.

<sup>29</sup> Again Nietzsche exaggerates. Zarathustra was cited in three letters that dealt with the issue of anti-Semitic agitation, but these brief mentions and short quotations from *Zarathustra* hardly qualify as interpretations of his magnum opus.

<sup>30</sup> The paragraphs under discussion are found in Nietzsche’s *Gesammelte Briefe*, Nr. 460, vol. 5, part 2, p. 718 and in Nietzsche to Franz Overbeck, 24 March 1887, Nr. 820, KSB 8.48.

<sup>31</sup> Niemeyer, “Schwester! Schwester!”, p. 343.

## The Anti-Elisabeth Psychology

With regard to Nietzsche's writings Niemeyer pursues the same path of accusing Förster-Nietzsche of fallacious philology while displaying his own philological shortcomings. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate his *modus operandi*. We know that in *The Antichrist* the editor of the text, Fritz Koegel, presumably with Förster-Nietzsche's knowledge and perhaps encouragement, undertook four alterations in the text. One of them involves the elimination of the word "junger" in front of "Fürst," so that the sentence in paragraph 38 reads "Ein Fürst, an der Spitze seiner Regimente," instead of "Ein junger Fürst." Niemeyer asserts that the word "junger" disturbed Förster-Nietzsche, "weil sie im Interesse der von ihr propagierten Kaiserreichstreue Nietzsches verschleiern wollte, dass ihr Bruder in äußerst kritischer Weise gegen Wilhelm II. Stellung bezogen hatte."<sup>32</sup> We have already seen that Nietzsche's view of the young Kaiser vacillated considerably during the last six months of 1888, but this passage does appear to reflect Nietzsche's turn against the Hohenzollern in his final month of sane life. Even if we grant that there were no other negative remarks about Wilhelm II found in other writings published under Förster-Nietzsche's auspices,<sup>33</sup> we would have to observe that she did a very poor job of hiding the offensive word that could have led readers to conclude Nietzsche was demeaning the Emperor. In fact, "junger" appears in the Taschenausgabe from 1906, and the commentary to the text in the Colli-Montinari Studienausgabe informs us that Arthur Seidl makes reference to its deletion in both the Großoktavausgabe and the Kleinoktavausgabe from 1899 (Kommentar, KSA 14.436). Förster-Nietzsche was thus not effective in suppressing the reference to the "young Kaiser," making it difficult to believe that she was as concerned about it as Niemeyer wants us to believe. A second example deals with aphorism 942 in *The Will to Power*. In a convoluted argument involving the alleged suppression of the word "Geist" in a passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* regarding the intermarriage of Jewish women and Prussian officers, Niemeyer asserts that Förster-Nietzsche left out the inserted remark, "es ist bekanntermaßen ein Leib-Wort unter ehrgeizigen Juden," in *The Will to Power* because she experienced it "obviously as unwise."<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to know why Förster-Nietzsche would have suppressed this remark in an edition of *The Will to Power*, since she includes it in her biography of

<sup>32</sup> Niemeyer, "Schwester! Schwester!", p. 347.

<sup>33</sup> Most of the negative comments about Wilhelm II appear in *Ecce homo*. He is the object of Nietzsche's scorn in some of the letters that seem marked by insanity. It is entirely plausible that Förster-Nietzsche believed that her brother was genuinely enthusiastic about the "young Kaiser" from remarks he made to Köselitz and possibly to her, and that his turn against him was another sign of his insanity. The case is by no means clear-cut, and certainly there is scant evidence that she falsified letters and writings to make Nietzsche appear to be enthusiastic about the Hohenzollern.

<sup>34</sup> Niemeyer, "Schwester! Schwester!", p. 347.

Nietzsche,<sup>35</sup> where the aphorism first appeared, as well as in the Taschenausgabe of the collected works from 1906.<sup>36</sup> The “unwise” sentence is even included in the 1930 edition, to which Alfred Baeumler wrote an afterword.<sup>37</sup> Once again the suggestion that Förster-Nietzsche was committing philological sins to bias her brother’s work toward National Socialist acceptance is based on unjustified speculation about her motives, shabby argumentation, and poor attention to detail.

Ultimately more interesting than the propositions Niemeyer is advancing is the psychology behind the assumption that Förster-Nietzsche violated Nietzsche’s texts for ideological purposes connected with National Socialism. It is well known that if someone is a true believer, this individual will find in reality evidence for his beliefs and interpret phenomena accordingly. There is little doubt, for example, that zealous Christians of former eras believed that they actually had sound evidence for witches and witchcraft, an assumption that we would find ludicrous today. Since the 1950s many Nietzsche scholars have been operating with rigid convictions about Förster-Nietzsche and her activities as editor and head of the Nietzsche Archives. The story that has been generated over the years is that Förster-Nietzsche manipulated Nietzsche’s letters and works in order to make him more acceptable to ideological tenets of National Socialism. The credibility of this account was assisted by various activities associated with Förster-Nietzsche: the use of Nietzsche’s writings to support propaganda during the First World War, her admiration for the Nietzsche enthusiast Benito Mussolini, and the interest that prominent Nazis, including Hitler himself, showed in the Nietzsche Archives – although we should note that many German parties supported the war in 1914, including the Social Democrats; that Mussolini was recognized as the legitimate ruler of Italy by all Western nations and did not become Italy’s “Duce” on the basis of anti-Semitic diatribes; and that in order for the Archives to survive and thrive in the early 1930s, it was necessary to secure support from the National Socialists, who achieved positions in government in Thuringia well before Hitler’s chancellorship. Based on a variety of evidence that is circumstantial and external to Nietzsche’s texts and the fact that Förster-Nietzsche did take liberties with Nietzsche’s correspondence, his published writings, and his literary remains, the assumption that the primary reason for Förster-Nietzsche’s textual transgressions was ideological, and involved nationalism and anti-Semitism, became a hallowed dogma among Nietzsche cognoscenti. As we have seen, however, the facts tell another story. Especially with regard to anti-Semitism, Förster-Nietzsche’s editorial work leaves no doubt that her brother opposed and disdained the anti-Semitic movement of his era. Förster-Nietzsche may have been an unscrupulous editor; she may have treated peo-

---

<sup>35</sup> Förster-Nietzsche, *Das Leben Friedrich Nietzsche’s*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 619.

<sup>36</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, Leipzig 1906, vol. 10, p. 942.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht: Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte*, Leipzig 1930, p. 630.

ple around her, including the various editors she hired to work with her and later fired, in an inappropriate fashion; she herself may have embraced anti-democratic and conservative political views. But Niemeyer and other scholars who assault Förster-Nietzsche have little basis to assert that her editorial manipulations should be held responsible for the reputation her brother acquired during the Third Reich.