


Nietzsche in Sils Maria... the eternal return

Nietzsche en Sils Maria... el eterno retorno

Ricardo Espinoza Lolás ^[a] 

Valparaíso, Chile

^[a] Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso

Nicolás Rojas-Cortés ^[b] 

Santiago, Chile

^[b] Universidad de Chile

How to cite: ESPINOZA LOLAS, Ricardo; ROJAS-CORTÉS, Nicolás. Nietzsche in Sils Maria... the eternal return. *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*, Curitiba: Editora PUCPRESS, v. 37, e202533014, 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.037.e202533014>

Abstract

This text postulates something fundamental for understanding thought in its radicality, namely, there are certain material conditions in the very place where one lives that allow and make it possible for a thinker to think what he or she thinks. And in the case of Nietzsche one cannot understand his abysmal thought of the eternal return without the author's experience in Sils Maria and its surroundings. It was in those places and with his own ghosts, such as Lou Salome's, that he was able to express that radicality of the real as a finite other that constitutes us because it touches us in our own body.

Keywords: Sils Maria. Lake Sils. Silvaplana Lake. Eternal return. Lou Salome.

[a] PhD in Philosophy from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, e-mail: ricardo.espinoza@pucv.cl

[b] BA, MA and PhD in Philosophy from the University of Chile. Editor of *Ethika+* (2452-6037), e-mail: nicolas.rojas.c@ug.uchile.cl

Resumo

Este texto postula algo fundamental para entender el pensamiento en su radicalidad, a saber, hay ciertas condiciones materiales en el lugar mismo en donde se vive que permite y posibilitan que un pensador piense lo que piense. Y en el caso de Nietzsche no se puede entender su pensamiento abismal del eterno retorno sin la experiencia del autor en Sils Maria y sus alrededores. Y en esos lugares y junto a sus propios fantasmas, como el de Lou Salomé, pudo expresar esa radicalidad de lo real en tanto otro finito que nos constituye porque nos toca en nuestro propio cuerpo.


Palavras-chave: Sils Maria. Lago Sils. Lago Silvaplana. Eterno retorno. Lou Salomé.

Ich bin ganz erstaunt, ganz entzückt! Ich habe einen Vorgänger und was für einen! Ich kannte Spinoza fast nicht: daß mich jetzt nach ihm verlangte, war eine „Instinkthandlung“. Nicht nur, daß seine Gesamttendenz gleich der meinen ist — die Erkenntniß zum mächtigsten Affekt zu machen — in fünf Hauptpunkten seiner Lehre finde ich mich wieder, dieser abnormste und einsamste Denker ist mir gerade in diesen Dingen am nächsten: er leugnet die Willensfreiheit —; die Zwecke —; die sittliche Weltordnung —; das Unegoistische —; das Böse —; wenn freilich auch die Verschiedenheiten ungeheuer sind, so liegen diese mehr in dem Unterschiede der Zeit, der Cultur, der Wissenschaft. In summa: meine Einsamkeit, die mir, wie auf ganz hohen Bergen, oft, oft Athemnoth machte und das Blut hervorströmen ließ, ist wenigstens jetzt eine Zweisamkeit. — Wunderlich!

Letter from Nietzsche to Franz Overbeck, Sils Maria, July 31 1881.

Nun, mein lieber guter Freund! Die Augustsonne ist über uns, das Jahr läuft davon, es wird stiller und friedlicher auf Bergen und in den Wäldern. An meinem Horizonte sind Gedanken aufgestiegen, dergleichen ich noch nicht gesehn habe — davon will ich nichts verlauten lassen, und mich selber in einer unerschütterlichen Ruhe erhalten. Ich werde wohl einige Jahre noch leben müssen! Ach, Freund, mitunter läuft mir die Ahnung durch den Kopf, daß ich eigentlich ein höchst gefährliches Leben lebe, denn ich gehöre zu den Maschinen, welche zerspringen können! Die Intensitäten meines Gefühls machen mich schauern und lachen — schon ein Paarmal konnte ich das Zimmer nicht verlassen, aus dem lächerlichen Grunde, daß meine Augen entzündet waren — wodurch? Ich hatte jedesmal den Tag vorher auf meinen Wanderungen zuviel geweint, und zwar nicht sentimentale Thränen, sondern Thränen des Jauchzens; wobei ich sang und Unsinn redete, erfüllt von einem neuen Blick, den ich vor allen Menschen voraus habe.

Letter from Nietzsche to Heinrich Köselitz, Sils-Maria, 14 August 1881.

Meine gute Mutter, seit der so angenehmen Sendung, für welche ich mich sofort bedankt habe, hörte ich nichts mehr von Dir, auch unser Lama bekam damals einen Brief von mir, aber hat nicht geantwortet. Überhaupt hat seit einem Monat keine Menschenseele an mich geschrieben. Oft krank gewesen, heute gerade erhebe ich mich von einem Anfalle. Sehr unruhiges Wetter. Wie vermisse ich in dieser Schneeluft die warmen Handschuhe! Wurst sende mir ja nicht mehr, ich habe Mittags Fleisch und möchte nicht mehr Fleisch essen. Aber bitte, einen Docht für die Spirit<us> Lampe, ein Kämmchen (mit Bürste) für die Tasche, etwas alte Leinwand für Wunden, dann Zwirn und Nadeln. Und sehr ist alles Süße hier oben von mir geschätzt, z. B. die guten Pfefferkuchen (das einzig Preiswürdige, was ich in Naumburg kenne) Ja! Und ein starkes Schreibheft, in gewöhnlichem Quartformat, gutes Papier, und Linien (in dieser Entfernung  Verzeihung!

Postcard from Nietzsche to Francizka Nietzsche, Sils-Maria, 18 August 1881.

Introduction

Sils Maria and its surroundings in Oberengadin were a home to Nietzsche, and it was there that he found inspiration and wrote part of his great work. It was also Meta von Salis—his final Ariadne, the Swiss feminist thinker—who revealed one of the philosopher's most important masks: the mask of happiness that embodies the eternal return. For Nietzsche was happy, too. His life was not only marked by pain and suffering, but also by the serenity of being near someone he loved, amidst the tangible presence of a place that offered him refuge.

... para mí Nietzsche está tan inextricablemente unido con Sils Maria como Heráclito con el santuario de la diosa en Éfeso. Fue su optimum en el Norte... En el silencioso mundo montañoso de la Alta Engadina, en el entorno saturado de formas y colores de la limpia Sils Maria, donde parece flotar como una promesa el aroma del Sur cercano sobre los dos picos del Piz Badile, entró el hombre más solitario, orgulloso y tierno de nuestro siglo en su reino originario, igual que el hijo de un rey nacido en el destierro... Nietzsche no simpatizaba sólo con el paisaje, sino también con las personas. Cuando las equívocas recensiones sobre sus escritos comenzaron a perderse hasta allá arriba y el médico, el maestro y el párroco, con los que acostumbraba a charlar en el café, las leyeron, se alegró tanto de la ausencia de curiosidad impertinente en estos señores, como divertido vino a resultarle observar cómo todos ellos hacían, del modo más discreto, en su presencia alusiones a la 'peligrosa materia explosiva'... Cuando Nietzsche me recogió en la mañana del 9 de septiembre de 1886, nuestro primer paseo fue a la península (Chasté)... Pronto estuvimos sobre el primer promontorio. Aquí había compuesto Nietzsche en otro tiempo, cuando todavía no había caminos que facilitaran el acceso a este lugar... tumbado sobre el musgo y los brezos llenos de sol... una parte de su 'Zaratustra'. Aquí había deseado ser enterrado cuando le llegase la hora... (Janz, 1985, p. 386).

What transpired for Nietzsche in Sils Maria is not a minor, merely biographical, or anecdotal episode; rather, it is constitutive of his life and, by extension, of his philosophical work. This significance extends beyond the doctrine of the eternal return—which many contemporary Nietzscheans are reluctant to engage with, perhaps due to a sense of discomfort or theoretical unease—and lies in the fact that Nietzsche's thought, like that of Kofman or Zambrano, is deeply rooted in the lived experience of place and encounter. His philosophy emerges not in abstraction, but through the concrete realities of landscape, solitude, and human presence. To study Nietzsche without attending to the material imprint of Sils Maria—evident in his letters, notebooks, and both published and unpublished writings—is to risk severing his thought from one of its most vital sources.

In this text, Sils Maria will remain ever-present because, as we have noted, it is only from there that Nietzsche reveals himself to us as the dynamite that delivers *The Antichrist*—that is, a mode of engaging with reality that departs from the Christian horizon and, consequently, from the ego and the nation-state. We cannot ontologize the author to make him say what he never said or thought; rather, it is in the materiality of his life, within that Dionysian horizon, that the living thought of the eternal return came to him.

The eternal return is presented as a way of living the instant—an experience that transforms the human being from within the finite real, which resists any categorization of a transcendent or transcendental nature (be it categorical, ontological, or hermeneutic). For this reason, Nietzsche becomes a doctor of culture, its teacher, its radical critic: that is, the thinker is transformed by the experience of the eternal return in Sils Maria—that subtle nuance which renders us distant, light, and capable of dancing.

1

Nietzsche was, by the standards of his time, completely “mad” —and he was more or less aware of it. He had no fixed “place”; he was always in transit, in motion—that is, eccentric. His human wisdom is wild: And when I spoke in confidence with my wild wisdom, she said to me angrily: “You will, you covet, you love, and only therefore do you *praise* life!” (2006, p. 84). He lived from a primordial Dionysian inspiration. He lived from the eternal return, which was both described and experienced in Sils Maria and its surroundings—such as Lake Sils and, especially, Lake Silvaplana. That eternal return was an unspecific, dynamic, temporal overflow occurring within the factual and finite dimension of apprehended matter, in the “fruitive tempering” with itself within the people of the Upper Engadine at the turn of the twentieth century: that is Nietzsche. The eternal return is the nuance of the subtle—a nuance that repeats itself again and again; not as the repetition of the identical, but of the subtle in its difference. A “tempering in sensation,” a concrete (never abstract) experience that propelled him to envision new possibilities for his beloved German homeland, his Heimat—to which he remained bound in the eternal return of his life, and which later acquired material resonance in Sils Maria.

Nietzsche, like Lenin in Russia or Huidobro in Chile (who even aspired to the presidency), sought not merely his own revolution, but to revolutionize—and detonate from within—a nihilistic and dormant Germany. He did not regard a leftist-style revolution as viable; for him, it was merely another face of the same structure (in a similar vein, Lacan would echo this view in the twentieth century). It was, for Nietzsche, another manifestation of the false nihilism that veils the wisdom of the eternal return—a central concern in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Part IV (1885). For this very reason, he refused to edit the book as a complete four-part work, and chose not to publish it through a formal publishing house. For this reason, Nietzsche uses the term *nihilist* only once—on March 13, 1881, in a letter to Peter Gast. This reference appears just a few months before August 1881, when the eternal return explicitly emerges within his thought during his time in Sils Maria: “Lieber lieber Freund, warum kann ich Ihre Musik nicht hören! Ich bedarf aller Arten Gesundheit — es ist mir etwas zu tief in’s Herz gegangen, dieser „herzbrecherische Nihilismus“!” (13 March 1881. Letter to Franz Overbeck). Later, we come to understand that nihilism arises from the inability to hear the new music—it remains trapped, for instance, in Wagner’s music and all that it expresses. Nihilism occurs insofar as the Labyrinth completely loses us within its own values, and every horizon becomes closed—that is, a certain totality that prescribes what I must be, do, and expect. It is the symbolic order itself that both constitutes and oppresses us.

2

Nietzsche, being inspired by the Silvaplana Lake (when at the beginning of August 1881, next to a large pyramid-shaped rose overlooking the lake, he felt touched by the eternal return), in the midst of nihilism, is a madman and moves over (über) humanity, at a distance “in” itself, in doing so dynamically accesses the overflowing eternal return of Dionysos in a “tempering” apprehension, that is, a sensitive apprehension next to the huge pyramidal rock, fruitive (with that light, cold, colors, smells, solitude), of its time. This apprehension situates him in the lightness of the future, beyond his present condition (*hic et nunc*), and from there emerges his demand for emancipation—namely, a revaluation (*Umwertung*) of what surrounds him. Only then can he draw, from the shadow of the appearance of the fleeting yet dominant

ideological present, his people, and immerse them in the possibilities of tomorrow—possibilities rooted in the body, in the eternal return of matter, which, always bound, structures itself through a continual giving of itself. In this way, his people would be materially articulated from all that exists: “Sex [...] all the future’s exuberant gratitude for the now” (2006, p. 151). But in the act of revaluation, he himself—as a mere human being of flesh and blood (individual, social, and historical)—is surpassed, transcended, and rendered unfamiliar, for he no longer recognizes what is habitual in what has been subjectivized: that meaning which, valid here and now in his time under the guise of joviality, is nothing more than an ephemeral shadow. Nietzsche “does not understand himself” because he does not understand his society or his epoch, and it is precisely this dissonance that makes him ill. Madness afflicts him: Nietzsche’s binding tempering—his distance—amid Lake Silvaplana, in Sils Maria, in Lake Sils—that is, his madness—led him to isolation and, as previously mentioned, to a self-imposed exile from his beloved homeland, such as the Upper Engadine.

This, Wagner never understood; they could not comprehend how Nietzsche abandoned them, began to walk in solitude, and to speak in a “cursed,” “mad” language—or rather, not so much to speak as to sing. Cosima Wagner sent the following letter, dated August 14, 1900—just days before Nietzsche’s impending death on the 25th—to her son-in-law, Houston Stewart Chamberlain (the future Nazi ideologue):

Me sorprende que nadie se haya dado cuenta de que un hombre como él, que reniega de aquellos que lo único que le han hecho ha sido bien, insulte y se avergüence de su país, que no aprecie su lengua materna, sin haber llevado a cabo algo realmente grande, y se presente como profeta, debe ser o un monstruo o un loco, mostrándonos la índole deplorable de la capacidad de juicio en nuestra juventud actual. (Wagner, 2013, p. 243).

The philosopher expresses this at the beginning of his great book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: “When Zarathustra was thirty years old he left his home and the lake of his home and went into the mountains. Here he enjoyed his spirit and his solitude and for ten years he did not tire of it.” (2006, p. 3). Nietzsche created his own country; he did not wish to live either in Germany, his native land, or in Basel, his adopted homeland: “I prefer places where there are opportunities all Around you to drink out of running fountains (Nice, Turin, Sils); a small glass accompanis me like a dog” (2006, p. 87). Nietzsche built his country between the Alpine valleys (Tyrol, Engadine) and the pre-Alpine territories to the south, extending to the riverside regions in the west and the Adriatic (Venice) in the east. He spent the summer in Turin, where he experienced the great psychic breakdown that caused him to lose control over himself. By the end of his “sane” days, Nietzsche had become a stateless person—something similar would later happen to Rilke. This is in fact so, he had renounced German nationality and never managed to obtain Swiss nationality.¹ From this condition, Nietzsche became increasingly a stranger to himself; he could no longer “understand” himself in relation to a concrete, symbolic, and determined *there*. His transvaluation went beyond himself, severing him from the symbolic order. Nietzsche remained situated outside of himself—in the beyond of a flat, neurotic mode of life. He left his comfort zone and, in this distance, became a dancer, light as a bird—that is, Dionysian, a disciple of the god Dionysus. In an attempt to resolve this, Nietzsche wrote an enormous number of letters to his friends—sometimes as many as three in a single day. He was also constantly re-prologuing his writings. As time went on, he grew dissatisfied with what he had written; he no longer “recognized” his

¹ On his stateless status see Janz (1982, p. 377).

texts and had to rediscover himself within them through a new kind of reading in which a Dionysian mode emerged. Nietzsche lived in “Neverland,” the *supra-celestial* realm of the beyond (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247c-d). Nietzsche’s final attempt to find himself again in reality took the form of repeated autobiographical writings. He engaged in this process, for example, in 1858, 1861, 1864, and 1888. His last effort—somewhat desperate, yet brilliant—to establish a kind of ground on which to settle was *Ecce Homo*. Through it, he sought to fully situate himself once more. Nietzsche became so estranged from himself that he even felt posthumous—no longer retained even by his own epoch: “My day won’t come until the day after tomorrow. Some people are born posthumously” (2006, p. 3). Nietzsche became a “foreigner” to everyone—and to the Wagners, a sick madman who disavowed the past and, in doing so, attacked them, along with German values and the future of a German nation-state he deeply abhorred. In a letter from Cosima to Malwida von Meysenburg, dated October 8, 1900—shortly before Nietzsche’s birthday (October 15, 1844) and after his death (August 25, 1900)—she remarks on the strangeness of this “second and last” Nietzsche:

Hemos leído tus artículos sobre el ‘primer Nietzsche’ (me gustaría decir, el único Nietzsche) y nos conmovieron profundamente. Has hecho con ello un trabajo estupendo, como tú solo podías hacerlo, y es muy conmovedor que su verdadera imagen surgiese ante ti en el momento en que él finalmente fue redimido. No he leído ninguno de sus últimos escritos. Lo que llegué a saber de ellos era tan desalentador que me resultaba indiferente: él sucumbe a su sufrimiento y nosotros asistimos a un proceso de desintegración. También me llamó la atención la completa falta de originalidad en aquello que me fue comunicado. Me parecía como una nueva edición de los enciclopedistas y de los alemanes solitarios, ingeniosos y completamente locos, como Max Stirner (Wagner, 2013, pp. 245-246).

The first radical trait of Nietzsche’s personality is that he is a “sick person,” due to a madness that constitutes him at an essential level—one that binds him to the eternal return. This condition alienates him from his own time, estranges him from his friends, and renders him the loneliest of human beings. Yet it is a loneliness experienced in the midst of the capitalist, Christian, and neurotic city (which, for Nietzsche, are synonyms). In contrast, in Sils Maria he was part of a socio-historical human fabric, of that boat of the Swiss *WethOthers*, a community constituted through difference as a dynamic whole with the necessary distance. A community of “porcupine pigs” was built step by step in his beloved Sils Maria—a place that, in his view, should have been his burial site. There, that madman was happy and sailed, like a mythical White Bull, amid the lakes, mountains, and valleys.

Being immanent, he is absolved from a pure *situs* “in” himself. His measure lies beyond the *situs* of everyday life; he is absolute, but always in relation to his *situs*. This is how Nietzsche lived after taking medical leave from his university position in Basel (a leave that later became permanent, resulting in early retirement and a life sustained on very limited means). He found temporary refuge in places such as Nice, Turin, and others, but it was in the *situs* of Sils Maria that he was truly happy. Thus he left Cosima one night in Sorrento in 1876; thus he met Lou in Rome in 1882 and, for a time, was healed—an interval that allowed him to shape his mature life-thought. And thus, too, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* was born in 1883.

3

Each book—including the Fourth (despite being written more than a year after *Zarathustra* III)—was composed as a unified whole over the course of just a few days, written at full “speed,” almost in the manner

of Mozart or Schubert: that is, in a single inspired burst and with masterful execution. These texts were written in no more than two weeks each and emerged in a state of profound inspiration. This must not be forgotten when reading them, for they are youthful works, born from Nietzsche's daily walks through landscapes of astonishing expressive beauty—beauty rooted in sensation and materiality. His writing evokes painted impressions of wooded forests, stones, waters, celestial luminosities, tones and hues of every kind, shifts in temperature, and the musical *timbre* of the wind, in places such as Sils Maria, Lake Sils, Lake Silvaplana, Sorrento, Nice, and others.

It will never be possible to truly understand Nietzsche without knowing, for instance, the Upper Engadine and Sils Maria and its surroundings—such as the Val Fex: a place that, even today, preserves the very landscape Nietzsche once walked. It still offers an experience of the *here* that greets us in our own skin, among other skins. It is a boat of the *WethOthers*, in which that *WethOthers* travels alongside certain humans and their ghosts—Lou Salomé, Cosima and Richard Wagner—along with animals, stones, lakes, shades of green and blue, cold, snow, glimmers, winds, myths, Beethoven, texts, memories, phantoms, sensations, and more. Nietzsche walked these places for hours, days, weeks, and months.

Although *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (published in 1880) was not written in Sils Maria but during Nietzsche's first trip to the Engadine in Saint Moritz (1879), it is nevertheless a text that expresses his thought-life. Already in this work, Nietzsche reveals to us what nature means to him—the *other* that touches and redeems him. This occurred even before 1881, when, at Lake Silvaplana, he explicitly *felt* the passage of the eternal return through his body, in front of the pyramidal rock plunging into the water (opposite the small village of Silvaplana, which remains quite small to this day). The Aphorism 338 is very explicit:

There is many a spot in nature where, with a pleasurable shudder, we rediscover ourself; it is nature as the fairest kind of *Doppelgänger*. — What happiness awaits him who experiences such a sensation in just this spot, in this continual sunny October air, in this roguish play of the breeze from morn till night, in this purest brightness and temperate coolness, in the whole charm and gravity of the hills, lakes and forests of this high plateau that has fearlessly stretched itself out beside the terrors of the eternal snow, here where Italy and Finland have entered into a union and all the silvery tones of nature seem to have made their home: — how happy he who can say 'there are certainly greater and fairer things in nature, but *this* is mine and know to me, a blood relation, and more indeed than that' (1996, p. 392).

Those Alps—with their forests, lakes, rains, small villages, animals, cows, milk (abundant milk and cheese), and human presence—were the *situs* from which Nietzsche rose: from illness, from loneliness, and from economic austerity. And from there, he revealed to us the eternal return—and continues to do so. He could not achieve this in Sorrento, but he did in Sils Maria. In the small Italian town overlooking the great Gulf of Naples, the free thinker sculpted himself through pain, anguish, Wagner, travels, oranges and lemons, pasta, museums, islands, and conversations. But in Sils Maria, it was the eternal return that sculpted him—shaped by the *other* that touched him. It was the finitude of freedom itself, as eternal return.

However, Nietzsche would have been happy with current digital means to transcribe what he wanted to express from those Alps; with a tablet, a laptop or finally with a Smartphone he could have transcribed what was happening to him: photos, videos, reviews, online writings? And these unique texts that are born from Nietzsche are located in specific days and places; and associated with Nietzsche's own very precise experiences, totally precise, in the freedom of that detail that is inscribed in the body like a tattoo: it is the "Nuance of the Subtle". Take, for example, the First Book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. It was

written between November 23, 1882, and February 23, 1883, in Rapallo (Liguria, Italy). It is known that the core of the text was composed in just ten days. Rapallo, during the winter, offers temperatures around 10°C, typically cloudy, with some light. The Second Book was written between late June and early July 1883 in Sils Maria, in the midst of summer—bright and clear, surrounded by lakes, forests, and mountains, with temperatures rarely exceeding 20°C. The Third Book—the most important, which brings this symphony of the eternal return to its culmination—was written between January and February 1884, in the heart of winter in Nice, perhaps the most Mediterranean place in France, where winter temperatures exceed 15°C, with clear skies, little rain, and good food. In other words, the first three books of *Zarathustra* were composed over the span of a year, in warm winter climates and cool, luminous summers. Hence their unity: Dionysus. And finally, the Fourth Book was written between autumn 1884 and February 1885, also in Nice—one year after the explicit “conclusion” of *Zarathustra*. This is why Nietzsche never wished to publish it alongside the other three books. It was intended as a private text, in which he explores, in a simpler style—lacking his characteristic literary mastery—how the eternal return is often misinterpreted and distorted, and how its experience fails to occur, instead leading to confusion.

4

We also know that Nietzsche came down—like Moses—from Sils Maria after the summer of 1888, carrying his two tablets: *Twilight of the Idols*² and *The Antichrist* (intended as the first of four parts of the book *The Transvaluation of All Values*; ultimately, the book consisted only of this single part)³. Now, the tragic experience of the Dionysian is elevated to a great moment, a decisive instant—a heroic destiny in the manner of Antigone. That is, the eternal return operates as a force of redemption from nihilism, illuminating the path toward the transvaluation of values—German, European, or otherwise: the values of the market, of patriarchy, of colonialism. Tragedy, as an aesthetic, religious, political, and constitutive experience of the people, is now understood as a revolutionary force—one that seeks to elevate the values of life as a *WethOthers* in the making, thus becoming a *Boat*. Dionysus has explicitly arrived in Germany and Europe, led by his new Antigone—Nietzsche—and by a new Thebes. We find ourselves within the Dionysian vision of the European world of the nineteenth century. The god is more than Greek—or rather, Europe itself became Greek. Thus, the god manifests not only in the Greek *polis*, but in Europe itself. One might even say, with a touch of playfulness and irony: it is the arrival of the “Antichrist” in the midst of the nineteenth century. Through art, that old, nihilistic, and weary Germany becomes politicized; a new Thebes becomes possible, emerging from a new tragedy. Beethoven’s music, Wagner’s opera, and other artistic expressions may be understood as part of this transvaluation of what once signified death.

The dancery nature of the god Dionysus expresses, from the outset, that it is a dance with others—most notably, with Ariadne. To put it in Hegelian terms: the truth of Dionysus is Ariadne; she, the mortal, is the mediation of the immortal. And this is revealed through the dance. Yet this has been forgotten—or deliberately ignored: namely, that Ariadne is constitutive of the god Dionysus. This is what Nietzsche began to express in his philosophy from *The Gay Science* (1882) onward—after the inspiration of the eternal return

² A synthetic compendium of years of notes originally intended for *The Will to Power*, which he never completed (Sánchez Pascual, 1993, pp. 7-25).

³ Intended as the first of four parts of the book *The Transvaluation of All Values*; ultimately, the book consisted only of this single part (Sánchez Pascual, 1990, pp. 9-26).

in Sils Maria (when the White Bull itself played it upon Lake Silvaplana), and following his encounter with Cosima Wagner and, more radically, with Lou Salomé. There is a truly beautiful and highly significant passage in this book—prior to *Zarathustra*—that makes it clear that everything is resolved between the god and the mortal, between Dionysus and Ariadne, even though their names are not explicitly mentioned, as they are in *Zarathustra*. It becomes evident that the dance is a distant effect of Ariadne herself upon the god. The bull-god dances in response to Ariadne; she exerts an action at a distance. I quote in extenso:

Do I still have ears? Am I all ear and nothing else? Here I stand amidst the fire of the surf, whose white flames are licking at my feet: from all sides it is howling, threatening, screaming, shrieking at me, while the old earth-rattler sings his aria in the lowest of depths, deep as a roaring bull, while pounding such an earth-rattling beat that the hearts of even these weather-beaten monsters of the rocks are trembling in their bodies. Suddenly, as if born out of nothingness, there appears before the gate of this hellish labyrinth only a few fathoms away a large sailing ship, gliding along as silently as a ghost. Oh, this ghostly beauty! How magically it touches me! What? Has all the calm and silence of the world embarked here? Is my happiness itself sitting in this quiet place - my happier self, my second, immortalized self? Not yet to be dead, but also no longer alive? As a spiritlike, silent, watching, gliding, hovering intermediate being? As though I were that ship that moves over the dark sea with its white sails like an enormous butterfly! Yes! To move over existence! That's it! That would be it! - It seems as though the noise here has made me into a dreamer? All great noise makes us place happiness in silence and distance. When a man stands in the midst of his own noise, in the midst of his own surf of projects and plans, he is also likely to see gliding past him silent, magical creatures whose happiness and seclusion he yearns for - women (2001, p. 71).

This passage from *The Gay Science* is fundamental to Nietzsche's work. It is titled "Women and their action at a distance," and it provides the foundation for a fully developed understanding of what the eternal return expresses.

In the singular book that Nietzsche wrote with both blood and style—*Ecce Homo*, his final and literally great work, a torn Dionysian cry: "Evohé!"—the philosopher is strikingly clear and transparent; sometimes, perhaps, too much so, as he spares no one, not even his mother and sister. He shows us how everything new in his profound thought of the eternal return is like new music that is heard—a presence already felt in *The Gay Science*. Lou Salomé embodies the Ariadne-time; she never ensnares like a spider because she is light. With her, he dances; with her, he modifies and reinvents the myth. With her, he leaves behind the death of Cosima-Ariadne and escapes the labyrinth of Wagner—a labyrinth in which Wagner himself was trapped and ultimately succumbed, as in his *Parsifal*.

I will present this famous text in several passages to trace the transitions: from Cosima to Lou, from Dionysus to Ariadne, from the Labyrinth to the Ball, from dead time to the time of return, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, from old music to new, from old hearing to new awakening, from *Parsifal* to *Zarathustra*, from Wagner to Nietzsche, from Dionysus-Theseus-Wagner to Dionysus-Nietzsche, from pessimism to affirmation, from the ancient Greece to the new Greece yet to be built, from sexual difference to sexual relation, from the masculine-feminine duo to queer and its differentials, and from the I to the *WethOthers*,

Now I will tell the history of *Zarathustra*. The basic idea of the work, *the thought of eternal return*, the highest possible formula of affirmation —, belongs to August of the year 1881: it was thrown onto paper with the title '6,000 feet beyond people and time'. That day I went through the woods to the lake of

Silvaplana; I stopped near Surlei by a huge pyramidal boulder. That is where this thought came to me (año, p. 123).

It is quite significant that Nietzsche himself dates with such precision when and where this profound thought “assaulted” him: August 1881. In the midst of summer, amidst the fresh air of the Upper Engadine, by Lake Silvaplana—a beautiful, small, emerald-green lake nestled in the Alps—behind Sils Maria, next to a large, pyramid-shaped rock located about four kilometers from the modest room Nietzsche rented economically.

Final remarks

The first time Nietzsche visited the Upper Engadine, as mentioned, was not to Sils Maria but to St. Moritz in 1879. There, he wrote one of the most beautiful and profound texts about his walks through those landscapes, later published in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* (1880). Let us not forget that from 1881 to 1888—until his complete mental collapse on January 6, 1889 (after which he never returned to his beloved Sils Maria)—Nietzsche frequently traveled to the Upper Engadine and Sils Maria to live and write. The only exception was 1882, when he did not go because he was involved in an affair with Lou in Tautenburg, attempting, it seems, to form a couple—a relationship that ultimately failed when, as is well known, she fled with Rée. This passage from *The Wanderer and His Shadow* already reveals what many of us have experienced—or experience—in certain places, seemingly distant from the familiar life of our homeland. As early as 1879, and without knowing many people, Nietzsche felt himself part of a place in a broad sense. He experienced what he later taught academically in Basel: Dionysus as an actualization of the *other* within the self, a presence that gives life and whispers, “Yes, it is worth living this instant,” and to return. The text concludes with the phrase: “even more than that,” where that “more” signifies one’s own actualization within oneself—the double that pierces me from a distance and enables me to dance “in spite of” knowing that life has no guaranteed meaning. It was in the High Engadine that Nietzsche emerged from the labyrinth of Ariadne—the spider Ariadne of Tribschen.

Nietzsche was highly refined—among humans, among “things” of all kinds, and in the midst of nature. He was extremely sensitive to temperatures in general, and particularly to excessive heat. The worst for him was always the Sirocco, both literally and figuratively, from which he fled. The Sirocco could represent his family, his mother, Wagner himself, colleagues in Basel, a type of food, music, or social demeanor; it symbolized the decadence of all kinds—Christianity, Bayreuth, and so forth. He needed clear skies to live and write, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. This idea of nature, which emerges in Nietzsche’s walking—a *passeggiata*, as a Pugliese might say, meaning walking for the sake of walking without a determined purpose—is characteristic of a mode of being that has long since been lost to us. Today, we often no longer walk but rather navigate the virtual, through and within the overwhelming demands of work and labyrinths of various kinds. Nietzsche takes time to describe the place: it is not an office (he has none), nor a house (which he also lacks), nor beside a fireplace. Rather, it is outdoors, in summer, in the mountains, at a height, on a rock overlooking the Emerald Lake, on its shore, where light shines and the Alps are reflected on its peaks, with Sils Maria visible in the background. It is in that solitude—“blue blue, electric blue, that’s the color of my room,” as Bowie would say in *Sound and Vision*—that Nietzsche constructs his room to dance, and there he writes an immortal work. And there, thought visits

and inspires him; it is a phenomenological description of how the thought of the eternal return is given — already in its manner of presenting itself, it expresses, in a reduplicative fashion, what the eternal return is. Thought and content go hand in hand and, simultaneously, this unity occurs in that concrete place and nowhere else. This is decisive. If we turn to Nietzsche's already mythical and famous text — the renowned folio from his notebook, M III 1 — which today can be found among the *Posthumous Fragments* of August 1881, we find the complete sheet there. It contains five indications, and among other things, what appears as the title is "Die Wiederkunft des Gleichen. Entwurf". Point five states: "Das neue Schwergewicht: die ewige Wiederkunft des Gleichen", and ends by signing in

Anfang August 1881 in Sils-Maria,
6000 Fuss über dem Meere und viel höher über allen
menschlichen Dingen! — (NF-1881, 11[141])

It is important to emphasize that the sheet is complete and, in addition to outlining five points to be developed, the fifth point and the title of the sheet refer to the "return of the identical" and the "eternal return of the identical." Later, Nietzsche abandoned this formulation because it engendered a significant misunderstanding; for this reason, he subsequently referred only to the eternal return. For example, Heidegger consistently used the term "eternal return of the identical," thereby ontologizing Nietzsche through his own vision of Western Being. In this formulation, what becomes fundamental is the character of the "identical" (or, literally, in German: *das Gleiche*), while insufficient emphasis is placed on the returning character itself as an act of returning. Deleuze, on the other hand, always understands the eternal return as the return of the different — multiplicity continually affirming itself as new in its multiplicity, and therefore always differential. Heidegger consistently approaches from an ontology of being, while Deleuze operates from an ontology of matter. In our case, however, we do not work within any ontological hypothesis. Another important detail is that, on that sheet, there is a different nuance indicating the source from which that life-thought operates. In the original sheet, it is stated: "6000 Fuss über dem Meere und viel höher über allen menschlichen Dingen", but in the *Ecce homo* (7 years later) it is said: "6,000 feet beyond people and time". In the new text, it is simpler, it eliminates the empirical reference "über dem Meere" and adds synthetically to people "... and time", before it said on the sheet "... viel höher über allen menschlichen Dingen". This addition "and time" implies a crucial aspect of Nietzsche's thought and is central to the myth of Dionysus and Ariadne — a key that was absent at the outset but developed later in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and through his relationship with Lou. The eternal return does not signify the recurrence of something identical, nor does it denote a mere material dispersal understood as differential dissemination. In *Zarathustra*, it becomes clear that interpreting the eternal return as the return of the identical is a mistake — a false interpretation. This explains why expressing it philosophically — and even less so academically — is so difficult. The eternal return occurs scripturally, manifesting uniquely within each attentive reader in the very form of the writing itself. This is also why it took Nietzsche so long — more than a year — to compose this thought. The philosopher first needed to write *The Gay Science* in 1882, which serves as a propaedeutic demonstrating how to transcend the decadent morality of nihilistic ontology and a philosophical scriptural mode that no longer yields more of itself (a point well understood by Zambrano and Kofman). This transcendence is achieved through the dance, enabling one to break with the ontological gaze — Nietzsche's,

Wagner's, Cosima's, Schopenhauer's, Kant's, Germany's, Europe's, and I would even add Deleuze's. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche clearly states the function of *The Gay Science*: "[...] the very last poem above all, 'To the Minstrel', an exuberant dance song in which (if I may say so!) you dance over morality, is a perfect piece of Provençalism." (2007, 123). And only in 1883, and in just ten days, he wrote the first book of *Zarathustra*—but under the guidance of the dance of the new Ariadne; in other words, from the very expression of Ariadne, who is not the Lady of the Labyrinth, but the Lady of the Dance. And dancing cannot create labyrinths, but only fly lightly.

Data availability statement

The main focus of this article is contributions of a theoretical or methodological nature, without the use of empirical data sets. Therefore, in accordance with the journal's editorial guidelines, the article is exempt from being deposited in SciELO Data.

Referências

JANZ, C. P. *Friedrich Nietzsche. 2. Los diez años de Basilea 1869/1879*. Madrid: Alianza, 1982.

JANZ, C. P. *Friedrich Nietzsche. 3. Los diez años del filósofo errante (1879-1888)*. Madrid: Alianza, 1985.

NIETZSCHE, F. *Así habló Zaratustra*. Madrid: Alianza, 1980.

NIETZSCHE, F. *Correspondencia Friedrich Nietzsche. Correspondencia IV, Enero 1880-Diciembre 1884*. Madrid: Trotta, 2012.

NIETZSCHE, F. *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe (eKGWB)*. Digital version of the German critical edition of Nietzsche's works, posthumous fragments, and correspondence edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1967– / 1975–). Digital edition organized by Paolo D'Iorio. Nietzsche Source, [n.d.]. Available at: <https://www.nietzschesource.org/>. Accessed on: May 23, 2025.

NIETZSCHE, F. *Ecce homo*. Madrid: Alianza, 2011.

NIETZSCHE, F. *El Anticristo*. Madrid: Alianza, 1990.

NIETZSCHE, F. *El caminante y su sombra*. In: *Obras Completas. Volumen III. Obras de Madurez I*. Madrid: Tecnos, 2014.

NIETZSCHE, F. *Human, All Too Human*. Translation by R. J. Hollingdale. Introduction by Richard Schacht. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

NIETZSCHE, F. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and other writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridley & Judith Norman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

NIETZSCHE, F. *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

NIETZSCHE, F. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian del Caro & Robert Pippin. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

SÁNCHEZ PASCUAL, A. Introducción. En: NIETZSCHE, F. *El Anticristo*. Madrid: Alianza, 1990.

SÁNCHEZ PASCUAL, A. Introducción. En: NIETZSCHE, F. *Crepúsculo de los ídolos*. Madrid: Alianza, 1993.

WAGNER, C. *Cartas a Friedrich Nietzsche. Diarios y otros testimonios*. Madrid: Trotta, 2013.

Editors in charge: Léo Peruzzo Júnior e Jelson Oliveira.

RECEBIDO: 26/05/2025
APROVADO: 10/11/2025
PUBLICADO: 19/11/2025

*RECEIVED: 05/26/2025
APPROVED: 11/10/2025
PUBLISHED: 11/19/2025*