

Lou: The Story of a Free Woman

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[work in progress - please contact with any corrections, suggestions

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to Albina du Boisrouvray

Millions of lines have been written on the subject of Lou Andreas-Salomé. This woman, born in 1861 in St Petersburg, had no claim to celebrity, despite an abundant enough *oeuvre* in the German language which attracted notoriety in its time.

But she lastingly crossed the path of three men who were to become famous: Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, Sigmund Freud. A flamboyant trio who in a certain sense drew her into the sky where the stars shine.

Given this peculiar circumstance, and above all the fact that this superb creature had been their intellectual equal, Lou Andreas-Salomé begins to excite our curiosity. Biographies and essays appear, and continue to do so.

Must we join them? I do not possess any unknown information, any new document to reveal. But the sources of all who have written on the subject of Lou are the same: her "Journal", her autobiography, her correspondence, the heroines of her novels, her essays. Now, she censored herself in these texts, realising that she would be, after her death, an object of curiosity. In addition to her other talents, she was a good liar. Or rather, she had a rich and fertile imagination.

All this means that one remains here and there unsatisfied by what one reads, frustrated by a morsel of truth that one pursues without quite grasping it, maybe because her biographers, abundantly well-informed as they are, seem not to have the boldness to approach her frankly.

I do not pretend to know better than the erudite scholars of Lou Andreas-Salomé, one of the most intriguing woman of all, but only to propose an interpretation in some respects a little different.

I

Firstly, then, from whence the name of this diva or courtesan?

The Salomés, relatively numerous in France in the 15th and 16th centuries, were of the Sephardic Jews driven out of Spain and Portugal by the Inquisition, who sometimes ended up in Holland, like the family of Spinoza, but who were dispersed most often on the edges of the Mediterranean, almost within the Ottoman Empire, particularly hospitable to them.

In France, a certain number found refuge in Avignon, where their existence, whilst not warmly welcomed, was relatively untroubled. We find an André Salomé recorded in Baux in the 1500s. He had many children, and the family flourished.

We do not know how he was converted to protestantism when the reformed religion began to spread wildly. But this was at nearly the same time that another well-known Jew, Nostradamus, also decided to become Christian.

Alas! they had exchanged one persecution for another; the protestants were to become very soon the butt of all aggression. In Provence, Richelieu was to demolish the Chateau at Baux. They had to flee, or perish.

The Salomés thus arrived in a Germany already ravaged by the troops of Louis XIV, ending up in the Palatinate colony where the French had maintained their own language.

Once more, they showed themselves bold, hard workers. The great-grandfather of Lou became a *bourgeois* of Tallinn. Then, observing the formidable economic development of Russia under Catherine, he decided to set up in business in Saint Petersburg. Great prosperity repaid his foresightedness and that of all the Salomés.

Thus we arrive at Lou. She is born in a majestic state apartment situated in the building of the general staff of Saint Petersburg. A host of servants, a French governess, an English governess...Her father is already fifty-three; but, apparently, no stars on his shoulders. A valorous captain during the Warwaw insurrection, he could have capitalised on having the eye of the Tsar. But health problems had distanced him from leadership; he stayed in the administration and, until now, hasn't passed the grade of colonel, which is in itself not so bad.

At the requisite age, Gustav Salomé had requested and received a modest - but hereditary - title of nobility, accorded to good servants of the Empire. An administrative formality, in fact, and there we have Lou's aristocratic origins. She is not a snob: she dreams, her imagination running away with her. Besides, these little fantasies have some justification : she will know her father by the name of General von Salomé, consul of the Tsar, her mother will call him "the general"; and she herself will benefit on her passport from an identical title by proxy...general! The administration is more easy and prodigal with its favours than the military hierarchy.

Less "fabulous" than his daughter described him, Gustav von Salomé is nevertheless handsome, elegant, full of panache: a real incarnation of the romantic generation to which he belongs. His house at St Petersburg is reputed for its high level of intellectual conversation...and he is crazy about his little girl, born after five boys, for whom he is the very image of God the Father.

At her birth, the child will be named Louise, like her mother, but, within the family, they will always call her Liolia, the Russian version of Louise. Lou will appear later, we shall see in what circumstances.

Madame von Salomé is lovely, charming, an excellent house-mistress, a perfect wife, but rather overshadowed by an irrepressible daughter who does not and never will come down to earth - not by caprice, but by nature.

One day, when she is with her mother at the beach and watches her swim, she asks:
"Mouchka, go under, please!"
"But I'll die," responds her mother, "suffocate!"
"So ? *Nitchevo!* " replies the little girl.

Later on, Madame von Salomé would organise teas and receptions so that Lou could entertain the young well-born girls who are among her classmates - but she will cut school, with her father's knowledge, and will be bored with these chattering, frivolous creatures who know how to talk about nothing but clothes and future marriages, which just makes her laugh. How can one marry? On this point also, she will decide her intransigence in advance of her life, and make a joke of marriage...But we shall return to this.

Her five brothers adore her; joyous and affectionate, they are her playmates, her companions in every way. All her life she will preserve a vision of the men she has lost: her brothers. Never has a woman - who we would today call "feminist" - had a more tender, communicative relationship with men. On condition that they don't touch her.

An important, even capital, episode of her young life: she loses confidence in God, in the existence of God.

Until then raised in a very pious family, she thinks that this God resembles her Father, for whom she maintains a true devotion, that he is good, kindly, understanding, and that he hears her when, in the evening, before going to sleep, she recounts the events of her day. But, one day, a servant tells her that a couple of beggars had wanted to come into the house, that he had chased them and that they were found dead, *melting* in front of the door. The 'men' were in fact snowmen: the servant had meant to joke with her. But she doesn't understand it as such, and is horrified. How does one melt? And where does the melted part go to? Where? She interrogates God. Silence. And a thought penetrates her, makes her ill: what if God doesn't exist?

At seventy, she would still be interrogating and would say to her lover Freud that it

had never ceased to preoccupy her: that it was impossible to her eyes that God did not exist, but still, she doubted...

Neither Freud nor Nietzsche, who both played such a rôle in her philosophical and intellectual formation, would remove this vague belief that never answered to any dogma, any more than they would relieve that cruel unbelief with which she had had to live.

Lou is indeed a beautiful young girl: long arms, narrow hips, huge clear eyes, small straight nose, sensual mouth, long blonde hair, high forehead. But she has still a flat torso and the shape of an adolescent more than of a young woman. Today, we might suspect her anorexic.

We don't know when the metamorphosis occurred, when physical maturity caught up with the intense effervescence of spirit. A word of Nietzsche mentioning the false breasts that she had worn beneath her blouse even when she was already twenty-three seems to indicate that it was late, but this woman, otherwise so narcissistic, never speaks of her body. Basically, she doesn't allow it a separate existence apart from her soul...

It is clear that the narrowing gap between the slowing development of her body, of its secretions, of its emotions, and that of its spirit took nothing away from its seduction, on the contrary. She was destined to be desired in all her ambiguity for many years, and to appear the more desirable in proportion to her inaccessibility.

Her first love was to be chaste and perverse. He was called Heinrich Gillet. A Dutch pastor, he was the tutor of the Tsar's children and the incumbent of a Lutheran church in Saint Petersburg. Blonde, splendid, blessed with an enchanting voice, a favourite of society women who flocked to hear his sermons on Sundays, he was aged forty-one and married.

At sixteen or seventeen, Lou had to prepare for her confirmation. She began this preparation with another pastor, a Reverend Dalton, but violently rebelled against his dogmatism. Anyway, since God didn't exist, what was she doing there anyway? Dalton repeated to her that she was to be a Christian adult; She responded "I'm neither an adult, nor a Christian!" Dalton had never been so shocked as at such obstinacy.

One of her parents took Lou one Sunday to hear Gillet. There, it was instant enchantment. She procured his address, sent him a letter in which she asked for an interview – "not for reasons of religious doubts," she specifies. He exults: "You have come to me..." and envelopes her in his arms like a great cloak. At that precise moment, Gillet is her father, her God, he is Man...

This affair will last for two years. It is she who will end it. It's always she who ends it. But what sort of affair is it, exactly? A clandestine affair, evidently, but they saw each other every day at Gillet's office, very close to the Salomé residence, where Lou comes and goes as she pleases. Who would try to stop them?

Gillot quickly realised that Lou was an exceptional young person and that one must capture her spirit to keep her. Theoretically, she was there to prepare for her entry into the German Lutheran Church and to become at the same time a member of the German community. Now, she holds back with every fibre of her being. This same assimilation will cut the intimate ties which bind her to Russia; and what does one become when one makes a sacred vow without believing it, when one betrays one's own integrity?

Gillot does not push her; in fact his own knowledge of religious preparation is somewhat hazy. But he is extremely cultured. Her exercise books show that she studied the history of religions with him, that he spoke of philosophy, of metaphysics, of logic, of the Old Testament, of Descartes, Pascal, Port-Royal. He had her read Kant, Leibniz, Rousseau, Voltaire. She absorbed everything, and more.

This enforced training, the fact that she had assimilated this knowledge, would distinguish her later as a most rare case amongst women of her generation: a "valuable interlocutor," a true partner in intellectual pursuits. This she was, for Nietzsche and for Freud.

Sometimes, she even edits Gillot's Dominican sermons for him and one of them causes a scandal. It seems incredible that this situation can go on, but she loves him, she is his child, and he desires her. He sits her on his knee. A large girl of seventeen, it's not really quite her place...What they really did, we don't know. Some furtive caresses, perhaps? Occasionally, he embraces her madly. But Gillot's sorrow is that Lou is indifferent to physical passion. It's likely that she ignored it just long enough, and that is the key to the characteristic direction of this young woman's life.

She likes men but, in a word, they have no effect on her, unless repulsive. She has a powerful intellect, she has no body. She doesn't want one.

One day, Gillot, in a trance, embraces her, takes her in his arms and asks her to marry him. She discovers that he has even made the necessary preparations for the marriage. She is confounded. Once again God, *her* god, has collapsed, and there is nothing to be done. She expresses it to him sadly: "I will always be your child"; but she will never see him again, they cannot see each other any more. She must leave St. Petersburg.

He is amazed when she reveals her plan: to enrol at Zurich University, one of the first to admit women as students.

Zurich is a rallying centre for young Russians, intoxicated by revolutionary ideas and sexual liberty. But it's not this that interests Lou: she wants to work with Alois Biedermann, the greatest protestant theologian of the age.

What can Gillot do, except give way? It is Madame von Salomé who refuses with all her energy. The brothers plead for peace between mother and daughter, but as

always, Lou holds firm and mother ends up acquiescing. After all, perhaps it is desirable to move Lou away from Gillot, this man of whom she has heard that he may be dangerous?

An episode concerning passports intervenes. To obtain one, Lou must be confirmed: a curious *salade russe* of police and religion. She returns to Gillot. The pastor proposes to take mother and daughter to Holland, where he will confirm Lou at the church of a friend.

It is thus that on a beautiful morning the young woman finds herself on her knees before an altar, swearing to be a faithful member of the Christian Church. The very thing she had always refused. But she no longer has any choice. In fact, it is to Gillot, more than to the Church, that she swears her fidelity. It all seems after all like a bizarre marriage, fortunately enacted entirely in Dutch, so that Madame von Salomé doesn't understand a word.

What did pastor Gillot actually say? "Do not fear. For I have redeemed you. I call you by your name. You are mine..." And he blesses her.

He could never pronounce her name, Liolia, and he would for the first time call her Lou. She would make it her name forever. Something in her would remain eternally attached to him, that which as yet seemed very little like her...

When will we again find her in love, that word which sits so badly with her that she will seem year after year to scarcely exist in the flesh?

A photo shows her in Zurich, where she is living with her mother. At the University, where she is enrolled, her unusual charm captivates professor Biedermann. She wears a black dress buttoned up to the neck, with not even the plainest decoration; the high brow, the severe hairstyle, the profoundly piercing blue eyes, the delicate mouth. A striking, if not traditionally beautiful, countenance.

Biedermann had written to Mme von Salomé : "your daughter is a truly singular woman; she has a childlike purity and an integrity, at the same time as a quality of spirit and an independence of will which is not that of a child, hardly even that of a woman. She is a diamond."

The diamond would fall ill. Nothing allows us to know for sure quite what affected her, but, manifestly, the disease was of a pulmonary origin; she spat blood. Seaside resorts, health régimes, rest, she only became thinner. Last ditch recommendation: a complete change of climate. In consequence, in January 1882, Mme von Salomé took her daughter to Italy. Lou was twenty-one.

In Rome, the two women descend on their hotel. There, an convoluted situation is to unfold piece by piece, requiring many ingredients before Nietzsche makes his appearance.

One of Lou's professors, passionate for this young girl who he believed to be at death's door, had given her a warm letter of introduction to a woman much celebrated in the German, and even international, intellectual community of the day, a feminist heroine and an idealist involved in the revolutionary movement of 1848, to the chagrin of her own family: Malwida von Meysenburg, now in her sixties. She would, decided this woman, take Lou under her wing, and in fact the young girl became a regular fixture in her house.

Now Malwida is great friends with Nietzsche, who is not unknown, but is far from famous. In his lifetime, he never had more than three thousand readers. Suffering greatly, he had had to renounce his teaching post. He was plagued by terrible headaches. Malwida had offered him her hospitality throughout a whole winter in a lovely villa in Sorrento. He had arrived in the company of a young philosopher, Paul Rée, and another student. The stay had been idyllic.

To present fully the cast of characters, we must say that Paul Rée, quite large, very clever, is the son of landowners, rich and jewish, something he could never forget. He is a pathetic being who suffers from a quasi-pathological self-hatred, but at the same time is full of humour. He's also an inveterate gambler.

The evening when Rée arrives *chez Malwida*, entirely unannounced during dinner, from Monte Carlo, he has to borrow from her to pay his taxi, having completely

ruined himself. He is received nevertheless with open arms. Despite the mockery of Nietzsche and Rée at the expense of Malvida's theories on intellectual equality between men and women, she treats the latter, who is twenty-two years old, like a son.

Rée is agreeably surprised by the presence amongst the companions of a young girl with big blue eyes; he asks her permission to accompany her back to the hotel where her mother is awaiting her. She accepts, despite the reservations of Malwida, who finds it quite improper for her to be walking the streets at night in the company of a young man. Fortunately, the road is short between the Via delle Polveriere and the hotel.

But they have so much to talk about that they prolong their walk more and more. What do they talk about? Love? Not at all! Both are philosophers, thus they talk of philosophy, metaphysical speculations, the mystery of life, and God, who always intrudes.

Indifferent to the reprobation of Malwida and Mme von Salomé, Lou and Paul repeat these walks nightly, and Paul falls in love with her to such a degree that she cannot totally ignore it. She has him understand fully that, for her, the book of love is closed, and she speaks of Gillot, her only and greatest love – along with God. There is no room for another in her life.

At this torture, Rée becomes angst-ridden and can only see one way out : flight. The only victory in love, as everyone since Napoleon knows. But he is an extrovert. He has to tell someone – and above all he has to tell Malwida, who loves him like a son and whom he cannot leave just like that, with no explanation!

Thus he runs to her, confesses, reporting the events concerning Lou, who laughs when he talks of marriage.

Immediately he feels better. It is Malwida who feels bad, mad with rage against Lou who had destroyed all the hopes that she had created in this young boy. She restrains Paul, calms him, reprimands Lou. "But, really, what are they, these men, incapable of friendship, yes, of simple friendship?" replies Lou. In one instant and two smiles she makes up with Rée, who wants only to stay, and she then recounts a dream that she has had recently: she lives in an apartment of three rooms with two men, and everyone is happy. That's what she wants.

Rée realises perfectly well the unrealistic character of this proposal, but, to keep her, he is ready for anything.

What is necessary, he says, is that we have a chaperone to assure our respectability.

A chaperone? They try to convince Malwida to play this role. She cries out in horror. As for Mme von Salomé, she all but faints.

Then Rée has an idea: an old friend of his, Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher, would be an irreproachable chaperone. He writes to him, speaking of a "beautiful young Russian girl who is burning to meet you." Remaining ever faithful to Nietzsche, even if he sometimes fears for his reason, he knows that the solitude of the philosopher, the total absence of a woman in his life, is unbearable to him...

III

Nietzsche was thirty-seven.

He was in the process of throwing off the influence of Schopenhauer, who he had worshipped. The bleakest philosopher in history had taught that happiness was impossible, life was a tissue of suffering, and that in consequence the wise man must ensure he does not seek pleasure, which could only lead to great sorrow. When Nietzsche perceives that, on reflection, he did not agree, he writes the following: "It is the attitude of a coward who would live like a timid deer in the forest."

He rejoins the quest for happiness and pleasure, but his poor life is singularly bereft of them. The glamour of his appointment to the chair of classical philology at Basel University, where he was named at twenty-five, was from immediately tarnished by the fact that he was in no fit state to occupy the post. He survives thanks to a modest sum allowed him by the Swiss government; moving from one shabby *pension* to another, he is always in search of companionship to ameliorate his solitude, and of a climate that would make his life bearable.

Stefan Zweig described it thus: "[...] In the little furnished room, innumerable notes, notebooks, writings and proofs were piled high on the table, but just one book, and occasionally a letter. On the floor, in a corner, a great heavy wooden trunk, his only possession, containing his two shirts and his other suit, worn-out. On a tray, a quantity of bottles, vials, potions for the migraine which often leaves him prostrate for hours at a time [...] Wrapped in his overcoat and a woollen scarf, fingers freezing, glasses up close to his clouded eyes, scarcely able to decipher the text, he stayed seated in this fashion for hours and wrote until his eyes caused him agony." One might take him for an inoffensive eccentric. He announces terrible wars in the near future: now there was an idea!..No evidence for the dynamite that was in his mind and that, one day, would break it.

The Birth of Tragedy had had a certain reverberation; Wagner, who is still a friend, deigns to favour it; they are however at the point of rupture after a long idyll, but that's another story...

Rée presses his friend Nietzsche to join him in Rome, where the "young russian girl" awaits him with impatience. She has got the idea that Rée and she should live in a trio with him. But the project angers Mme von Salomé, who is this time determined to bring Lou back home. Lou turns to Gillot, writes to him for help in realising her plan. He replies severely: has she lost her mind? Who is she to believe herself capable of judging Nietzsche and Rée? A woman has a duty towards society: what of that?

This response leaves Lou heartbroken. Why do they all criticise, instead of being happy? " 'We must do this, we must do that...' I have no idea who this we is. It is only of myself that I know anything. I cannot live according to an ideal, but I can certainly live my own life, and I will do so whatever happens. In saying so, I don't represent any abstract principle, but something far more marvellous, something that

is within me, something that is warm with life, full of lightness and wants to escape."

There she is, contained within those few superb lines...

And how ridiculous, the pastor who preaches good conduct to her!

One must recognize nevertheless that this idea of three people living together is odd. Or rather, it's a man's idea! The masculine side of Lou, which is strong, is expressed in it.

Mad with love, Rée thinks only of one thing: not to lose her, to stop her returning to Russia. He would be ready to cohabit with an elephant if that was the wish of Lou. With all his hopes, he counts on the arrival of Nietzsche and on the effect that he will exert on Mme von Salomé.

If the philosopher was late, it was because he had embarked on a disastrous voyage in Sicily, but, one day when Rée and Lou are working at Saint-Pierre de Rome, in a small side-chapel - Rée slaving away at a demonstration of the non-existence of God - a man suddenly appears, comes straight towards Lou and says to her with a great bow: "By what stars are we reunited here?" It is Friedrich Nietzsche.

She would write later that the first impression left by this stranger of medium height, discreet dress, with his shortsighted squint, was that of a mysterious character, "of a secret solitude". She noticed his hands, "incomparably beautiful and slender," but felt nonetheless a certain repulsion towards him. His bombast annoyed her.

A singular ballet began. After scarcely a few days passed in Rome, during which he never sees Lou alone, Nietzsche wants to marry her. He charges Paul Rée with making the proposal. The same Rée is himself an obstinate candidate for Lou's hand. So as not to show himself ill-humoured, he all the same passes on Nietzsche's request to the interested party. Lou screams with laughter: a bourgeois marriage! In the best traditions! Nietzsche wants a bourgeois marriage! She would tell him what she thought of that!

Rée advises diplomacy: if she still wants to bring her plan of living three under the same roof, she must be careful with Nietzsche's pride.

Lou calms down. She will say to Nietzsche - which is the truth - that, if she was to marry, the Russian government would discontinue her allowance. Now, she has no other source of revenue. Hence, a good reason to rebuff an impecunious man.

But he doesn't want to let go. He is so taken with this dream creature who understands the nature of his preoccupations and can intelligently discuss them. He is IN LOVE.

Everyone, at this time in history, travels for a yes, for a no, whatever the risks and discomforts of long journeys. Here then are our heroes at Orta Lake, one of the smallest but most beautiful of the upper Italian lakes, to the north of Milan, a

favourite beauty spot. Mme von Salomé and Lou are en route to Russia, where the mother had decided to return her daughter, Nietzsche and Rée following in the direction of Switzerland.

Orta is a place imbued with a certain magic where millions of pilgrims had come to pray before the shrine of saint François and to kneel on the wooded hill that goes by the name of Monte Sacro. Rée is tired, Mme von Salomé sulky; Lou and Nietzsche leave alone to climb the hill.

What happens? We can say very little with certainty: they disappear for twice as long as is necessary to go to Monte Sacro and return. As for the explanations given by Lou to her furious mother, they are hardly credible.

Lou and Nietzsche had talked a lot. It was in the course of this walk that the philosopher, in extreme agitation, was to reveal to the young woman the final stage of his thought: the theory of the eternal return of everything, a new metaphysics...And then?

At the end of her life, Lou would confide to an old friend what she had never written or spoken to anyone: "I don't remember whether I kissed Nietzsche or not..."

It is as if she had said: "I don't remember whether I set the house on fire or not." For, it was after this walk to Monte Sacro, of which he said to her: "I owe you the most beautiful reverie of my life," that Nietzsche, enlightened, was to lose contact with reality.

Lou had no particular inclination towards him. Paul Rée seriously sermonises to the young woman, who is, ultimately, behaving like a coquette. He calls her "my little snail"...He begs her not to play with Nietzsche. The two are to meet at Lucerne, in front of the Lion. There, she will have to say firmly, with no equivocation, that she could never be his wife.

Yes, yes, promises Lou, who dreads this meeting with Nietzsche, and who, in the end, would rather take refuge in ambiguity. She does not want to marry him, but she does not want to lose him either. She is basically profoundly flattered by the interest this great mind shows in her, even if she has never doubted that she merits it. This apart from the fact that he helped her to come to terms with the religious phenomenon, which occupies a central place in her life.

The interview at Lucerne - where Rée joins them - is ended with a photograph. The idea is Nietzsche's. A cliché, which would ultimately become famous. We see Nietzsche and Rée pulling a cart whilst Lou, sat behind them, wields a whip. The record does not state who decided upon this particular scene.

Despite the remonstrances of Rée, Lou promises Nietzsche to spend a few weeks holiday with him. He invites her to Tautenberg, a small village where he rents a house with his sister Elisabeth. This sister, we have to say, is an absolute bitch! She has gone down in history as the one who shamelessly falsified the texts of her

brother, who died insane in 1900, in order to conform them to hitlerian doctrine. Thus she had the "will to power," the most intimate essence of being according to Nietzsche, glorified under the name of national socialism. It would take many years after the war, and much conscientious work, for the imposture to be dispelled, and Nietzsche rehabilitated.

In 1882, Elisabeth is nothing but a country woman full of passion for her brother and very close to a militant antisemite she is to marry. From the first minute, she takes a dislike to Lou. Although she doesn't know anything about music, the two women proceed to Bayreuth where Wagner is giving *Parsifal*. Nietzsche made sure he did not accompany them. Cautious amateur, musical gourmand - "without music, life would be a horror, a fatigue, an 'exile'" -, self-confident composer himself, he had published *Richard Wagner at Bayreuth*, a intolerable panegyric to he who was to become a most dear friend, and to his wife Cosima, of whom he would be a chivalrous servant. The Wagners were horrified by the idea. Nietzsche dreaded with good reason the reception that he would find if he presented himself at Bayreuth, and he claimed that Parsifal "put him to sleep." Moreover, he had decorated *Carmen* with plaudits.

Elisabeth keeps a prudent distance. Lou, in revenge, presented to the clan Wagner by Malwida, becomes immediately popular, at least among the men.

The two women have some disagreements which are taken up again at Tautenberg, where it is a question, for Elisabeth, of driving the "terrible Russian" from the mind of Nietzsche. But he doesn't comply and stays in Lou's room most of the night, despite Elisabeth's vociferous protest. What do they do? They talk. Of God, of religion, of death, of sex. Heaven and hell are the principal subjects of their conversation.

"The trait that we have in common," notes Lou in her *Journal*, "is fundamentally religious.[...] For the free-thinker, the religious impulse, as if fallen back on itself, becomes a heroic force of their being, a desire for sacrifice in a noble cause. In Nietzsche's character there exists such a heroic trait [...] We will see him becoming the prophet of a new religion, and he will be of those who search heros for disciples."

Not a bad premonition!

In fact, the philosophy of Nietzsche was to explode, some years later, after a conference of the Danish critic Georg Brandes, and relayed to France by Taine.

The holiday in Tautenberg would have been idyllic, if it weren't for Elisabeth. Nietzsche is enchanted before Lou, "the most intelligent and the most gentle of women [...] quick like an eagle, brave as a lion." He never manages to approach her physically, but does not give up hope. At twenty-one, she is in the prime of her androgynous beauty.

He writes to Malwida : "This year [...] has been made marvellous for me by the charm and the grace of that truly heroic young soul."

If we can trust her correspondence, it seems that he awaited with confidence the moment when Lou, Paul and he would move in together at Vienna, thus realising the cohabitation of the famous "trio".

This prospect provokes from Malwida some frightening sermons, and from Mme von Salomé, just resigned smiles. As for Paul's mother, she considers cutting him off from the family.

Lou's excitement for the life "in trio" hasn't disappeared, but she is not so desperate. During the weeks that preceded her arrival at Tautenberg, she had spent some delicious day with Paul in the beautiful Rée family dwelling, at Stibbe, where he spent freely so that each minute could be comfortable for the girl. Rée is a charming being, a little complaining but charming nonetheless, often funny too...In Lou's mind, the prospect of the trio is put back until the long-awaited moment of reconciliation with Nietzsche.

When she arrives at Tautenberg, he throws her a party. But what a stupid idea to have stuck his sister in-between them! This woman, very pleasant physically, had conceived an almost pathological hatred of Lou who she called, as we have seen, "the terrible Russian". She execrated her, she wanted to kill her, in fact she was to try, at least symbolically. All her life she will pursue her with an aggression as active as it is inventive.

Nietzsche sees none of this. The presence of Lou enchants him. He will pass nineteen days which he will always remember, "compelled by destiny towards happiness," a very rare situation in his life.

Rustic holiday: Lou resides with Elisabeth in the pastor's house, while he sleeps at a peasant's house. In fact, he stays in the young woman's room until one in the morning - to talk of heaven and hell... It drives Elisabeth mad, and she continually harasses them.

She reproaches Lou for being dirty. The fact is that the young girl isn't in the slightest bit smart, not at all. But Nietzsche doesn't complain. Instead, he reproaches her for writing poorly. It's true: she doesn't have much style and never will. Now, for the philosopher writing must be perfect or must not be at all; the results of creation, excellent or nothing. His own style - rapid, percussive, acute - is dazzling.

Thus, he reads Lou's work, a treatise on women, and says to her: "You must rethink the whole thing and rewrite it in one go, in twenty-four hours!" That, she doesn't know how to do, but it remains the only point that she concedes to him.

Besides, he wishes to write a work in collaboration with her. A great homage, but she sidesteps it. She will never be a disciple, a second-in-command; he will never absorb her into the role of heiress. She has received everything she can from him. Rée will say, ironically, "She gained two years."

It is in any case obvious that she is weary of their relationship. She doesn't realise that Nietzsche has written to Mme von Salomé that they are secretly engaged. They pass a few days together at Leipzig, where Paul Rée awaits them. But the old image of the trio is faded. Nietzsche understands this and leaves them; he heads for Italy, leaving an affectionate letter for Paul. Before him opens a abyss of despair. This time, he realises that he has lost Lou.

Elisabeth intoxicates him with abominable lies about the woman he continues to love. It's only the beginning of a campaign of calumnies which she will continue to the end of her life.

Nietzsche is fragile, lovesick. First he revolts against his sister, then he swallows it all. After this, he writes some horrible things about Lou: "This little thin and dirty and nauseating monkey, with her false breasts and her sexual atrophy..."

Sexual atrophy: it is the first and only time, to my knowledge, that this has been said. And we can only be surprised that it seems that no-one else has, so to speak, put their finger on it.

I don't know what this "sexual atrophy" is, and even whether it exists, but it is probably another name for that misfortune that we attribute to Mme Récamier, the beautiful Juliette de Chateaubriand, those whom one calls "unavailable"[barré] but who are nevertheless the great seductresses of their times. It's this, or something similar, which had made of Lou "an asexual Messaline," as H.F.Peters wrote, and explains her implacable refusal of all intimate relations, the ardour she aroused, the force that she exerted...

But no-one ever saw or described the famous "barrier" which kept at a distance the lovers of Juliette Récamier. Of those which paralyse the pastor Gillot, which made Nietzsche despair, which afflicted Rée, which made of Lou this marble goddess, we could however furnish, with all due caveats, an attempt at explanation.

Lou may not have been simply a physiological "case", but a little girl who had some sort of incestuous experience.

What exactly? I don't know. Father, brothers, she had a large entourage of men who doted on her - this much is certain - excessively. She later protected herself from masculine sexuality with an implacable violence. This speaks for itself. I cannot prove that there is a relation of cause and effect, but I believe so.

It makes sense that nothing of this appears in the stories that Lou wrote during her childhood, except perhaps for an intoxicating intimacy with her father...

At Tautenburg, Nietzsche suffers alone, then, without ever resigning himself. Then he understands that Lou has definitively escaped him, that they will not live together ever, that Rée has taken her. And he begins to abhor the traitress.

It's now that a new blow falls: Wagner dies. The two events come one after the

other. Nietzsche is nothing but a mass of sorrow when he takes up his pen and produces, in ten days, the first part of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. The mystery of creation.

We are now in the beginning of 1883. In June, he produces with the same speed the second part.

An extraordinary book which is situated slightly on the margin of his own oeuvre, and where the notion of the "superman" first appears: "Man is something that must be overcome", preaches the prophet. The future, he says, belongs to the strong, to those who are un pitying, overflowing with health; these are the creators of new values. They love the earth, and every idea of the afterlife makes them laugh, because they know that all the gods are dead. They obey without fear the commandments of their will-to-power. Their goal is grandeur, not happiness. They live dangerously and accept without qualms the terrible truth that there is neither liberation nor exit from the wheel of eternal return. They are the lords of the earth who hate the herd, the mob, the humble, the sick and poor of spirit.

Erotic images abound, at the same time as allusions to the sexuality of the author. In summary, the "superman" is the inverse image of Nietzsche: everything that he is not and whose absence Lou made him feel to the extent of it draining all his energies.

Zarathustra says : "Woman is not capable of friendship. Women are still cats and birds, or, at best, cows."

What would have happened if Lou had shared her life and love with Nietzsche? We have the right to think that he wouldn't have written this book whose doctrine, that of the "superman", was to become in Nazi Germany, trafficked by Elisabeth, the bible of German thought. But without doubt it would be oversimplifying a little to put all of this weight on the rejection of a piteous lover by a young girl...

During the last years of her life, consumed by the syphilis which she was to die of, just like Baudelaire, like Maupassant - it was the AIDS of its time -, during these years where he was published once more, the notoriety of Nietzsche became considerable. She had never ceased to believe that it would be so. The great German philosophers are never forgotten. But none of them ever attained such global celebrity, outside of cultivated circles. We are struck with this in saying: "God is dead..." Between 1895 and 1900, Nietzsche and all his writings, essays, memories concerning him, are rediscovered.

In Berlin, Lou understands quickly the part she can play. Straight away she writes some articles for the major journals, the *Vossische Zeitung* and the *Neue Rundschau*, then a book, which received an uneven reception because it reproduced private letters giving the impression that there existed a great intimacy between herself and Nietzsche. He was still living; we could well reproach Lou for her bad taste.

Nevertheless, she was to become well-known thanks to her writings, and her book

still remains a primary reference text. One might say that it launched her.

But, all her life, she carried the mark of having "rejected" Nietzsche. No commentator spared her this recurrent grief.

In fact, what which we cannot pardon her for is for having been a woman capable of understanding the thought of Nietzsche and of making it clear. And the sound of that bell still resonates...

She was never bothered with it, but she had to suffer, amongst other attacks, four works by Elisabeth accusing her of being a Jew, fat, of displaying a feeble attachment to pleasure and comfort, which Nietzsche himself could never stand; and of having conceived a repugnant liaison with a priest from Saint Petersburg. Sometimes, the friends of Elisabeth found relief in insults.

Many long years later, Freud wrote to Lou:

"I am often irritated when I hear mentioned your relations with Nietzsche in terms that suggest you were quite hostile and which cannot at all correspond to reality. You have let it all pass, because you have become a *grand dame*. Won't you finally defend yourself in a dignified fashion?"

She never bothered.

Nietzsche is walking in the road, in Turin, when he suddenly throws his arms around the neck of an old coach-horse. A great commotion. His housekeeper sees him and rushes out. They transport Nietzsche, sobbing, to the hospital, where his old friend Overbeck comes to find him to take him to a psychiatric clinic, in Jena, where he will stay many years. He passes his last months at his mother's house, completely mute, and dies at Weimar, on 25 August 1900. He is fifty-five.

As far as we know, Lou was not excessively affected by his death. She admired him, but she did not love him.

IV

How wonderful life was, in the Berlin of the 1880s! The brilliance of intellectuals of every hue illuminates the city. Lou makes conquests everywhere amongst the writers, sociologists, scientists. She has fun. She is happy.

She lives with Paul in a three-room apartment, and he discovers unsuspected domestic virtues in her. It is she who manages their budget - the rent that the Russian state provides for her, the monthly allowance that Mme Rée allows her son - and, for the first time in his life, Paul will not be crippled by debt. His brother Georg is amazed.

But they do not live in their kitchen, far from it: they can be seen everywhere; in all the literary circles and groups. He is ever that bizarre, brilliant, funny, insomniac character, castrated, in a way, by Lou; he must of course have found some sort of enjoyment in it. As for her, protected by the armour of her declared chastity, she wrought, thanks to her slavish charm, no little devastation within these milieus usually the exclusive preserve of men.

She leaves for the country with one, promises another she will marry him, turning one against the other like fools - always carefully preserving her virginity. She had the effect amongst men, one might say, of a drug that however rarely tasted, they could not do without.

A brutal attack is directed at Lou by Elizabeth, notably with the support of Malwida and Mme Rée, in an attempt to destabilise her. It takes the form of pressurising Mme von Salomé into believing that it is imperative she recall her daughter to St Petersburg, on the pretext that in Berlin she will find only dissipation.

At the Rée's, things are getting serious! Paul's brother comes down on Lou's side, against their mother; the brothers Rée discuss, and decide that Lou must respond by publishing a book to prove to her mother that her occupation could not be more serious. Lou and Paul leave together for the Tyrol, in order to find some peace and to write, he a philosophical treatise, *The Origin of Moral Conscience*, she a psychological novel, *A Struggle for God*.

This novel, written on demand, was to receive the best critical notices of any that would follow it. Even if it is not a literary masterpiece, it is a success. The objective is therefore attained.

Mme von Salomé is swayed. A piquant detail: to ensure greater chance of success, Lou had published under a man's name: Henri Lou. The subterfuge had succeeded.

And Paul? To become a university professor, as he wishes, he must submit a dissertation to a university jury of his choice. But, wherever he presents his text, it ends up being refused... This, at the very same moment Lou is becoming a successful young author... A humiliating situation, even for a masochist!

Paul Rée turns to medicine. He has at his disposal an inherited fortune. He could donate it to the poor and destitute. His disinterest and altruism would become legendary.

As for the present, with Lou, it is over. Their friendship is intact, but they hardly see each other from one week to the next.

One evening, she tells him that she has met a certain Andreas, and that she plans to continue seeing him if Paul agrees. He acquiesces. He is not the type of man to make a scene. He leaves.

Outside, the rain is torrential; he returns to take shelter. Then he leaves again, but reappears to take a book. Dawn has broken before he definitively leaves. Lou recounts:

"I saw by the lamplight a small photograph of myself as a child, which I had given to Rée. Near to it, on a folded paper, he had written: 'Be well! Do not look for me!'"

The next morning, a workman brought his body back to the Inn. From the height of a cliff, he had plunged into the river, near the place where, more than fifteen years before, with Lou, they had passed their happiest years.

An end which seems strangely like a suicide.

Who was this Andreas who had obtained that which so many others had solicited in vain? The son of a German and an Armenian prince who had changed his name. Small, bearded, very dark, he was known in Berlin as the best specialist in Persian culture. He taught, but found himself always in trouble with the authorities, whom he couldn't stand. He had no fortune.

Where did his charm lie? The fact that Lou was to take his name into her own is a strong sign. She did not hide it, on the contrary.

Of an unhealthy sensibility, seeming always on the point of explosion, and in fact sometimes actually exploding, he has an intense relationship with nature, with animals, with plants, walking barefoot in the grass, eating vegetarian foods, never separated from his knife.

He had lived many years in Persia, where he had taken part in the mission sent by the Prussian government to observe the passage of the planet Venus. When the mission was recalled, he had refused to return and had survived by practising a very peculiar, and apparently useful form of medicine; he had become an expert on reptiles...not particularly useful for obtaining a job in Berlin! He gave personal lessons whilst awaiting a post at the university...

One day as they were sitting at table with Lou, he took out his knife and plunged it straight into his chest. She called for help, a doctor came and suspected Lou herself of having wielded the knife. This certainly isn't the young lady's style, but Andreas'

style is writ large in it. Why such a gesture? According to Lou, to make her marry him. He won. But she poses conditions: an unconsummated marriage, forever...

He accepts, persuaded that it is a mere matter of a young woman's caprice. But Lou proves uncompromising. He now tries persuasion, now the strong manner. One night, as she sleeps, he tries to take her. She half-awakes, gripping the man's throat, making him gasp. She opens her eyes and perceives with horror that she is in the process of strangling Andreas. A delicious conjugal embrace! She was to allow him no other in the space of forty years. How can we understand this attitude? One could suggest that in rebuffing Andreas after his having invaded her bed, she enjoyed exercising a power over him that she never had over her incestuous brother.

In addition, they had nothing to say to each other. At the end of his life, Andreas was to be found every day at the clinic where Lou would go to be operated on. He would be eighty-four. He stayed an hour with her, and the two spouses discovered that, for the first time in their life together, they started to have a proper conversation!

So, what sort of pact had they made together during more than a half-century? They hadn't spoken, they hadn't copulated and so had no children together, they had nothing in common through their work... She did not see him more than eight days a year, when she grew weary of her wandering.

Andreas yells? She lets him yell.

Have I mentioned that she had pushed this perversity even so far as having had the union blessed by the pastor Gillot? Mme Gillot's mother and Mme von Salomé had helped, a little dumbfounded by this most original marriage. And we are given to understand that it was indeed a mockery of the idea of marriage. It is traditional that the pastor wishes the couple divine grace and fecundity. Lou had censored this suggestion. Gillot had blessed nothing more than the intellectual association between two persons.

The unhappy Andreas can have had no doubt, at this instant, that he would be progressively reduced to the role of an old umbrella useful on rainy days. But then, there are men for whom this is their vocation...

For now, though, throughout her thirties, Lou deserts metaphysics to explore what women are to make of their sex. She is obviously preoccupied by the question. We do not ever find her embarking on the least adventure herself, but all that she writes bespeaks an ardent reflection on feminine sexuality, even though she never speaks of her own, always hidden. One could almost say 'cursed', but the term would be too strong here. What is sure is that this sexuality is alive and kicking.

It is a period where she writes terrible things. This, for example, in a letter to Frieda von Bülow, her dear friend and a celebrated explorer :

"To be a woman and accept the predominantly erotic destiny of woman, is at the same time to be deprived of all that a human being is capable of besides this."

Who has stated more cruelly and more profoundly that to which a woman can be reduced?

And here, where she rails against the idea of a professional life for women:
"The grandeur of woman resides in her absence of ambition. She is an organism closed in on herself who enjoys in herself the joy of existing."
Words equally scandalous as they are opportune, they dazzle with their acuity.

A man was to temporarily trouble her in her work: the writer and politician Georg Ledebour. Brilliant, full of energy and self-assurance, he tells her coldly that her marriage is a sham, that she is still a virgin. She is blown over by having been found out so. Ledebour makes her a forceful courtship; his personality, his intuition get the better of Lou's resistance. Not of her physical resistance, of course: that is not for the taking. But she wants to accept this love which is offered and which she believes could remain platonic.

The trouble is Andreas, who is little disposed to tolerate Ledebour. One evening when they are together with friends, he acts so badly, playing with his knife, that the company imagine he has already stabbed Ledebour. He is close to it. Ledebour, who loves Lou, pleads that she leave this madman, divorce him, that she go with him; he offers her everything a woman could desire, he thinks: social situation, fortune, but, despite the council of Frieda von Bülow, she does not manage to break with Andreas...

Ledebour, who would go on to a brilliant career, would never forgive Lou for this offence.

It was in the wake of this sinister affair, and after they had considered committing suicide together, that Lou and Andreas arrived at a new contract: divorce excepted, Lou could do as she wished, he would accept it. Andreas submitted; Lou, previously filling out as never before, went on to lose several kilos.

Fortunately, during this sad period she nourished some passionate female friendships: Frieda von Bülow, already mentioned, Helen Klodt Heydenfeldt - two young aristocratic women; Sophie Goudstikker, renowned photographer. All achieved great stature in their lifetimes, even if they were refractory with respect to what we call 'feminism', in vogue at the time in Berlin. They challenged the doctrine fundamentally: the liberation and all that followed it. To their eyes, women would be free when they obeyed only God. What a start, then! [Qu'elles recommencent donc!]

The correspondence, most abundant, between Lou and Frieda, was savagely mutilated by Lou herself. She evidently did not want a certain image of herself to become known. One cannot say of the fragments of paper any more than they themselves yield: the expression of some exalted sentiments... The liaison of Lou and Frieda von Bülow will remain essentially secret, just like the brief experiences which proved decidedly "awakening" for her. Rare amongst her fugitive partners were those who have spoken. One of the two, though, described her as "insatiable":
"She opened wide her blue eyes," he reported, " and cried: "Sperm! Sperm, I want

more!" She held what she called her 'little banquets'."

But something was to befall her mind, at thirty-five years old, which goes by only one name in all languages: it is Love. This was to leave behind it an enchanted trace: the dozens of poems written by Rainer Maria Rilke for the woman of his life.