"One of the Deep Race . . . Who by Far Came Closest to Me": Nietzsche and Paul Bourget

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ABSTRACT

Early in 1884, Nietzsche read Paul Bourget's Essais de psychologie contemporaine. That Nietzsche borrowed from Bourget without attribution in section 7 of The Case of Wagner *is widely known. Less well known is the extent of Nietzsche's borrowings. In this paper, I assess Nietzsche's continuous dialogue with Bourget. First, I indicate Bourget's significance for a remarkable range of fin de siècle writers. In valuing Bourget highly, Nietzsche was not eccentric but resembled his contemporaries. Secondly, I survey Nietzsche's borrowings from Bourget, showing that the famous borrowing in* The Case of Wagner *is hardly an isolated exception. Thirdly, I show that what Nietzsche learns from Bourget's treatment of Baudelaire goes well beyond the passage on literary* décadence. *A final section considers Bourget's sharp turn in his 1889 novel* Le disciple *away from the positivism of his mentor Hippolyte Taine. Nietzsche and Bourget share pedagogical concerns that would enable him to understand Bourget's turn, notwithstanding Nietzsche's hostility to the Catholicism that Bourget embraces.* Le disciple*'s appearance would not necessarily have dissuaded Nietzsche from the judgment of his 1888 notebooks: "Fromentin, Feuillet, Halévi, Meilhac, les Goncourt, Gyp, Pierre Loti — — — or to name one of the deep race, Paul Bourget, who by far came closest to me by himself — — —."*

1. Introduction

Early in 1884, Nietzsche read Paul Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, just after its publication in late 1883. That Bourget made a strong impression on Nietzsche is clear. Just after reading Bourget for the first time, Nietzsche copied into his notebooks a summary of a passage about literary *décadence* in the *Essais*, prefaced by the heading "The style of decadence in Wagner." The entry concludes with an exact reference to the *Essais* ("Bourget p. 25.").[1] Three years later, this passage appears almost verbatim in section 7 of *The Case of Wagner*, with no acknowledgment of Bourget. Nietzsche scholarship has long been aware of this particular borrowing. Less well known are the depth and extent of Nietzsche's borrowing from Bourget. It neither starts nor ends with *The Case of Wagner*.

In this paper, I assess Nietzsche's continuous dialogue with Bourget. It begins in the winter of 1883-1884 with his discovery of the *Essais* and ends in the autumn of 1888 with *Ecce Homo*, where Nietzsche places Bourget first on a list of "recent Frenchmen" whom he finds "charming company" (EH "Clever" 3/243).[2] My assessment proceeds in the following steps. First, as an antidote to the oblivion into which Bourget has fallen for twenty-first century readers, I briefly indicate Bourget's significance for a remarkable

1 1883, 24[6], CWFN 14.386. Entries from Nietzsche's notebooks are cited by year and group number, followed by section number, as these appear at Nietzsche Source: Digital Critical Edition (eKGWB), ed. Paolo d'Iorio. Whenever possible, these citations are followed by a reference to the appropriate volume of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, eds. Alan D. Schrift, Duncan Large, and Adrian del Caro (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), abbreviated as CWFN. The entry cited appears in CWFN, vol. 14, *Unpublished Fragments from the Period of* Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Summer 1882–Winter 1883/84), trans. Paul S. Loeb and David F. Tinsley (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

2 All citations to Nietzsche's published texts occur as parenthetical references, with abbreviations and section names or numbers, accompanied by page numbers to the following translations: *Ecce Hom and On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1966); *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1967); *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1966); *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

range of fin de siècle writers. In ranking Bourget as highly as he did, Nietzsche was not eccentric but resembled his contemporaries. Secondly, I survey the numerous borrowings from Bourget that one can find in Nietzsche's corpus. The survey is instructive in showing that the borrowing that appears in CW 7 is not an isolated exception. Thirdly, I argue that what Nietzsche learns from his reading of the first chapter of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* on Charles Baudelaire goes well beyond its well-known passage on literary *décadence.* In a final section, I consider Bourget's sharp turn in his 1889 novel *Le disciple* away from the positivism of his mentor Hippolyte Taine. What might Nietzsche have made of this turn? Giuliano Campioni, one of the few Nietzsche scholars to raise this question, claims that Nietzsche would have straightforwardly disapproved of Bourget's trajectory, since it reflects a dogmatic bent that is alien to Nietzsche. Taking Campioni as an interlocutor, I will argue for a different judgment about the relation between Nietzsche and Bourget. However opposed their ultimate conclusions, both writers share pedagogical concerns that would make Nietzsche significantly more receptive to the later Bourget than Campioni allows.

In short, the appearance of *Le disciple* would not have necessarily dissuaded Nietzsche from the judgment that he recorded in his 1888 notebooks: "Fromentin, Feuillet, Halévi, Meilhac, les Goncourt, Gyp, Pierre Loti — — — or to name one of the deep race, Paul Bourget, who by far came closest to me by himself — — —."[3]

2. Who was Paul Bourget?

Few today know about Paul Bourget (1852-1935). But in his own time, the man was widely celebrated (and sometimes reviled) by his fellow authors whose names are more familiar to us. Oscar Wilde called him "the master of the *roman psychologique*."[4] Henry James, another master of the psychological novel, carried on an extended correspondence with Bourget

3 1888, 25[9]. The CWFN volume that will provide English translations of notebook entries from this period has not yet appeared.

4 Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying* in *De Profundis, The Ballad of Reading Gaol and Other Writings*, ed. Ann Varty (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2002), 147.

for more than a decade.[5] Robert Louis Stevenson wrote him fan letters, nearly having a nervous breakdown when it appeared that Bourget might not reply.[6] (Eventually, he did.) Edith Wharton called him "the most dependable and the most indulgent friend one could imagine," even if she admitted that she disliked his novels.[7] Mark Twain judged him important enough to attack in an essay called "What M. Bourget Thinks of Us."[8] (Twain disliked *Outre-mer*, a book about his travels in the United States that was published in 1895.)

Before Bourget turned to writing novels and travel journals, he composed essays on prominent thinkers that he described as "a series of psychological studies."[9] The first five such essays, originally published in the Paris literary journal *Nouvelle Revue*, were collected and published as the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* in 1883. A successor volume, *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine*, appeared in 1885. (Nietzsche's annotated copy of this latter volume has been preserved.) The publication of the *Essais* created a minor sensation, as suggested by the fact that both Nietzsche and the *Atlantic Monthly* took immediate notice. What brought Bourget fame and fortune, however, were not the two volumes of the *Essais* but the many novels that he would write—beginning with 1885's *Cruelle énigme* and 1886's *Un crime d'amour.* Nietzsche particularly liked the latter novel. Writing to Overbeck, he pronounces that "in French literature, this year's grand success is *Un crime d'amour* by Paul Bourget: the first encounter between the two most intellectual currents of pessimism, Schopenhauer's (with the 'religion of pity') and Stendhal's (with razor-sharp and cruel

5 The Bourget-James correspondence, preserved in the Houghton Library at Harvard University, has never been edited or published.

6 As he tells Henry James in a letter from June 17, 1893. Earlier Stevenson told James that he "wrote Bourget a dedication; no use resisting; it's a love affair. O, he's exquisite, I bless you for the gift of him" (December 7, 1891). A dedication to Bourget appears at the beginning of Stevenson's 1892 travel memoir *Across the Plains.*

7 Edith Wharton and Adeline Tintner, "Memoirs of Bourget from Across the Sea," *Edith Wharton Review* 8 (Spring 1991): 30.

8 Mark Twain, "What M. Bourget Thinks of Us," *The North American Review* 160 (January 1895): 48-62.

9 Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris: Lemerre, 1883), 321. Hereafter cited parenthetically as "E" followed by page number.

psychology). Lectures are being given about this novel: which, at last, is once again 'chamber music literature' and not for the masses. In Germany, I hear, they call it a 'product of decay'–."[10] His evaluation of Bourget's third novel, 1887's *Andre Cornelis,* is less positive. Bourget, he tells Heinrich Köselitz, is "among the younger generation of novelists that is completely tyrannized by and jealous of Dostoevsky."[11] Writing to Hippolyte Taine later that year, Nietzsche tells him that he was pleased to come across Taine's name in the dedication of *Andre Cornelis*, although he does not like the book.[12]

Though Nietzsche knew and closely monitored Bourget's productions, the converse is not true. Until the twentieth century, Bourget seems to have had no idea who Nietzsche was. This is not surprising, since Nietzsche's books hardly sold in his lifetime, whereas Bourget's literary star only grew brighter. In 1894, five years after the publication of *Le disciple* (and Nietzsche's collapse), he was elected to the Académie française and subsequently nominated five times for the Nobel Prize in literature. Daring to put Bourget in the company of Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy, Havelock Ellis suggested that Bourget strives for the "same ideal" of needing "to reconstitute the complete man, instead of studying him in separate pieces; to put a living soul in the clothed body."[13] So evident was Bourget's ascendancy to literary fame that the introduction of the 1905 English translation of *Un crime d'amour* assures its readers that "as a novelist his reputation is secure."[14] This prediction has not aged well. One of the few works of Bourget scholarship to appear in the twenty-first century is titled *Avez-vous lu Paul Bourget?*[15] For most today, the answer is something like "I have not read him—and why would I?"

10 Nietzsche to Overbeck, April 10, 1886. I cite Nietzsche's letters by date, as they appear at eKGWB. Translations are my own.

11 Nietzsche to Köselitz, March 7, 1887.

12 Nietzsche to Taine, July 4, 1887.

13 Havelock Ellis, "A Note on Paul Bourget," in *Views and Reviews, First and Second Series* (London: Harmsworth, 1932), 60.

14 C. C. Starkweather, "Bourget and His Writings," in *A Love Crime*, by Paul Bourget (Paris: Société des Beaux-Arts, 1905), ix.

15 Marie-Ange Fougère and Daniel Sanguse, eds., *Avez-vous lu Paul Bourget?* (Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2007).

In what follows, I do not try to defend Bourget's novels on aesthetic grounds. Nor do I intend any apologia on behalf of his particular brand of Catholicism. I do, however, find it hard to dismiss Henry James's judgment that "Bourget is a very interesting mind—and figure altogether—and the first, easily to my sense, of all the talkers I have ever encountered."[16] Though James had reservations about most of Bourget's novels (with the exception of *La terre promise*), he held his travel writings in extraordinarily high regard and judged the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* a substantial contribution to psychological analysis. That Nietzsche shared this judgment is attested perhaps most dramatically by the fact that only after reading the *Essais* does he begin to style himself a "psychologist." When book 1 of *Beyond Good and Evil* closes with a tribute to "psychology" as "now again the path to the fundamental problems" (BGE 2 [32[), one cannot but wonder: How indebted is such "psychology" to what Nietzsche reads in the *Essais?*

Months before *Beyond Good and Evil*'s appearance, Nietzsche praises Bourget as "Stendhal's liveliest student" and his "true disciple." That praise occurs in an 1885 letter to Resa von Schirnhofer; in that same letter, he reminds Resa that he had shown her Bourget's *Essais* while the two were in Nice.[17] Three months later, writing this time from Sils Maria, he tells her that he is reading an advance copy of the *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine*. [18] In 1886, Nietzsche asks his publisher to send Bourget a complimentary copy of *Beyond Good and Evil.*[19] He would expect Bourget to recognize himself in that text's flattering references to "psychologists" and French psychologists in particular (see, e.g., BGE 218 [146]).

However forgotten Paul Bourget is today, he was continually on Nietzsche's mind from his discovery of the *Essais* in the winter of 1883–1884 to the composition of his last works in 1888. Accordingly, readers of Nietzsche have a strong motive to wonder how deep and how extensive Bourget's impact on Nietzsche might have been.

16 Henry James, writing to Charles Eliot Norton, July 4, 1892. In *Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1920), 199.
17 Nietzsche to Resa von Schirnhofer, March 11, 1885.
18 Nietzsche to Resa von Schirnhofer, June 1885.
19 Nietzsche to C. G. Naumann, August 2, 1886.

3. Some Nietzschean Borrowings from Bourget

Among the compliments that one musician can pay to another, recognizing him as a kindred spirit, is to steal his licks. It is not difficult to locate any number of phrases and passages that Nietzsche lifts from Bourget. An aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil* concludes with this declaration: "The fatalism of the weak-willed embellishes itself surprisingly when it can pose as '*la religion de la souffrance humaine*'; that is *its* 'good taste'" (BGE 21 [29–30]). "La religion de la souffrance humaine"—"the religion of human suffering"—are the closing words of Bourget's 1886 novel *Un crime d'amour*. Nietzsche was sufficiently enamored of the phrase to use it again—but striking the adjective "*humaine*"—in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, composed one year later. It appears in the Third Essay's attack on the ascetic ideal: "I should like to know how many shiploads of sham idealism, heroic trappings and grand-word-rattles, how many tons of sugared sympathy-spirits (distillers: *la religion de la souffrance*), how many 'noble-indignation' stilts for the aid of the spiritually flatfooted, how many *comedians* of the Christian-moral ideal would have to be exported from Europe today before its air would begin to smell fresh again" (GM III.26/159).

This is not the only borrowing from Bourget to appear in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. In the Second Essay, Nietzsche claims that pain must be "translated into the imaginative and psychical and adorned with such innocent names that even the tenderest and most hypocritical conscience is not suspicious of them ('tragic pity' is one such name; '*les nostalgies de la croix*' is another" (GM II.7 [68]). Nietzsche lifts this latter phrase from a sonnet that Bourget published in 1875 under the title "*Nostalgie de la Croix*."[20]

A still more dramatic borrowing appears at the outset of *On the*

20 In Paul Bourget, *La vie inquiè*te (Paris: Lemerre, 1875), 198–99. Bourget's "anxious life" persisted long after the composition of this early sonnet. On January 10, 1891, Alice James writes in her diary that the princess of Monaco told her brother Henry that Bourget "was dining with her one day, when he sat speechless wrapped in gloom for a long time; suddenly bursting into tears he rushed from the room; on being followed, he was found sobbing with his hands, and on being asked what the matter was, he explained: 'La vie! la vie! la vie est si amère!' He is now honeymooning in Algiers, but still in despair" (*The Diary of Alice James*, ed. Leon Edel [New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1934], 164).

Genealogy of Morality. "We are unknown to ourselves, we knowers; we ourselves to ourselves: that has its good reason," declares Nietzsche in the first sentence of its Preface.[21] Many a reader has taken Nietzsche to have stated a revolutionary discovery about the elusiveness of self-knowledge, or to have put an old discovery in a newly arresting way. But the reader of the *Nouveaux essais de psychologie* will recollect these words: "tant il est vrai que nous sommes obscurs à nous-mêmes, et que notre vraie personne s'agite, s'ingénie, s'accroit, dépérit en nous à notre insu."[22] I quote the French so that the reader may observe Nietzsche's mimicry of Bourget's style, as indicated most visibly by the construction "nous sommes obscurs à nous-mêmes."

This is among the 162 passages in Nietzsche's copy of the *Nouveaux essais* to have been marked in pencil by Nietzsche himself. Since Nietzsche himself flagged this passage before composing the famous first sentence of the *Genealogy*'s Preface, any denial that he was directly inspired by Bourget on this point seems quite implausible. Many discoveries await the Nietzsche scholar who examines his heavily annotated copy of the *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine* in detail.[23]

Remaining within *On the Genealogy of Morals*, one can lengthen the list of likely borrowings. It would not be too much to say that the *Genealogy* is "bookended" by references to Bourget. The work concludes by glossing the desire to escape "all appearance, change, becoming, death, from longing itself" as a "*will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion, against the most fundamental presuppositions of life" (GM III.28 [163]). Three years earlier, Nietzsche would have read something very much like "will to nothingness" in the opening chapter of the first volume of the *Essais*, where Bourget ascribes to pessimism "l'horreur de l'Être et le goût,

21 I have given a literal rendering of this sentence in order to emphasize its syntactical correspondence to Bourget's sentence. Kaufmann's more idiomatic version reads: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—and with good reason" (GM Preface [15]).

22 Bourget, *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris, Lemerre, 1886), 142.

23 Such a scholar might attempt something along the lines of what Benedetta Zavatta has recently done with Nietzsche's annotations of Emerson in her *Individuality and Beyond: Nietzsche Reads Emerson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

l'appétit furieux du Néant" (E 17). The phrase recurs two pages later in Bourget, where he speaks of the need of the psychologist "to reconstitute the history of this *goût du néant*" (E 19).

But can we be sure that Nietzsche knowingly borrowed these phrases from Bourget? Did he deliberately transcribe them without attribution? Regarding such questions, it is helpful to consider the evidence from the 1884 notebook into which Nietzsche copies a passage from the third section of the opening chapter of the *Essais*. Here is the notebook entry:

> *Wagner's* **style** of **decadence:** the single *phrase* becomes *sovereign*, subordination and orientation become random. Bourget p. 25.[24]

The existence of this notebook entry—combined with the passage from CW 7 where Nietzsche reproduces the passage in Bourget virtually verbatim, but without attribution—is proof that Nietzsche was capable of knowingly borrowing and intentionally withholding attribution. As Descartes tells us, it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once. No deceiver is a one-time offender, at least not for long. The same holds for one author who borrows from another, without acknowledgment. If an author is capable of doing such a thing once, he can do it again. Awareness of one such act justifies the suspicion of others.

Here is the passage that appears in the first edition of Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*:

> The same law governs the development and the *décadence* of that other organism which is language. A style of *décadence* is that where the unity of the book is decomposed, so that it gives way to the independence of the page; where the page is decomposed, so that it gives way to the independence of the phrase; and where the phrase gives way to the independence of the word. Examples abound in our present literature which corroborate this fruitful hypothesis. (E 25)

24 1883, 24[6]; CWFN 14.386 (emphases in original).

Compare this passage from Bourget with these words from *The Case of Wagner*:

> For the present I merely dwell on the question of *style.* —What is the sign of every *literary* décadence? That life no longer dwells in the whole. The word becomes sovereign and leaps out of the sentence, the sentence reaches out and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the expense of the whole—the whole is no longer a whole (CW 7 [170]).

Whether the subject is an organism, a society, or a book, there lurks the possibility of disintegration and death—that is, *décadence*. Parts overleaping wholes, parts crushing or suffocating the whole. But why is Nietzsche so drawn to this proposal? Not, I think, because he regards it as Bourget's most arresting or characteristic idea. (It is neither.) Rather, he judges it a handy weapon to be used for attacking Wagner where he is most vulnerable. Nietzsche has no interest in denying Wagner's power to compose short, beautifully haunting passages that express languid melancholy, and to do so in tones no less potent than Baudelaire's poems. His obvious weakness, Nietzsche says, lies in his "incapacity for giving organic form," his inability to build a convincing whole. "Take any of Wagner's 'knots' and examine it under the microscope—and you'll have to laugh, I promise" (CW 9 [175]). His peculiar combination of microscopic brilliance and macroscopic poverty recalls the Goncourt brothers, "who are quite generally pertinent to Wagner's style: one feels a kind of compassion for so much distress" (CW 7 [170]). That Nietzsche formed this judgment solely by reading the *frères Goncourt* and comparing them to Wagner is possible but unlikely. More probable is that he was influenced by reading and annotating the central chapter of the *Nouveaux essais* on the Goncourt brothers—and especially its long final section, titled "Questions on Style."[25]

Some commentators on Nietzsche assume that he borrows from Bourget's general theory of *décadence* in order to formulate his own,

25 See *Nouveaux essais*, 180–98.

similarly general theory of *décadence*.[26] For those who only read page 25 of the *Essais* and compare that page with CW 7, such an intention appears plausible—even obvious. Nevertheless, it is a misconstrual. The reason is simple: Bourget does not himself intend to state a general theory of *décadence* in his own name. Rather, his aim is to portray *Baudelaire* as a "theorist of *décadence*." Bourget's intention is not to use Baudelaire as a proxy for his own theory of *décadence,* but to gain insight into what is singular about the tormented soul of Baudelaire. Only then will he be able to sketch two "points of view" from which the advantages and disadvantages of *décadence* can be surveyed.

In order profitably to compare what Bourget says about *décadence* with what Nietzsche says, the reader should not leap to the third section of the first chapter of the *Essais* and compare the passage to its counterpart in CW 7. Instead, he must see how Bourget works up to the theme of section 3. To do so, he must follow the argument that Bourget makes in the opening chapter's first two sections. To these sections, I now turn.

4. From "Pessimism" to "Irrevocable Nihilism" and *Décadence*: Bourget's Case Study of Baudelaire

To lift the passage on *décadence* that appears in the third section of Bourget's chapter on Baudelaire out of its context virtually guarantees that one will misunderstand both Bourget and Nietzsche. That commentators would focus almost exclusively on the final section of Bourget's chapter on Baudelaire is understandable. The title of that section ("*Théorie de la Décadence*"), along with the directness of Nietzsche's textual borrowing from that section, seem to justify such a focus. In what follows, I will show that the first two sections of the Baudelaire chapter exert a still deeper influence on Nietzsche.

26 Something like this assumption pervades the otherwise insightful treatments found in Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 121; Andrew Huddleston, *Nietzsche on the Decadence and Flourishing of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 118; Kaitlyn Creasy, "Nietzschean Decadence as Psychic Disunity," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 55, no. 2 (2024), 130.

Bourget begins his essay on Baudelaire with an air of modesty. He says he will discuss three aspects of Baudelaire's conception of love, as reflected in his poetry. But Baudelaire's poems interest the author of *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* only insofar as they reveal his person. They show, according to Bourget, that he is "at one and the same time a mystic, a libertine, and an analyst" (E 5). Clearly enough, the poems attest to what we might call his mystical sensualism. He worships the raised figure of his Madonna, who gives his parched soul a taste of the eternal. But with no less zeal, he enjoys the pleasures of Venus. Not just ordinary Venus or wise Venus, but Venus at her blackest and bloodiest, driven by "criminal daring" (E 6). Bourget quotes "Une martyre": "Alive, in spite of all your love, You could not satisfy the vindictive one. Did he then sate his immense desire on your inert and acquiescing flesh?" (E 7). After praising this poem's special power, Bourget remarks that it could bear an epigraph drawn from Sade's bedroom: "Here there is torture!" (E 7).

In Baudelaire, Bourget says, we discern "the thirst for an infinite purity mixed with a devouring hunger for the most voluptuous joys of the flesh" (E 7-8). But so what? Both the quest for the infinite and the search for bodily pleasures have long been associated with eros. To perceive what Bourget considers singular about Baudelaire, we must consider the third aspect: *l'analyseur*. Baudelaire has the power to stand aloof from his mystical debauchery. He can watch it, he can think about it, he can dissect it into its constitutive parts. But his analytic power ensures that both his mysticism and his libertinism are doomed to a self-conscious frustration that knows its own impotence. Both have been "codified into formulas in the brain, which decomposes the sensations with the precision of a prism that decomposes light" (E 8). In this way, Bourget remarks, "the analyst's intellect cruelly remains in control." *Cruellement*, he says, because once the analyst arrives, he never leaves. His watchful eye ensures the mystic's inability to abandon himself to transcendental ecstasy. He makes it impossible for the libertine to lose himself entirely in sensual pleasure.

Mystic, libertine, analyst: each suffuses Baudelaire's poetry. Bourget infers that "in this man, three men live at the same time" (E 8). In his essay's first section, what he emphasizes about this peculiar combination

is its novelty. "These three men are very modern, and more modern yet is their union. The end of religious faith, the way of life in Paris, and the scientific mind of the period worked together to fashion, then to meld, these three types of sensibility, long separated to the point where they seemed utterly distinct" (E 8).

Those lacking psychological depth are apt to speak of "religion" as a binary, as when they blithely categorize themselves or others as either "religious" or "not religious." As a psychologist, Bourget knows better. Baudelaire's impiety is clear enough; he rejects much of his Catholic upbringing. But that should not obscure the imprint that Catholicism made on him. "Can one still not find, in our impious century"—asks Bourget—"enough Catholicism for a child's soul to soak up mystical love of an unforgettable intensity? Faith will fade, but mysticism, even when expelled from the intelligence, will persist in sensation" (E 9). It is no accident, Bourget observes, that Baudelaire spontaneously uses liturgical terms "to address a mistress and to celebrate a voluptuous pleasure" (E 10). Catholicism never entirely leaves his sensibility. But it mingles with the city dweller of Paris, who "slept in brothels and knew the rancor of broad daylight that revealed the faded curtains and the even more faded face of the bought woman." To some, this hybrid of residual Catholic and Parisian sophisticate might seem exotic. But is the way of life sustainable? As Baudelaire "pursued the visceral, mindless task that rises from the nerve endings to the brain and, for a second, relieves the pain of thought" (E 11), his search for pleasure becomes ever more manic. The solace is brief. Ever-increasing doses are required for the same effect.

For Bourget, these are psychological truths. His primary intention is not to moralize. He wants the reader of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* to understand Baudelaire, and even to admire him. We can praise the "life of the literary figure who is always observing," as Bourget puts it. However deeply plunged into debauchery, Baudelaire kept his mind intact. Indeed, he did not merely "preserve it—what am I saying? He sharpened the edge of his intelligence where others would have dulled their minds forever" (E 11). He is, Bourget says near the end of the essay, a higher type, an "homme supérieur," who had no time for stupidity (E 31).

What does any of this have to do with Nietzsche? Setting aside the striking invocation of *homo superior*, we may consider the relation between Bourget's diagnosis of Baudelaire as one in whom three men live at the same time, fighting for dominance, and *Beyond Good and Evil*'s assertion that in a single person, every drive seeks to represent itself as the "legitimate *master* of all the other drives" (BGE 6 [13–14]). When Nietzsche refers to "soul as subjective multiplicity" (BGE 12 [20]), the reader of Bourget's *Essais* will nod and think, "Yes, this sounds familiar." I am not claiming that Bourget is the unique source of Nietzsche's depth psychology. That cannot be true, since we find Nietzsche invoking and theorizing about the drives in both "Schopenhauer as Educator" (particularly section 6) and *Human, All Too Human*. But Nietzsche's discovery of Bourget in 1884 gives him the impetus for placing the drives (and "psychology" in general) close to the center of his thought.

To test further the suspicion that Bourget inspires the explicitly psychological turn (or return) that begins with *Beyond Good and Evil*, we may consider the next section—the central section—of his chapter on Baudelaire. This section bears the title "Le pessimisme de Baudelaire." On what grounds does Bourget ascribe "pessimism" to Baudelaire? His starting point is the commonplace that Baudelaire is "unhealthy." To discern what makes him so, Bourget proposes that the psychologist must probe the depths of *l'âme mystique,* his "mystical soul." What most impresses this soul is the experience of "God as personal and living." Baudelaire's early childhood was mystical in this sense. It had nothing to do with "faith," where "faith" means "professed belief in a set of religious ideas." Many people, Bourget emphasizes, are content with a "faith in ideas"—that is, "an abstract faith that lends itself to all sorts of transformations." Such people "need a set of beliefs, but not a vision." What their youthful selves might have called "faith in God," Faith 1.0, as it were, is easily replaced by Faith 2.0, a different set of beliefs that they and their peers find more inspiring. Bourget notes multiple examples: a belief "in Liberty, or Revolution, or Socialism, or Science." Such beliefs can easily be combined with others, including beliefs in "Humanity or Progress." (Perhaps these combinations yield Faith 3.0.)

In none of these versions does faith have any attraction for the mystical soul. Such a soul knows God by living with God, Bourget says, in the way that "we live with a loving father who knows us, who understands us" (E 19–20). For *l'âme mystique*, "faith" is irrelevant and beside the point. "It *sees* God" (E 9; emphasis in original). Baudelaire's disease arises from the conflict between his mystical soul and his inner analyst. His youthful experience of God was just an illusion, an artifact of his own making that has no contact with reality—or so says the analyst within. But the mystical soul never stops desiring union with the divine, or at least the pleasure that attends such union. As Bourget says, "when one has known the intoxication of opium, that of wine disgusts and seems trivial" (20). What happens when opium does not work? "In his darkest hours, he tries to return to the mystical world by way of horror" (21). Though Baudelaire's milieu is Paris, what he wants is Paradise. A simpler soul might be content with Paris. But because Baudelaire cannot simplify his polyphonic being, he is unable to rid himself of his basic desire for transcendence, even as he consciously denies the possibility. The dissonance (*désaccord*) between his milieu and his aspirations "produces a moral crisis and a tortured heart" (E 12).

We can now see why Bourget explicitly attributes "pessimism" to Baudelaire. There is a gap between what he wants and how things are, and this gap will never close. No effort, or series of efforts, can change this basic reality. Optimism had tended to be the norm for the French. What makes Baudelaire a pessimist, Bourget says, is his defiance of his "hereditary optimism" in favor of "the supreme negation." Accordingly, Bourget asserts Baudelaire's privileged status as an outstanding "case" (*cas*) of this new phenomenon. "He can be cited as the perfect exemplar of the Parisian pessimist, two terms that would at one time have seemed strangely yoked together" (E 17).

Baudelaire is a pessimist. As such, he resembles others whose basic attitude to life is negative. Bourget names Schopenhauer as well as the Saint Petersburg conspirators and the "driven misanthropy of naturalist novelists" (E 15). But Bourget goes further. Baudelaire is not just a writer whose doctrinal pessimism might conceal a deeper optimism. No, he speaks with "the bitter and definitive imprecation that the vanquished spirit

hurls at existence as he sinks into irrevocable nihilism, here in the French sense of the term" (E 18). Indeed, reflection on the three psychological elements that constitute Baudelaire will lead us to discover—Bourget says explicitly—the "history of the taste for nothingness of the disillusioned Catholic, who has become a libertine analyst" (E 19).

I have already remarked on the correspondence between Bourget's "*le gôut du néant*" and Nietzsche's "will to nothingness." Now I want to mention five psychological consequences that Bourget infers from Baudelaire's particular brand of pessimism:

1. First, he bears special contempt toward those who substitute for God a concept, or a social or political program, as that which endows life with meaning (E 20, E 31).
2. Secondly, despite his felt emptiness, he continues to live—but he can do so only by means of an ever-larger dose of stimulants to "fix or deceive this emptiness." The thirst for a real infinity, when conjoined to "the absence of any belief in a true paradise," seems to require an "artificial paradise" (E 21).
3. Third, Baudelaire's way of living is hard on the nerves. We see in Baudelaire the "sinister incapacity" for "a nervous system too overworked" to experience a "single complete *frisson* of pleasure." Eventually, the libertine will be no longer capable of arousal, let alone love (E 22).
4. As the ability to satisfy his sensuality grows weaker, he will become increasingly cruel. He will dream of inflicting pain (E 22).
5. His ultimate response to reality and life, as he knows them, is to seek revenge (E 13, E 15, E 18).

For each of these five consequences, one can readily find analogues in Nietzsche's texts. Contempt for God-substitutes is a theme that Nietzsche sounds before he reads Bourget, as attested by aphorism 109 of *The Gay Science*, which he wrote two years before discovering the *Essais*. Something similar might be said about the second point. The "artificial paradise" that Bourget attributes to Baudelaire recalls the construction

of the "worlds behind" (*Hinterwelten*) that Zarathustra attributes to those who despise the earth (Z I.3 [29]). For each of these analogues, Nietzsche might find agreeable corroboration in the *Essais* of ideas at which he had arrived independently. The third point, however, points more clearly to the possibility of direct influence. Just as Bourget speaks of Baudelaire's damaged nervous system, so Nietzsche points to Wagner's "overexcited sensibility" and "his taste that required ever stronger spices." He even adds a French sentence: "*Wagner est une névrose*" (CW 5). Regarding the fourth point: that the desire to inflict pain is a compensation, rooted in a decay of sensuality or a defect of the "feeling of power," is a theme that Nietzsche sounds in the 1882 *Gay Science* before he reads Bourget (see aphorism 13), but develops more fully in the *Genealogy*, after he has read Bourget. As for the fifth point, *Zarathustra* anticipates Bourget's diagnosis of the psychological type that seeks to enact revenge against reality. But Nietzsche will greatly enlarge the point in the works that he composes after discovering Bourget, particularly Book V of the 1887 *Gay Science*. Giuliano Campioni has persuasively suggested that Nietzsche's articulation of the "ascetic ideal" as it exists in the ostensibly unbelieving scientist who pursues truth for its own sake, regardless of the cost, corresponds closely to the portrait of Hippolyte Taine drawn in the fourth chapter of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*.[27]

For the purposes of analysis, I have distinguished five different points of contact between Nietzsche and Bourget. But these points might be regarded as rays that converge at a single point. If one were to give a name to this point, what would it be? For Bourget, the name should reflect the character of the man in whom they converge. His preferred name is revealed in these words: "Voilà l'homme de la décadence" (E 22-23). "*Décadence*" is the fitting name for the elusive center where Baudelaire's physiological and psychological traits converge. That Nietzsche had heard the term "*décadence*" and used it himself before he read Bourget is evident but trivial. The interesting question is not just about a term.

27 Giuliano Campioni, "Nietzsche and 'the French Psychologists': Stendhal, Taine, Ribot, Bourget," in *Nietzsche and the Problem of Subjectivity*, eds. João Constâncio, Maria Branco, and Bartholemew Ryan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 225.

It concerns *décadence* as a concept that has impressive synthetic power. For Bourget and the later Nietzsche alike, *décadence* promises to bring together phenomena, psychological and physiological, that are diverse but related. Bourget says that *l'homme de la décadence* has "preserved an incurable nostalgia for his ancestors' beautiful dreams," and by his excesses has "dried up in himself the sources of life" (E 23). Just so for the later Nietzsche: anything that impoverishes life by fleeing reality, often by looking backward to an alleged "ideal," is associated with *décadence*.

In his 1888 works, Nietzsche seems altogether smitten by the unifying power of *décadence.* This is no accident. It suggests his ability to recollect what he gained from his reading of Bourget's essay. In 1888, as he writes in *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche will turn back to the page of the *Essais* that he had noted four years earlier. He decides to plagiarize it.

5. Judging *Décadence*: Bourget's Perspectivism vs. Nietzsche's Moralism

Nietzsche's conscious decision not to credit Bourget is continuous with the rhetorical persona in *The Case of Wagner*—that of an author whose penetrating thought about *décadence* eschews outside authorities. All he needs, it seems, are his experiences of himself, music, and Wagner. This persona should not, however, blind us to the possibility of *The Case of Wagner*'s deep dependence on Bourget. This possibility extends to Nietzsche's determination to treat Wagner as a "case."

In writing about the five subjects of the *Essais*, Bourget explicitly treats each author as a particular "case" of a more general malady. Baudelaire, he says, is an "especially successful case [*'cas' les plus réussis*] of the nihilistic negation that flows from *décadence*" (E 17). Near the end of the *Essais*, he asks what he has accomplished "in this series of psychological studies" (E 321). His response is that he has discovered what is common to a diverse set of authors: a poet (Baudelaire), a historian (Renan), a novelist (Flaubert), a philosopher (Taine), and a "composite artist" in whom critique and imagination are united (Stendhal). "In these five Frenchmen who are so valuable, I have encountered the same disgusted philosophy

of universal nothingness" (E 322). Here lies an important affinity between Bourget and Nietzsche. In *The Case of Wagner*, Nietzsche treats Wagner as a particularly instructive "case" (*Fall*) of a phenomenon that extends far beyond his own intentions—one that seems no less universal than "modernity" itself (CW Preface [156]).

Perhaps it is too much to say that *The Case of Wagner* owes both its title and its fundamental conception to Bourget. Nevertheless, Nietzsche's treatment of Wagner as a "case" of *décadence* owes something to the prior example of Bourget.[28] The primary difference between Nietzsche's method and Bourget's, it might seem, is that Nietzsche focuses intensively on a single case, that of Wagner, whereas Bourget considers many cases—five in the *Essais* of 1883 and five more in the *Nouveaux Essais*. But on closer inspection, this difference seems minimal. Nietzsche also considers multiple cases of *décadence*—most explicitly, Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols* and himself in *Ecce Homo.* Moreover, the multiple authors taken by the "Expeditions of an Untimely Man" in *Twilight* as subjects for psychological analysis might be seen as additional "case studies."

If Nietzsche shares with Bourget the basic idea of approaching *décadence* through a study of cases, it does not follow that there are no significant methodological differences between them. Although Bourget prides himself on the diversity of figures that he analyzes, none of them are musicians or composers of music. For a sensibility as intensely musical as Nietzsche's, this is a major omission. Any study of modern *décadence* that makes no reference to music is bound to be incomplete—perhaps even subphilosophical. "Others may be able to get along without Wagner; but the philosopher is not free to do without Wagner" (CW Preface [156]). For Nietzsche, what lies at the heart of a culture is bound to elude any discourse that operates in images or words. The only thread that leads one through the labyrinth is music. Therefore, *The Case of Wagner* presumes that only by paying close attention to modernity's most emblematic musician,

28 See E 186 on the contrast between "un cas particulier" and "la loi commune qui gouverne tous les cas," a contrast observed by Hugh Davidson in his valuable article "The *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* and the Character of Adrien Sixte," *Modern Philology* 46 (August 1948): 37.

Wagner, can we uncover the depths of its most characteristic condition, *décadence*. Nietzsche was aware that Bourget's understanding of music was shallow at best. In autumn 1888, he tells Malwida von Meysenbug that Bourget lived near him, and that he would have sought Bourget's counsel on many things, but not music, because "he understands nothing *in rebus musicis et musicantibus*."[29]

I have argued that Bourget inspires Nietzsche's decision to see Wagner as a particular "case" of a more general malady—namely, *décadence*. But what does Nietzsche specifically take from the passage of page 25 of the *Essais* that he reproduces without attribution? To approach this question, it is necessary to look intently at the immediate context of the passage as it appears in the *Essais*. A casual reader who notices that the third section of Bourget's Baudelaire chapter is titled "*Théorie de la Décadence*" is likely to assume that Bourget means to formulate a general "theory of *décadence*." But is this what Bourget is actually doing? Consider its opening:

> If a very special nuance of life, if a new manner of interpreting pessimism, already makes Baudelaire's mind a psychological instrument of a rare order, what distinguishes him in the literature of our age is that he has marvelously understood and almost heroically exaggerated this particularity and this novelty. He realized that he had come late to a senescent civilization and, rather than deplore his lateness in the manner of La Bruyère and Musset, he rejoiced in it—I was going to say, *honored* it. He was a man of *décadence*, he has made himself into a theorist of *decadence*. This is perhaps the most unsettling characteristic of this unsettling figure. This is perhaps what exerts the most disturbing seduction on a contemporary soul. (*E* 23-24)

Here, Bourget is not stating a theory of *décadence* in his own name. Rather, he is showing how Baudelaire styles himself as a "*théoricien* of *décadence*,"

29 Nietzsche to Malwida von Meysenbug, October 4, 1888.

one whose example might inspire others. (Whatever "*théoricien*" means here, it obviously does not refer to anything like a detached academic who "has a theory.") Baudelaire is a singular case, but he writes poems that resonate with others. His art inspires emulation. The title "*Théorie de la Décadence*" does not by itself authorize the search for a general "theory of *décadence*" in Bourget, which one might proceed to compare and contrast with some other "theory of *décadence*" that we find in Nietzsche. (Or more likely, *impose* on Nietzsche.)

Let us look more closely at the place in the *Essais* that comes just before the famous passage that Nietzsche transcribes. Bourget writes:

> By the word décadence, one readily designates the state of a society that produces too many individuals who are unsuited for the labors of communal life. A society should be compared to a living organism. Like an organism, it can be resolved into a federation of lesser organisms, which themselves can be resolved into a federation of cells. The individual is the social cell. For the whole organism to function with energy, it is necessary for the organisms that compose it to function with energy, but with a subordinate energy; and for these lesser organisms themselves to function with energy, it is necessary that their component cells function with energy, but with a subordinate energy. If the energy of the cells becomes independent, the organisms that compose the total organism similarly cease to subordinate their energy to the total energy, and the anarchy which is established constitutes the *décadence* of the whole. The social organism does not escape this law, and it enters into *décadence* as soon as the individual life is exaggerated under the influence of acquired well-being and of heredity. (E 24-25)

Since both a living organism and a human society are wholes composed of parts, both can disintegrate. Whatever promotes disintegration, and therefore death, is constitutive of "the *decádence* of the whole." But what happens if we consider what Bourget calls "that other organism which is language"? If language can develop, can it also disintegrate? Can it too be

a subject of *decádence*? Bourget answers this question yes by constructing an analogy between a living organism, a human society, and a book composed of language. As each is subject to disintegration and death, each is vulnerable to *decadence*. It would seem that Bourget's judgment of *décadence* is straightforwardly negative.

Yet this is precisely the point where Bourget the psychologist wants to hesitate rather than moralize. There are, Bourget asserts, two different and indeed contradictory "points of view" from which one may judge decadent human societies, as well as the decadent literature produced by their authors. The first, he says, is characteristic of statesmen and moralists. Their main preoccupation is the flourishing of the whole, gauged according to the "quantity of force that the social mechanism is able to produce" (E 26). The smaller the quantum of energy, the more likely the society is to fall apart and die. This point of view, Bourget says, is legitimate. Perhaps it is the only standpoint available to the responsible statesman. But for the psychologist, another perspective presents itself. The psychologist can acknowledge the peculiar qualities of the solitary artist, the delicate sensibility, the free-thinker who rejects illusion, prejudice, and fanaticism. These qualities will not adapt him to society; they will probably hasten his death. But however doomed such individuals or societies are, they have their own value. "Is it not the fatal lot, as it were, of the exquisite and rare to fail before brutality? One might well avow such a failing and prefer the defeat of Athens in its *décadence* to the triumph of the violent Macedonian" (E 28). From the psychologist's perspective, neither success nor longevity is a criterion of value. *Décadent* individuals and cultures alike contribute much to what Bourget calls the "rich treasure of human accomplishment" (E 28).

The same kind of judgment is available in the domain of literary *decadence*. Bourget acknowledges that the works of the Goncourt brothers—to which Nietzsche explicitly compares Wagner's operas, not coincidentally—are prime instances of literary *décadence*. Their idiosyncratic choice of words is in tension with the sentence, the page, the whole—so much so, Bourget says in 1883, that perhaps in fifty years their style will be completely unintelligible. For the kind of literary critic

whose temperament resembles that of the statesman or moralist, the only judgment can be negative. But from the psychological point of view, the Goncourts might be treasured precisely because their style is inaccessible to the masses. Against moralizing detractors, "les théoriciens de la décadence" can mount this reply: "What does it matter? Is the aim of the writer to be a perpetual candidate for the universal suffrage of the ages? We delight in what you call our corrupt style, and we delight in all those who belong to our refined race and our time" (E 28).

Such passages from the *Essais*, playing one point of view off another and refusing to condemn either, anticipate the "perspectivism" for which the later Nietzsche becomes famous. They might help explain why Nietzsche experienced Bourget as a kindred spirit.

But can the kinship last? Its strictly temporary character seems evident. Shortly after Nietzsche's collapse in January 1889, Bourget will publish his next novel, *Le disciple*—an exposure of what he regards as the moral bankruptcy of his former mentor Hippolyte Taine. Six years later, he will write *Outre-mer*, an account of his eight-month stay in the United States in which he refers to himself as a "Christian by desire."[30] In another six years, in 1901 (not long after Nietzsche's death), Bourget will formally return to the Roman Catholic Church.

The difference between Bourget's trajectory and Nietzsche's disposition is bound to strike the reader as a contrast than which no greater can be conceived. On the one hand, we see Bourget's retreat to dogmatism. On the other hand, we see Nietzsche's fearless passion for knowledge, which he never hesitates to link to his godlessness. It seems that Bourget is one of the "apostates" described by Zarathustra, shamefully "crawling back to the Cross" (Z III.8 [155]). This is the kind of story that Giuliano Campioni tells. Once a deep psychologist who fully deserved the respect that Nietzsche gave him, Bourget turns into a clumsy Catholic moralist who becomes a supporter of the monarchist group *Action française*. Nietzsche, by contrast, has none of these defects. He freely

30 Paul Bourget, *Outre-mer: Notes sur L'Amérique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Lemerre, 1895), 139. Cf. Paul Bourget, *Outre-Mer: Impressions of America* (London: Unwin, 1895), 191.

draws upon Bourget in order to develop his own notion of *decadence*, but does so "away from all sorts of moralistic evaluation."[31] Avoiding "any form of predetermined, fixed and prejudiced interpretation," his critical mind dedicates itself to the "patient work of deciphering."[32] To the end, he remains faithful to his task. Unlike Nietzsche, Bourget will ultimately subordinate his art to politics, as Julien Benda would allege near the end of Bourget's lifetime.[33]

I want to call into question the neatness of the contrast that Campioni draws between Bourget and Nietzsche. The story that Campioni tells is based on some truths, but there are others that it omits or suppresses. Does the 1888 Nietzsche really approach *décadence* in a manner free from "all sorts of moralistic evaluation"? *Décadence*, Nietzsche tells us, is a "will to the end" (CW Preface [155]). However alluring some find it, it deserves condemnation: "What one ought to shun is found attractive. One puts to one's lips what drives one yet faster into the abyss" (CW 5 [165]). These are not the words of a man who shuns moralistic evaluation. Indeed, their exemplar is Pascal: "We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front of us to stop us seeing it."[34] Throughout *The Case of Wagner,* Nietzsche polemicizes against *decadence*, relentlessly and confidently. By contrast, Bourget displays in the *Essais* a genuine ambivalence about *decadence*. It contributes to the dissolution of a society, but it also produces artists with a sensibility upon which subtler minds place a high value.

But, one might object, that is Bourget in 1883. We might expect him to change his mind thereafter. That over the years he becomes less sanguine about *décadence* is true. In 1920, almost two decades after his formal return to Catholicism, he issues a revised edition of the *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, regarding it as the "definitive edition." Some of the changes are just what one might expect. For example, in

31 Campioni, "Nietzsche and 'the French Psychologists,'" 223–24.

32 Ibid., 229.

33 See Julien Benda, *Treason of the Intellectuals*, trans. Richard Aldington (New York, NY: Norton, 1969), 9, 79, 83, 118.

34 Pascal, *Pensées* (§166 Lafuma, §183 Brunschvicg).

the 1883 edition, Baudelaire was merely "a great disdainer"; in 1920, he becomes "un fanfaron de satanisme."[35] Nevertheless, the definitive edition preserves both perspectives on *décadence*, as if to acknowledge that a reader might feel the pull of each. Nietzsche, by contrast, seeks to conceal his inner conflictedness about Wagner and *decadence*. The author of *The Case of Wagner* comes across as a crusading moralist who submits Wagner to the strictest judgments. His two criteria are *truth* and *life*. With respect to the first, Wagner is convicted of radical dishonesty. His *décadence* takes refuge in what is murky and shadowy and obscure. His music bypasses the mind and aims straight for the nerves. He lies in order to advance his aesthetic agenda; he is an actor who has no use for principles or truth. With respect to life, Wagner's *décadence* is still worse. It is infected by the will to the end, and it infects others. It makes music sick. It is a symptom of "descending life." As such, it can and must be opposed by whatever promotes "*ascending* life" (CW Epilogue [190]). The use of "life" as a standard is characteristic of Nietzsche. As Frithjof Bergmann observed some time ago, Nietzsche has little use for those who want him to be "the pope of their nihilism." He wields "life" as "the most cutting and 'objective' standard: for in all fields he separates that which is dying from that which will live."[36] From Nietzsche's own standpoint, to expose Wagner, Socrates, morality, Christianity, or whatever else as an instance of *décadence* is to condemn it in the strongest terms possible.

These considerations suffice to complicate the narrative that advances a simplistic contrast between "Nietzsche the moraline-free psychologist" and "Bourget the reactionary moralist." Even after his reversion to Catholicism, Bourget retains a certain open-mindedness in both his published works and his personal relationships, whereas Nietzsche's writings become ever more hostile to *décadence* in general and Wagner in particular. Not for nothing is his final work titled *Nietzsche contra Wagner*.

35 Compare E 31 to Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1920), 25.

36 Frithjof Bergmann, "Nietzsche's Critique of Morality," in *Reading Nietzsche*, ed. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 44.

5. Pedagogical Recklessness: Bourget's *Le disciple* and Some Nietzschean Considerations

In showing that Nietzsche is more moralistic and Bourget more perspectivist than it might appear, my argument weakens the predictable and conventional contrast between Bourget and Nietzsche that Campioni draws. But a question remains. Is there really any positive affinity between Nietzsche and the author of *Le disciple*? It is hard to deny that *Le disciple*, published in 1889, reads as a not-very-subtle "novel of ideas" that seems to disdain the kind of ambiguity and nuance prized by Nietzsche and some of his readers.[37] Nevertheless, I want to bring into sharp relief a side of Nietzsche that would sympathize with the motives that animate *Le disciple*'s composition. To make this contention persuasive, it is necessary first to tell the story of *Le disciple*, a novel not likely to be familiar to many readers today, before returning to Nietzsche.

Le disciple is a tale of a relationship between a student and his teacher. The teacher is Adrien Sixte, clearly modeled on Bourget's old master Hippolyte Taine.[38] Sixte is the author of three books: *Psychology of God*, *Theory of the Passions*, and *Anatomy of the Will*. These books express his grounds for holding views inspired by Spinoza and developed further by the emerging natural sciences. Sixte teaches his students what he writes in his books. At least one of his students, Robert Greslou, makes Sixte's convictions his own. "You appeared to me as a kind of modern Spinoza," he tells him.[39] Sixte inspires Greslou to the point that he contemplates a celebration of the feast day "of one of my saints, of Spinoza, of Hobbes, of Stendhal, of Stuart Mill, of you, my dear master" (D 152).

37 For Bourget's defense of the genre that some dismiss as the "thesis novel," but that he prefers to call (following Balzac) the "roman à idées," see his Preface to *The Land of Promise* (Chicago, IL: Neely, 1895), 5–17.

38 As Armand Singer remarks, no one at the time, "including Taine himself," had much difficulty in recognizing Adrien Sixte as a portrait of Taine (*Paul Bourget* [Boston, MA: Twayne, 1976], 65).

39 Bourget, *The Disciple*, 145. Hereafter cited parenthetically as "D," with page numbers and renderings as they appear in the widely available anonymous English translation published in 1901 by Scribner and Sons.

The action of *Le disciple* can be summarized quickly. After studying with Sixte, Greslou travels to an aristocratic chateau where he will live as the tutor of the marquis's youngest son, Lucien. He comes to know the boy's older brother, the noble Count André, and their sister, Charlotte. About a year later, Charlotte is found dead from strychnine, drawn from *nux vomica* seeds that were procured by Greslou. The authorities think Greslou murdered Charlotte, surmising that Greslou was upset because Charlotte did not return his affections and became engaged to another man.

The truth is more complicated, as we learn from a long letter that Greslou writes his teacher from prison as he awaits his trial. Greslou says that he had sworn off romantic liaisons. At the chateau, as he rereads his old teacher's three books, a plan occurs to him. He would seek to seduce Charlotte "without loving her, from motives of purely psychological curiosity" (D 173). While suffering from a brief illness, he arouses her pity and uses that pity to arouse her affection, in accordance with what he has read in Sixte's *Theory of the Passions*. This success excites him: "The idea alone of directing at will the subtle movements of a woman's brain, all this sentimental and intellectual clockwork so complicated and so tenuous, made me compare myself to Claude Bernard, to Pasteur and to their pupils. These savants vivisected animals. Was not I going to vivisect at length, a human soul?" (D 188). Though his first efforts seem to arouse her affection, she proceeds to grow cold to him. As he tries a new tactic that proves more effective—reading aloud to Charlotte and giving her recommendations—he delights in his apparently successful manipulation. He notes a line in Sixte's book that mentions the success of "professional libertines" but wishes for more "documents" that can illuminate the phenomenon—an obvious allusion to Taine's inexhaustible desire for "documents humaines" that, properly analyzed, will yield deterministic laws to which all human behavior conforms (D 215). Suddenly he finds himself in the grip of genuine desire for Charlotte; he declares his love for her, only to be rebuffed. But as he licks his wounds, he discovers some new evidence suggesting that, despite the rejection, she has real feelings for him (D 229). This discovery prompts him to resume his psychological experiment, as he assures himself that he is not really

in love. Against the odd scruple about treating another as an object, he recollects Spinoza's "theorem in which it is written that our right is only limited by our power," buttressed by lines in Sixte's *Theory of the Passions* about "the duel between the sexes in love" and the right of the stronger to conquer the weaker (D 236).

But Charlotte has left the chateau, ostensibly to recover from illness. Once again, Greslou finds his tranquility disturbed as he moves through the principal passions analyzed by Sixte: love, desire, regret, jealousy, and finally, hate (D 239). Soon he learns that Charlotte has accepted the marriage proposal of the very man she had refused two years earlier. Greslou infers that his experiment has failed entirely, but then senses upon Charlotte's return that she does love him, despite her engagement. Greslou's knowledge that he can never be with Charlotte arouses in him a resolve to kill himself. To that end, he obtains some *nux vomica* seeds and places a self-pitying farewell letter on her table, one that might induce her to run to him before he drinks a vial of strychnine at midnight. His stratagem works: she runs to him and begs him not to kill himself just yet: "Let us die together!" (D 274). Declarations of love follow. After the bliss of *la petite mort*, Greslou changes his mind about their suicide pact, whereupon Charlotte denounces him as a coward. The next day, Charlotte tells him that she was able to force the lock of his notebook that contains detailed notes about his psychological experiment, and that she read the notebooks. These notebooks reveal what Greslou really thought about her, she says; they show that he caused her to engage in unworthy actions. She has, she adds, written a note that tells her brother André everything (D 288). The next day, she kills herself with the strychnine that Greslou had originally intended for his own use.

Greslou sends his former teacher a long version of what has been summarized above, one that painstakingly notes the relation between his actions and Sixte's teachings. He pleads: "Write to me, my dear master, direct me. Strengthen me in the doctrine which was, which is still mine, in the conviction of universal necessity which wills that even our most detestable actions, even this cold enterprise in which I embarked in the interest of science, even my weakness before the compact of death, are a

part of the laws of this immense universe" (D 292). Before Sixte can respond, André appears at Greslou's trial, announcing that his sister was driven to kill herself by Greslou. He proceeds to execute him, and the novel ends.

Who or what is to blame for this unhappy result? Not just Greslou, answers *Le disciple*, but also Adrien Sixte. Or more specifically, Sixte's pedagogical recklessness. Perhaps Sixte has the right to seek truth wherever it might lead, as he develops doctrines inspired by Spinoza and modern natural science. But does this insulate him from the practical consequences of his pedagogy? Bourget has come to think that there is something extraordinarily naive, and indeed irresponsible, about the idea that teachers can inspire students to hold "immoralistic" views without raising the probability that some students will translate these views into action. One might counter: no teacher can be held responsible for student misunderstandings. Bourget, however, is hardly convinced by such a response. Greslou's translations of Sixte's teachings are not obviously bad. As he had argued in 1883, the views of Taine are an instance of what the *Essais* call "the same disgusted philosophy of universal nothingness" (E 322).

Of this last point, *Le disciple* does not try to convince the reader by direct argument. It chooses other means. Perhaps most notably, it does so by the meticulousness with which Greslou documents the correspondence between his thoughts, actions, and desires and what he has read in Sixte and his canon of deterministic philosophers who reject religion as crass superstition.[40]

What would Nietzsche make of *Le disciple*? The obvious response is that he would hate it. Some of Nietzsche's texts harmonize closely with claims that Bourget attributes to Spinoza and Taine and puts in the mouth of Adrien Sixte. Nevertheless, the obvious response should be queried. For one thing, Nietzsche's supposed "positivism" is a temporary and

40 As Mansuy notes, the character of Sixte is not just a cipher for Taine, but also evokes the thinkers who were most influential for Taine (Michel Mansuy, *Un Moderne: Paul Bourget* [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960], 492-493). This is not, of course, to deny the primacy of Taine for Sixte. Hugh Davidson contends that the views held by Sixte "are practically indistinguishable from those Bourget assigned to Taine" ("The *Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine* and the Character of Adrien Sixte," 34).

experimental phase of his authorship.[41] By the time he writes *Beyond Good and Evil*—by the time he starts to read Bourget's *Essais*—he identifies and squarely rejects any picture of Spinoza as a pure servant of truth (BGE 5 [12-13]). Whatever his affinity with atheistic determinism, this affinity does not generate in him the indifference to the practical consequences of his views that Bourget attributes to Taine.[42] Moreover, Nietzsche's own "doctrinal" sympathies coexist with strong warnings against discipleship. For example, Zarathustra expresses any number of views that the later Bourget would find anathema—but Zarathustra also discourages his disciples from believing in him (Z I.3 [68]).

At least in certain texts, Nietzsche is deeply sensitive to the dangers of discipleship that *Le disciple* means to expose, even if it seems unlikely that he would accept Bourget's eventual solution. Nietzsche's sensitivity to the concerns of *Le disciple* can also be found in his notebooks. For instance, consider this entry:

> One must *not* say many things and say many things differently than one thinks; and I nearly believe that even as a teacher one must always teach the opposite of what one considers to be true. If someone thinks today: what does it matter? What does it matter today that paper gets printed for everybody? "Paper for everybody" can still be used for different things than reading: in this it has its justification.[43]

Nietzsche and Bourget share a sense of the immense power that a teacher of philosophy can have over his pupils. Should a teacher attract disciples, he must speak in a way that truly benefits them. Often this means speaking in a manner that does something more, and something other, than simply express the teacher's particular views. The best teachers, Nietzsche and

41 For corroboration, see 1877, 25[2]; CWFN 12.439.

42 "Il était alors, il est aujourd'hui un philosophe parfaitement insoucieux de l'action, et qui se préoccupe seulement de la logique et de la sincérite de sa pensée, en politique comme ailleurs" (E 249).

43 1885, 34[272]; CWFN 16.79. Volume 16 of CWFN is *Unpublished Fragments (Spring 1885-Spring 1886)*, trans. Adrian del Caro (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

Bourget agree, care about the practical effects of their speech on their students. Some who want to teach philosophy dismiss or trivialize this concern: "I'm a philosopher, and my only job is to teach what I regard as true." But neither Bourget nor Nietzsche think that teachers can evade responsibility for the impact of their discourse on students. To some degree, they are rightly held responsible for its consequences.

If this analysis is correct, it implies any number of difficulties for those who would like to be philosophical teachers. They cannot just bound into the lecture hall and "say what they think." If their views are of the sort that may be "true but deadly" (HL 9/112), they must take special care regarding what they say and how they say it. Bourget's critique of his former mentor Taine, as conveyed by the character of Adrien Sixte, is that he never sufficiently recognized any such responsibility. He assumed that the philosopher's only duty was single-minded devotion to truth. As a young man, Bourget greatly respected Taine and his "implacable sincerity" (E 181). He even had Taine to thank for the initial suggestion that he compose the *Essais*.[44] But he was increasingly unable to shake the sense of a deep nothingness at the center of the old positivist's approach, substantively and pedagogically. As early as 1883, it was clear to Bourget that Taine's philosophy was ultimately an exercise in despair. A sentence near the end of the *Essais*'s chapter on Taine announces: "His teaching contained within itself the seed of the darkest and most incurable nihilism" (E 235).[45] Whatever truth it expresses comes at the expense of life.

The tension between truth and life is a leitmotif of Nietzsche's thinking. One might suppose that Nietzsche would diagnose Bourget's stance as just another effort to dissolve this tension, and so to weaken culture itself, which somehow depends on this tension (BGE Preface [2-3]). But I am not sure that Nietzsche would dismiss *Le disciple* so brusquely. He would not endorse the prejudice in favor of the teacher who "says what he means and means what he says," and who consequently rejects the pedagogical uses of irony and dissimulation. Here is another revealing entry from the notebooks:

44 Mansuy, *Un Moderne: Paul Bourget*, 322.

45 Attention to such passages can suggest the deep continuity between the psychologist whom Nietzsche reads and admires in 1884 and the author of *Le disciple*.

> An educator never says what he himself is thinking, but always only what he thinks about a thing in relation to its use for the one he is educating. He must not be detected in this dissemblance; it is part of his mastery that we believe in his honesty. He must be capable of all means of discipline and castigation: some natures he advances only through the whiplashes of scorn; others, lethargic, indecisive, cowardly, vain, perhaps with exaggerated praise. Such an educator is beyond good and evil; but no one is allowed to know it.[46]

Do Nietzsche's published texts consistently display the pedagogical prudence endorsed by the words quoted above? The ease with which any number of people—including but not limited to the National Socialist party in Germany—made irresponsible use of Nietzsche suggests a negative answer to this question. Some of their uses of Nietzsche's texts are reminiscent of the uses that Greslou makes of Sixte and all his works in *Le disciple*.

In his comparison of Bourget and Nietzsche, Campioni pronounces that Nietzsche is "more radical and more coherent" than writers like Bourget. This is "because he is a critic of the metaphysical and moral residues still present in their positions."[47] Against such praise, one might counter that there is little to admire about an author who thinks boldly but writes with pedagogical irresponsibility. Pushed to its extreme, this counterclaim would assert that, far from being "more radical and more coherent" than Bourget, Nietzsche is merely another Adrien Sixte.

I have no interest in pushing the claim against Nietzsche quite this far. I do not think that the only effect, or even the primary effect, of his authorship is to damage those who read his books, even if Nietzsche himself would sometimes doubt whether his writings ever did anyone good.[48] But what would Nietzsche, the deep admirer of Bourget's *Essais*

46 1885, 37[7]; CWFN 16.143.

47 Campioni, "Nietzsche and 'the French Psychologists,'" 219.

48 See, for example, a line at the end of a postcard that he sends from Sils Maria to Köselitz on July 23, 1881: "I absolutely do not know anymore with which opinions I still do good, with which I hurt."

de psychologie contemporaine, the *Nouveaux Essais*, and the novel *Un crime d'amour*, make of *Le disciple* and its critique of a man like Taine? Would he have recognized its potential applicability to his own works? Or would he defend himself by citing the many cautions against discipleship that abound in his writings? (These include not just *Zarathustra* and *Ecce Homo*, but also the third *Untimely Meditation*, "Schopenhauer as Educator.") Would he argue that his forceful expression of these cautions, combined with his own late criticism of Taine (see EH "Clever" 3 [244]), place him in an essentially positive relationship to *Le disciple*?

About such questions, we can only speculate. Nietzsche's powers were not preserved long enough for him to continue his ongoing conversation with Paul Bourget. Extending the dialogue is a task for us.