

# **When Nietzsche Wept Study Guide**

**When Nietzsche Wept by Irvin D. Yalom**

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# Plot Summary

Dr. Josef Breuer is a successful Viennese doctor. In 1882, a young woman by the name of Lou Salome comes to visit him while he is on vacation in Venice. She asks him to try and treat her friend Friedrich Nietzsche for despair. She believes she is the reason he is so depressed and is afraid he might commit suicide and deprive the world of one of its greatest philosophers. She persuades Dr. Breuer to treat him but tells him Nietzsche must not know of her involvement, and it would be best if he didn't realize that he was actually being treated by a physician.

On advice from his friends, Nietzsche travels to Vienna to see Dr. Breuer. He has been afflicted with migraines and feels desperate for help with them. Nietzsche is reluctant to put his trust in Dr. Breuer, but after Dr. Breuer saves Nietzsche from a brutal migraine attack in the middle of the night, their relationship improves.

Nietzsche agrees to enter a hospital for a month under Dr. Breuer's care on the condition that Nietzsche help Dr. Breuer with his despair. Dr. Breuer's marriage is in a terrible state, and he feels there's nothing left to live for. At first, their counseling sessions are volatile and competitive, but over time, the two men overcome their pride and work on helping each other.

Nietzsche is obsessed with Lou Salome, the woman who came to see Dr. Breuer in Venice. Dr. Breuer is obsessed with a woman named Bertha Pappenheim, who was one of his patients until recently. The men's obsessions interfere with their abilities to have normal relationships. Dr. Breuer finds himself spending hours every day thinking about Bertha, and these obsessions tear him away from his wife and children.

Dr. Breuer has a young medical student named Sigmund Freud. Breuer helps Freud with his studies, and Freud acts as a sounding board for Breuer's research. They are also personal friends and spend a great deal of time together. Freud is very interested in Breuer's therapy with Nietzsche.

One day, Breuer and Nietzsche take a walk in the cemetery where Breuer's father, mother, and brother are buried. There, Nietzsche realizes that Breuer's mother's name was Bertha, and he plunges into philosophizing about the fear of aging and dying. Breuer is overcome with all the emotions and thoughts involved in this conversation. When he arrives home, he asks Freud to come over and hypnotize him. While he is hypnotized, Breuer acts out his dream of leaving his current life and starting all over again by making conscious decisions about where to work, who to marry, and everything else. Through this hypnotism, Breuer realizes that he has already chosen the life of his dreams, and he is able to let go of his Bertha obsession.

Once he is recovered, Breuer can finally help his friend Nietzsche recover from his own obsession with Lou Salome. Nietzsche realizes that the roots of his obsession are in his fear of loneliness. To Nietzsche, Lou Salome represented a true friend and companion,

a meeting of the minds, and a romantic partner. He is able to move on from his obsession and continue his life's work of writing about philosophy.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Josef Breuer, renowned physician, is on vacation in Venice when he receives an impertinent note from a Lou Salome. In the note, the woman requests that he meet her at a café the following morning at nine o'clock. His first inclination is to ignore the demanding note, but he is intrigued and goes to the café in the morning to meet her. Lou Salome is a striking young woman. Not only is she very beautiful, but she carries herself with great confidence.

Lou Salome tells Dr. Breuer about her friend Friedrich Nietzsche. She feels that he is full of promise and that his works will have a lasting influence on the world. She is worried about him because he is suicidal, which is why she has come to Dr. Breuer. Nietzsche has consulted many well-known doctors in Europe, but none of them have been able to help him. Breuer's patients include some of the best known scientists, artists, and philosophers in Europe such as Brahms, Brucke, and Brentano.

In order to dispel Dr. Breuer's skepticism about her request to treat Nietzsche, Lou Salome produces a letter to Nietzsche from Richard Wagner. This impresses Dr. Breuer, who begins listening in earnest. Lou's brother Jenia attended a medical class that Dr. Breuer taught, and Jenia recommended the doctor to Lou. Dr. Breuer is enormously impressed with the young woman who is obviously extremely intelligent. As she speaks, Dr. Breuer thinks about Bertha, a patient with whom he has had an affair. Dr. Breuer has spoken with his students at length about Bertha's case. He always disguises his patients' names to protect their privacy. He refers to Bertha as Anna O. He also thinks about his wife Mathilde, who is waiting at home for him and finally breaks off the conversation with Lou Salome so he can return to Mathilde.

Lou Salome wants to meet with him the following morning to tell him more about Nietzsche's case, specifically about how she bears some responsibility for his current state of despair. Dr. Breuer says he cannot meet with her tomorrow because of his wife. She proposes meeting him at his office in Vienna in a month. In the meantime, she will try to persuade Nietzsche to meet with Dr. Breuer, but she's not optimistic that Nietzsche will seek help on his own.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

From the details of the chapter, we learn that Josef Breuer is a man of consequence. He is sought after by the most wealthy and famous men in Europe when they need a doctor. The details about Dr. Breuer tell us a great deal about the character of Lou Salome. The fact that she would treat such a man with a confident and assertive manner shows she is no ordinary twenty-one-year-old woman.



The setting is revealed almost immediately. The first line mentions the chimes of San Salvatore, and before the first pages is over, the narrator tells us Dr. Breuer has come to Venice to get away from the demands of his business . The date is also revealed on the first page as there is a note from Lou Salome dated 21 October 1882. Knowing the date gives the reader further appreciation of Lou Salome's character. In 1882, women didn't generally address men, especially older well-known men, with such familiarity as Lou Salome does from the very first.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

It is four weeks later, and Dr. Josef Breuer is at his office in Vienna expecting a visit from Lou Salome. She arrives wet from the rain and immediately offers some suggestions as to how Dr. Breuer could treat her friend Nietzsche. She advises Dr. Breuer to not attempt hypnotism on him because his mind and intellect are too strong for it. She also tells Dr. Breuer that during the treatment he should not ally himself with her. She has been the major cause of his recent bout with despair. Dr. Breuer probes her on this.

Lou Salome tells Dr. Breuer about the "unholy Trinity" between herself, Friedrich Nietzsche, and their friend Paul Ree. She pulls out a picture of the two men and herself; the men are standing and she is in the cart holding a whip. She explains that she does not believe in marriage. This relationship with these two men began as a marriage of minds, but she started to have romantic feelings for Paul. She is very attracted to Nietzsche's mind, but he mistook her feelings for romance and proposed marriage to her, which he retracted two weeks later when he realized his mistake.

Lou Salome then produces a letter for Dr. Breuer to read. The letter is written to her from Nietzsche and expresses his great admiration for her. Dr. Breuer feels empathy for Nietzsche because he understands how a man could fall so helplessly in love with her. Lou tells Dr. Breuer about Nietzsche's odious sister Elisabeth, whom she describes as mean-spirited, divisive, and anti-Semitic. Paul Ree is Jewish and Dr. Breuer is, too.

Then Lou produces more letters that she reads to Dr. Breuer. They are written by Nietzsche and full of suicidal references. She has broken off the relationship, and Nietzsche seems to be playing with death. Lou is extremely worried about his perilous situation, but she knows he will not accept help from her because she is the cause of his despair. She tells Dr. Breuer that he must treat Nietzsche without ever telling him that the treatment was her idea, and in addition, it would be best if Nietzsche didn't know he was undergoing treatment at all. Lou Salome then gives Dr. Breuer two of Nietzsche's books and then leaves.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Friedrich Nietzsche, Lou Salome, Dr. Breuer, and Paul Ree are all historical figures who lived in Vienna at roughly the same time. Nietzsche, Salome, and Ree did indeed form what they called the "unholy Trinity," and they had a picture taken of them with Nietzsche and Ree standing and Salome kneeling in a cart holding a whip.

The point of view so far in the novel has been third person limited. There is a narrator who tells us what's going on, but the focus is on Josef Breuer and his thoughts. The narrator divulges Josef Breuer's thoughts and internal dialogue, but Lou Salome, Nietzsche, and other characters are not as psychologically developed by the narrator.

This third person limited narrative allows us to gain greater understanding of one character and retains some mystery about the other characters.





# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Dr. Breuer has a long day. After his office appointments, he gets in his fiacre and visits seven patients in their homes, three of whom are desperately ill. By the time he is finished, he is too tired to meet his scientist and physician friends at the Café Griensteidl as he usually does. He asks the driver just to take him home. On the way home he sees a young friend of his, Sigmund Freud, walking in the rain, and he asks Freud if he'd like to come home with him. Freud gets in the fiacre.

The two friends have much in common. They are both Jewish physicians, although Freud is still in training and prefers research to actual medical care. Dr. Breuer describes Freud as himself ten or eleven years ago, and he encourages his friend to optimism about the anti-Semite forces that are keeping Jewish scholars from fulfilling their careers.

When they arrive at the Breuers' home, Josef's wife Mathilde is pleased to see Freud, whom she calls Sigi. She tells Sigi to take a hot bath and Josef to lie down and rest before dinner. There is obvious tension between Josef and Mathilde. Mathilde complains to Freud that Josef doesn't talk to her anymore, and Josef feels bad that Freud has become the confidant of two unhappy marriage partners. It's apparent that Freud is a regular and welcome visitor in the Breuer household. Freud stops at the children's bedrooms and says goodnight to them before following Breuer into his office.

Freud talks about how he'd love to write and do research, but right now he's so busy reading and learning that he doesn't have any time. Freud has been concocting his dream theory, but he has run into dead ends and is frustrated. Breuer tells Freud all about Nietzsche and Lou Salome and what he is trying to do there. Freud is interested but skeptical that Breuer will be able to do anything in such a strange situation. They also talk about Bertha and her treatment. They work through their problems aloud with each other. In the end, they decide to give Nietzsche a false name to use when they talk about him clinically: Eckart Muller.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

The characters of Josef Breuer, Sigmund Freud, and Mathilde Breuer form an interesting triangle in this chapter. From all appearances, Josef and Mathilde should be a happily married couple. Mathilde is a beautiful woman and attentive mother to their children. Josef is a well-known successful doctor who is very amiable with his co-workers and acquaintances. And yet, they can barely speak to each other without getting in an argument.

Freud is younger than both. He is still a student, but he has much in common with Breuer, and he has become so close with the Breuers that he is almost a part of the



family. He bathes at their house and wears Breuer's clothing. He is called "Sigi" and "Sig" in their house and kisses the children good-night. He has become a confidant to both Josef and Mathilde and manages to stay in both of their good graces. One wonders if his psychological study allows him to stay afloat in this triangle. It is not a traditional love triangle like we see in many novels because Freud is not in love with Mathilde and Mathilde is not in love with him. Rather, he is an outlet for two unhappily married people. He is the friend they should be to each other.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

A week later, Dr. Breuer receives a note from Lou Salome saying that their plan is working, and Dr. Overbeck has agreed to exert his influence with Nietzsche to get him to see Dr. Breuer. Nietzsche arrives at Dr. Breuer's office, and Dr. Breuer immediately notices that Nietzsche is pale, cold, and weak. He has a huge mustache and soft voice. The soft voice surprises Dr. Breuer because the voice in Nietzsche's books seems anything but soft.

They first converse about his previous treatments and physicians. He has seen many well-known physicians. Their conversation quickly turns to philosophy and Nietzsche's career. Nietzsche explains that he had a professorship at Basel but that he had to resign his position three years ago because of illness. He's convinced, however, that if he hadn't left on account of illness, he would have been driven out by those who didn't trust him. Breuer feels confident with the way the consultation is going, so he prepares to begin the portion of the consultation dealing with medical history.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

The story has built a sort of mystery around Nietzsche by focusing the action around him before the character is actually introduced to the reader. From the very first page, the reader has heard about Nietzsche, his illness, his genius, and his failed relationship with Lou Salome. Breuer has looked at his books and anticipated this meeting. When Nietzsche is finally introduced to Breuer and to the reader, there are already expectations in place.

The author uses a technique at the end of this chapter to increase suspense. Instead of writing this consultation all in one chapter, the author splits it into two chapters and ends this chapter with a question and request of the patient. Thus, the next chapter will begin with Nietzsche's response to the question, and the pause gives Nietzsche's response added importance that it wouldn't have if the chapters were combined.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Dr. Breuer and Friedrich Nietzsche talk for ninety minutes. The examination is very thorough, and Nietzsche seems to have no reservations when talking in depth about his illness, his symptoms, and his physical well-being. Dr. Breuer is surprised about the complexity of Nietzsche's illness and tries continually to get Nietzsche to talk about his despair, but Nietzsche handily changes the subject away from suicide the closer Dr. Breuer gets to it.

Nietzsche tells Breuer that he is ill almost all the time and cooperates fully with the exam. Nietzsche says that his home is his steamer trunk and that he usually lives in hotels. He eats bland foods and abstains from alcohol and coffee. He spends most of his time writing, but his eyesight is too poor for reading. He likes walking and often walks four or five miles a day. He says he gets many of his best ideas while walking, so he carries paper with him to scribble them down.

Breuer begins to look at the conversation as a chess game. He becomes obsessed with succeeding with Nietzsche as a patient, and he tries to trap him in his own words. He wants Nietzsche to admit to the despair Lou Salome spoke of, and he begins to feel that he is being duplicitous, which he hates. They agree to meet on Friday after Breuer has had time to study Nietzsche's past medical records. But before Nietzsche leaves, he wants to ask Breuer three more questions.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Chapter 4 ends with a question for Nietzsche, which adds suspense and gives added importance to Nietzsche's response. Chapter 5 ends with three questions for Dr. Breuer, but the actual questions are not revealed until the beginning of Chapter 6. Nietzsche's three questions add to the combative tone of the consultation thus far. Instead of a patient-physician relationship, this consultation feels more like a debate between colleagues, and this tone is only a foreshadowing of what is to come.

The words used by Breuer to describe Nietzsche reveal his feelings toward the relationship: "his prey had eluded him." If Nietzsche is Breuer's prey, then his trophy must be Lou Salome at this point. However, Nietzsche puts Breuer on the defensive. By the end of Chapter 5, Breuer is questioning his every move and wondering how the consultation slipped from his control.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Dr. Breuer sits back in his chair and asks for the three questions. Nietzsche asks if he will go blind, if he will have these attacks forever, and if he has a progressive brain disease that will kill him young like his father or drive him mad. Breuer is speechless. He has never received such questions before from a patient. Nietzsche says that in all the years he has been ill he has never gotten a physician to honestly answer these questions, and he feels he has a right to know.

Then the men have a philosophical discussion about what a physician's responsibility is in regards to telling patients the truth about their conditions. Nietzsche believes that it is the physician's duty to tell the absolute truth and to not spare the patient any information so the patient can make decisions based on it. Breuer believes that physicians have a responsibility to offer comfort to dying patients, and that in order to do this, they must often withhold painful information. He believes that physicians should offer hope. Nietzsche exclaims that "hope is the final evil."

Nietzsche mentions both of his books that Lou Salome had given Breuer. Breuer knows he cannot let Nietzsche know he has the books, so he asks Nietzsche where he may purchase them. Nietzsche says that his publisher has been very successful at hiding the books from the world and that there isn't a bookseller in Vienna carrying the books, but he will bring his own personal copies over to Breuer so Breuer may read them. Nietzsche gets up to leave and Breuer feels rebuffed because the conversation is dropped. He feels that Nietzsche has suddenly grown cold.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

The conversation becomes more combative in this last chapter of the initial consultation. It is apparent that the consultation has become a sort of competition between client and physician. These two characters have much in common and make an interesting compare/contrast study. Both men are very successful in their careers, but they are rejected by their peers. Nietzsche is rejected because of his liberal ideas and questionable relationships. Breuer is rejected because of his Jewish heritage. Perhaps this record of rejection has made them both combative.

Secondly, their areas of interest are somewhat at odds. Nietzsche is a philosopher whose ideas are far-fetched in the current academic setting. Breuer is a respected doctor who is becoming more and more interested in mental health, which is not a respected area of research. What can be studied about the brain and what can be theorized by modern philosophy lead to natural dissensions, which are inflamed by this prolonged conversation.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Breuer awakens from a nightmare the following morning. In his dream he has been searching for Bertha and fallen a great distance. He feels ravaged by his obsession with Bertha and can't understand why he is not happy with the lovely Mathilde.

When he arrives at the office, his nurse Frau Becker hands him Nietzsche's personal copies of his books. The books are annotated in the margins, and Breuer spends some time reading them. He feels that the philosophy is strange and arresting. The books cover all kinds of topics from art to nature and politics. That evening Breuer discusses Nietzsche's writing with Freud who has come over for dinner. They also discuss Nietzsche's health and the three questions Nietzsche posed in the last chapter. Freud encourages Breuer to use Nietzsche's own words to convince him to pursue treatment.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

By beginning the chapter with a disturbing dream, the author shows that while Breuer helps others with their physical and mental health during the day, he has difficulty maintaining his own mental health during the night. In literature, nighttime is often a symbol of the unknown. Breuer's deepest regrets and fears are illuminated in the darkness while he sleeps, and his days are affected by his difficult nights.

Breuer also depends on Freud for advice, even though Freud is much younger and less experienced. Breuer needs a confidant since he doesn't have a confidant in his wife Mathilde. The chapter ends with a letter to Friedrich Nietzsche from his sister Elisabeth. The letter says that Lou Salome is spreading lies about him and trying to blackmail them all. Elisabeth is attempting to have Lou deported for immorality.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

The following morning at breakfast Josef and Mathilde have an argument about how much time he spends with his patients. She says that she worries about him spending so much time with Nietzsche, but Breuer takes this as accusations about his relationship with Bertha. He is very sensitive about this because several months ago Mathilde insisted that Breuer fire his nurse Eva Berger because of their unusually close relationship. Breuer has very much missed Eva and feels that Mathilde was unfair.

Nietzsche arrives for his appointment to discuss the three questions he asked Breuer. Breuer answers the questions immediately by saying that there is no evidence that he has a progressive brain disease, that his migraines should become less severe as he ages, and that although he doesn't know if Nietzsche will go blind, there is sufficient evidence that migraines do not lead to blindness. Nietzsche is pleased that Breuer has been so straightforward with him.

Breuer has decided that the best thing for Nietzsche will be to hospitalize him for an extended stay at the Lauzon so he can watch him carefully in a stress-free setting. Once again behaving as if the consultation were a chess game, Breuer applies argument after argument to get Nietzsche to agree to this. Finally, Nietzsche's seemingly last defense is to say that he couldn't possibly pay for such a hospital stay, and Breuer tells him that his family pays for two beds at the hospital all the time and that one of them could be used by Nietzsche free of charge.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Even though the former consultations have not gone very well, Breuer still insists on following his normal approach. He tries to outwit Nietzsche, which puts the philosopher on his guard and does not develop a relationship of trust. Nietzsche and Breuer speak to each other directly, but the tone of their conversation is combative.

The juxtaposition of two conversations in this chapter is interesting. The first conversation is at the breakfast table between a husband and wife. Josef and Mathilde are suspicious of each other and have built obvious walls between them. They do not speak comfortably with one another, and they dwell on the past. The other conversation, between physician and client, is much more personal. The two characters reveal all kinds of details about themselves in order to prove themselves right.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Up to this point in the consultation, Breuer has felt he has finally gotten Nietzsche to see from Breuer's point of view. He has even asked if Nietzsche is ready to be admitted to the hospital today, but Nietzsche is far from ready. He prepares to leave Breuer's office. Breuer asks him why he has even come for treatment if he is not willing to listen to the physician's advice, and Nietzsche says the he has come on strong recommendations by his friends.

Nietzsche presses Breuer on his motivation for wanting so desperately to help him, even at his expense. He can tell that there is something dishonest about Breuer's motivation. Nietzsche accuses Breuer of being prideful and arrogant, and Breuer feels the consultation slipping through his hands. Nietzsche finally stands to leave and says that he will be catching this afternoon's train to Basel and will return in two hours to pay his bill and collect his books.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Just when Breuer thinks he has finally won this battle of wills with Nietzsche, Nietzsche sees through him and flees. Throughout the conversation, Breuer tries to settle himself down, but once he begins on this aggressive course it is impossible to change.

During most of the prose, the dialogue is frequently interrupted by Breuer's thoughts as he analyzes the conversation and plans his next move, but at the end of this chapter as Nietzsche prepares to leave, the dialogue is void of any such interruptions. It is clear that Breuer feels defeated. There is no need for the author to spell this out to the reader.





# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

That evening, the Breuer family holds their Friday evening supper with Mathilde's sisters and their families. These suppers are a tradition, and normally after dinner Breuer retires to his study with his brother-in-law Max, an ugly and overweight urologist. Josef and Max usually play chess together on Friday evenings, but Josef feels too agitated about Nietzsche this night to play chess. Having no one else to talk to, he explains the situation to Max and asks for advice.

As Max speaks, it is clear that he is a vulgar and immoral man. He talks about his sexual affairs and temptations regarding prostitutes, but he gives Breuer some good advice about Nietzsche. Breuer and Max have known each other since they were in medical school, even before they married into the same family. Max reminds Breuer of the way he challenged the professors in class sometimes. Max says that instead of trying to learn from the professors, Breuer was always trying to punch holes in their theories and intellect. Max says this is what Breuer has been doing to Nietzsche, trying to punch holes in his philosophy. He challenges Breuer to try and learn something from Nietzsche instead of trying to prove him wrong.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Breuer gets good advice from the unlikeliest of sources. It is also surprising that Breuer would confess such intimate things to his brother-in-law whom he professes to dislike. It seems that Breuer is willing to have an intimate relationship with anyone except his wife. Max of course knows all about Breuer's marital problems because Mathilde talks with her sister Rachel (Max's wife) about her marriage.

The flashback, which really is a reference to the past during a dialogue, gives us a little more insight into Breuer's character. From Max's description of the college-aged Josef Breuer, it seems that pride has always been a character flaw for him and that it has perhaps only hardened over the years until it has molded his persona.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

In the middle of the night following Breuer's conversation with Max, someone pounds on his front door. A man he doesn't recognize tells him that one of his patients is very sick at his guesthouse and that he should come right away. The patient is Nietzsche, and Breuer quickly gets dressed and goes out into the snow. The man from the guesthouse, Herr Schlegel, is a military veteran whose narrative is inexhaustible. He doesn't want Nietzsche to die in his guesthouse because that would be bad for business.

When Breuer arrives at the guesthouse, he finds Nietzsche in a near comatose state. The bed sheets are covered in blood and vomit, and Nietzsche is wearing only his underwear, his other clothing having been tossed to the floor near the bed. Breuer stays with Nietzsche. He rubs his temples and, upon examining the room, discovers a nearly empty bottle of chloral, which he likely overdosed on. Breuer gets Nietzsche's heart rate under control and is surprised that Nietzsche responds by grabbing Breuer's hand and acting grateful. Breuer leaves but then comes back later in the day to check on him.

Once Nietzsche is lucid, he becomes his icy, reserved self once more. Nietzsche says that he wants to get home as soon as possible, and Breuer warns him that traveling after such an attack is very dangerous. Nietzsche thanks Breuer for all his help but says he must leave for Basel on Monday. Walking home, Breuer feels he has become obsessed with helping Nietzsche. However, he thinks he discovers a way to help the man.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

The author constructs a scene wherein the tables are turned and Nietzsche becomes vulnerable. Nietzsche is so sick that he is not fully conscious, and in this state, Breuer is able to see another Nietzsche, a Nietzsche who knows that he needs help and reaches out to the hand that has the power to help him. This feeds the fire that is burning in Breuer. Once he sees this Nietzsche who wants help, he wants more than ever to be the one who can help him.



# Chapters 12, 13, and 14

## Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Summary

On Monday morning, Nietzsche arrives at Dr. Breuer's office to settle his account and pay his bill. He says he is grateful for Dr. Breuer's help but expects to never see him again. Dr. Breuer then proposes a new plan. He suggests that Nietzsche stay for a month and receive treatment from Dr. Breuer at the Lauzon, and during that time Nietzsche will act as a physician to Dr. Breuer's soul and help him deal with his despair.

At first Nietzsche is dead-set against this plan, but at Dr. Breuer talks about the plan, he warms up and eventually agrees to it. Dr. Breuer promises to only treat Nietzsche's body because he doesn't feel he has the background or knowledge to treat his mind. Nietzsche is to feel free to treat Dr. Breuer as an experiment. Dr. Breuer will be the subject on which Nietzsche can test his hypotheses and work out his philosophy.

Chapter 12 ends with a letter from Nietzsche to a friend named Peter Gast. In the letter, Nietzsche explains why he will be staying in Vienna for another month. He seems excited about the proposition. He also speaks of Lou Salome in the most disparaging way. He thinks Dr. Breuer doesn't know anything about Lou Salome.

Nietzsche moves into the hospital, and Breuer makes sure that he gets the best room available. On the way home from the hospital, Breuer stops to talk with Freud at a pastry shop. Freud thinks Breuer is crazy for proposing that Nietzsche treat his despair, but Breuer assures him that it was the only way to get Nietzsche to agree to staying at the hospital and being treated. Breuer tries to explain his obsession with Bertha to Freud, but it's clear that Freud doesn't want to hear about it and doesn't understand it.

The following morning, Nietzsche and Breuer have their first session at the hospital. Nietzsche takes copious notes as they discuss Breuer's complaints. Breuer feels very uncomfortable playing the part of the patient. He likes to be in control of the situation. During their conversation, Breuer still tries to slip in references to Nietzsche's despair and possible suicide attempts. The conversation feels somewhat like a struggle. Breuer tells Nietzsche about Eva Berger and his lust for Bertha. Breuer believes that Eva offered herself sexually to Breuer at one point, and he has regretted turning her down. Nietzsche is obviously disgusted by these revelations, but he tries to stay objective.

## Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Analysis

At the beginning of the chapter, Nietzsche is as straightforward as he has ever been, even to the point of rudeness. The men have developed a brutally honest relationship, so when Dr. Breuer proposes this new arrangement, Nietzsche reacts as honestly as possible, hesitating at first and then warming to the idea as they talk.

The letter from Nietzsche to Peter Gast, dated 4 December 1882, gives a little insight into Nietzsche's feelings about the arrangement without violating the third person limited point of view that favors Breuer's insights. From this letter, we learn that Nietzsche hates Lou Salome and is very frustrated with her.

The consultation chapters begin to follow a new pattern. The core of the chapter consists of dialog between the two men, sitting in Nietzsche's hospital room. At the end of the chapter, however, the reader gets to read excerpts from Breuer's and Nietzsche's case notes for the day. This formula allows for an opening up of the point of view and for details that the two men are not willing to divulge to each other at this stage of their relationship.



# Chapters 15, 16, and 17

## Chapters 15, 16, and 17 Summary

During their next session, the two men decide to try and work more amiably together. Nietzsche tells Breuer they don't need to wallow in the details of Breuer's lust. Breuer feels that these sessions should be a sort of confession, as if he were confessing his sins to a priest. Nietzsche doesn't think that such an approach would be helpful. He wants to elevate Breuer's thoughts and perspective.

Breuer is intent on getting Nietzsche to reveal some details about himself and not be so private, but this is very difficult. Nietzsche seems to have built very high walls around his personal life. Nietzsche's migraines have subsided, so the two men spend their time working on Breuer's problems. Breuer feels that his life is at a dead end, that he's ascended as high as he can go in his profession and personal life, so there's nowhere to go but down. This makes him feel that there's no point in going on with his life. He tells Nietzsche that when he was a boy, someone once called him "the lad of infinite promise." He still thinks about that phrase and turns it over and over in his head.

They talk about Breuer's life goals and how he chose them. Breuer feels that he never really made a conscious choice about his goals. He thinks that they were just thrust on him by his family and environment and that he is a prisoner to them. Nietzsche talks to Breuer about making conscious decisions. Breuer even feels that his marriage was not his choice, which is why he's so unhappy with it now. In his notes, Nietzsche says that he finally feels like they're getting somewhere and having productive discussions.

Breuer, however, feels absolutely miserable. He feels anxious and suffocated. His marriage is all but dead. He decides it's time to really seek Nietzsche's help and to quit pretending Breuer needs help just so he can treat Nietzsche. He begins to wonder if Nietzsche likes him and considers him a friend. Then a card shows up at Breuer's office from Lou Salome announcing that she'll be coming to see him. She arrives and asks how the treatment is going. She is as powerful to him now as she was the first day they met. Lou Salome hands Breuer some copies of letters Nietzsche has written to others. Breuer knows he is betraying Nietzsche by reading the letters. When Lou Salome asks how Nietzsche is doing, Breuer tells her that he cannot give her any information. He refuses to tell her where he is and even whether or not he is treating him. She is enraged by this refusal and storms out.

## Chapters 15, 16, and 17 Analysis

A turning point is reached in these chapters when Dr. Breuer humbles himself enough to realize that he really does need Nietzsche's help. In coming to this conclusion, he begins to see Nietzsche more as a friend and Breuer respects him more. This is

evidenced by his guilt when he reads Nietzsche's letters during Lou Salome's visit to his office.

The notes and letters at the end of the chapters reveal to the reader that Nietzsche has bigger problems than his headaches. In one letter he tells a friend how much he hates Lou Salome, and in the next letter, he writes poetry to Lou. Thus, the author is drawing parallels between Breuer's obsession of Bertha and Nietzsche's obsession of Lou.



# Chapters 18, 19, and 20

## Chapters 18, 19, and 20 Summary

Breuer realizes Nietzsche is suffering from the same sort of obsession that he is, and he's angry that Nietzsche has not confessed this to him. He begins the next session by telling Nietzsche about a dream he's had, and they work together to try and make sense of it, but Breuer's motive in sharing this dream is to get Nietzsche to open up about his obsession with Lou Salome. It doesn't work, and they both feel angry.

Then Nietzsche tries to get Breuer to attack the Bertha obsession by hurling insults at Bertha. Then he is to give money to charity every time he thinks about her. When this doesn't work, he instructs Breuer to put a pebble in his shoe every time he thinks of her and walk around like that all day. These ploys don't help. Nietzsche then tries to find out what Breuer thinks he is missing. Breuer talks about a certain smile he has seen on women's faces. He traces this back to a ten-year-old girl he had a crush on in school. He says Mathilde looks at his son with that smile but never at him that way.

In Chapter 20, the two men take a walk together in the cemetery where Breuer's father, mother, and brother are buried. Nietzsche notices that Breuer's mother's name is Bertha and wonders why Breuer has never mentioned this before. This opens up a whole new train of thought, and they talk about how perhaps the Bertha obsession doesn't have its roots in lust. Maybe the obsession is a way of avoiding his real fears: time, the loss of youth, and death. Nietzsche talks about his theory of "dying at the right time." There is no way to avoid death. You just have to make sure that you die at the right time, meaning that you die after you have lived to your fullest. Breuer seems very moved by this discussion, and they part on a quiet, uncomfortable note.

## Chapters 18, 19, and 20 Analysis

The pacing of the story picks up in these chapters as Nietzsche rapidly tries treatment after treatment to get at the source of Breuer's despair. He comes up with all kinds of attacks on the obsession, and they all have a superficial, band-aid approach. The more Breuer tries these methods, the more fully he falls into despair as he feels that there is no way to help him.

Then, unexpectedly, Nietzsche realizes that Breuer's mother was named Bertha and his daughter is named Bertha as well. This revelation helps him to get his treatment of Dr. Breuer back on track. He leaves the superficial alone and plunges to the heart of the matter. The structure of Chapter 20 reveals just how deeply Breuer feels this treatment when he leaves no notes at the end of the chapter.



# Chapters 21 and 22

## Chapters 21 and 22 Summary

Breuer sets his pigeons free and recollects saying good-bye to his wife and children. He has decided that he must start his life over and consciously make his choices. Mathilde is enraged when he tells her that he is leaving her and the children. He tries to explain to her that he has to be free, and she asks him whether she has ever had the freedom to make such choices. She reminds him that he made promises to her and the children when he married her. But he still leaves.

Breuer goes to visit Max. Max is sad to see him go. He says that Breuer is his best friend, and that his life won't be the same without him. Then Breuer goes to visit Bertha at a hospital in Switzerland. He observes her from a distance as she walks with her young doctor arm in arm. While he watches, Bertha has a muscle spasm in her thigh, and the doctor carries her to a bench and massages it for her. Breuer recognizes every move Bertha makes and feels sorry for the young doctor who is obviously aroused by Bertha's antics.

Breuer leaves the hospital without seeing Bertha and goes to visit Eva Berger. Eva is living alone in a small apartment. Since he laid her off, she has been working the night shift at the general hospital. Breuer tells Eva that he has left everything and is going to Italy, and he asks Eva to come with him. She refuses him. Before he goes, he asks her if she was sincere when she offered herself to him, and she tells him she doesn't remember that conversation.

Breuer then gets on the train to Italy. When he gets there he realizes that he looks out of place and old. He goes to a barbershop and gets his beard shaved. His beard has been hiding his aging skin, and he looks very old and foreign to himself. He buys some new clothes and stands on the street in Italy wondering how he will support himself. Maybe he will get a job in a restaurant. Then he hears a familiar voice. It is Sigmund Freud's voice. He is counting backward and telling Breuer to waken from the hypnotic state he has been in. Breuer wakes up on the sofa in his library, and after he comes to his senses, he tells Freud about his experiences while he was hypnotized.

Breuer is so grateful to be back in his home with his family and friends that he is like a new man. He talks about his experience with Max, and they play a game of chess together. The next day, Breuer goes to the hospital to see Nietzsche and to announce that he is cured of his Bertha obsession. Nietzsche is shocked. Because Breuer was so out of sorts after their walk in the cemetery, Nietzsche has been worried that Breuer will be worse off. Breuer feels a little guilty for having Freud hypnotize him without discussing this with Nietzsche, but he believes that Nietzsche's teachings led him to that point.





As they talk, Nietzsche opens up and talks about his great loneliness. Lou Salome is the only woman that has ever showed any interest in him, and Nietzsche has been consumed with his love for her and bitter about her refusal of his marriage proposal. Breuer tells Nietzsche that he doesn't have to be lonely. He invites Nietzsche to come stay with him and his family. Nietzsche weeps and says that it is not in his nature to feel comfortable in such a situation, but knowing that he has a choice about being alone or being with other people makes a world of difference to him.

Nietzsche feels a migraine coming on, and Breuer helps him to get through it. The two men confess to each other their deceptions. Nietzsche says that he has been hiding his obsession with Lou Salome, and that the reason he has been helping Breuer with his own obsession was so that he could figure out a way to get rid of his own. Then Breuer tells Nietzsche about Lou Salome and shows Nietzsche her letters.

Nietzsche asks Breuer to help him with his obsession with Lou Salome. He talks about his fears of being alone and weeps at the thought of never having a family. They talk about their fears and struggles, and they both feel better about the future. In the end, Breuer goes back to his family where he falls in love with Mathilde as he sees her for who she truly is, a partner in his sojourn through life, not the reason he ages and will die. And Nietzsche gets on a train and begins working on Zarathustra.

## Chapters 21 and 22 Analysis

The act of setting the pigeons free symbolizes Dr. Breuer's release from bondage. He has spent his entire life in the service of experimental medicine. He is like the birds that look up confusedly at him when he takes them out of their cage before they are shoed out the window. In this analogy, Nietzsche is the one who pulls Breuer out of his cage and encourages him to fly away.

The hypnotic trance Breuer uses to pull himself away from the Bertha obsession resembles Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. In *A Christmas Carol*, Ebenezer Scrooge visits different scenes from his own life, and after he awakens from the dream, he has a new perspective and his actions towards others changes. Likewise, in this story, Dr. Breuer sees what his life would be like if he left his family and patients and made himself free from all obligations. He realizes that he would be miserable, and as a consequence, he learns to appreciate his life and those around him.

The author writes the time when Dr. Breuer is under hypnotism in such a way that the reader doesn't realize it's hypnotism until Breuer wakens. This gives the reader the impression that the action is very real, and this is Breuer's experience. Thus, it is plausible when he wakes up that the hypnotism has had sufficient impact on Breuer to cause real change.



# Characters

## Dr. Josef Breuer

Dr. Breuer is an eminent Viennese physician who dabbles in psychology. His clientele consists mostly of wealthy and famous people, and he has done some teaching at universities. He comes from a Jewish background, and this has caused some discrimination in his career. Nevertheless, he feels that he is at the pinnacle of his career.

Dr. Breuer is married to a beautiful woman, Mathilde. They have five children and a large extended family. Although it seems that Dr. Breuer has everything he could possibly want, he is miserable because of a continual obsession about a former patient of his, Bertha Pappenheim.

Dr. Breuer was really a Viennese physician during the 19th century. His character here has been fictionalized, and he probably never met Friedrich Nietzsche, although it is true that he had a friendship with Sigmund Freud.

## Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche is a shy, passionate man of 40. He has a sickly constitution and has come to Dr. Breuer seeking help for his recurrent migraine headaches. Like Breuer, Nietzsche has been consumed by an obsession with a woman. Nietzsche was in love with Lou Salome, but she refused to marry him.

Although Nietzsche comes from a wealthy, educated family, he has renounced many modern comforts so he can concentrate on his writing without interference from the more superficial aspects of life. Therefore, he lives in boardinghouses and carries everything he owns in a suitcase. His clothing is worn, and he prefers a very austere existence.

Nietzsche's vision is so poor that he can barely read. Therefore, his own ideas are not as influenced by others as they would be if he read widely. Of course, Nietzsche was a philosopher of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and his influence has been vast.

## Lou Salome

Also a historical figure, Lou Salome was an influential intellectual at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th. Lou Salome is Russian and very beautiful. She has a striking, confident presence that disarms men. She is unconventional in her manners and very straightforward.



Although it seems Lou Salome is just trying to help Nietzsche by getting him medical treatment, it is never clear exactly what her motives are. She has a love affair with Nietzsche's friend Paul Ree, and this breaks Nietzsche's heart. She feels real animosity toward Nietzsche's older sister Elizabeth. Lou Salome is very open-minded about different ethnic groups and doesn't believe in marriage.

## **Sigmund Freud**

Sigmund Freud, one of the pioneers of modern psychology, is a medical student in this novel. Breuer knows Freud is extraordinarily bright, and he enjoys Freud's company. Freud is a regular visitor at the Breuer household, and Breuer's wife Mathilde enjoys having him around. Freud eats dinner at the Breuer's house often and even tucks their children into bed.

Although Breuer feels he cannot be candid with Freud, he asks Freud to hypnotize him to help him get over his obsession with Bertha, and it works. Freud is engaged to be married at this time, and he doesn't understand how Breuer could possibly have fallen out of love with a beautiful woman like Mathilde.

## **Mathilde Breuer**

Mathilde Breuer is the wife of Dr. Breuer and the mother of five children. She comes from a wealthy Jewish family that is not very religious but is very prominent in the medical community. Every Friday night, her parents and siblings and their families come over for supper. Mathilde is a beautiful woman and could have married anyone she wanted; therefore, the failure of her marriage is that much more tragic.

## **Bertha Pappenheim**

Although the reader never actually encounters Bertha Pappenheim, her presence fills the novel because Dr. Breuer is obsessed with the memory of her. Bertha was a patient of Dr. Breuer's, and he spent a great deal of time with her, trying to help her overcome her "hysteria." In the course of this treatment, Dr. Breuer fell in love with her. Bertha Pappenheim was an actual patient of Breuer's and Freud's, and her treatment marks the beginnings of psychoanalysis.

## **Eva Berger**

Eva Berger was Dr. Breuer's nurse before the story begins. Dr. Breuer laid her off after ten years of working for him because of rumors that he was having an affair with her. Because of his obsession with Bertha, Mathilde no longer trusted him, and Eva Berger was the casualty of the situation. Later in the story, Breuer "visits" Eva while he is hypnotized and realizes that her attraction for him was all in his head.



## Max

Max is the husband of Mathilde's sister Rachel. Every Friday night, Max and Josef Breuer play chess after dinner in Breuer's study. Max is a doctor as well, a urologist, so they have much in common. They went to school together before they married into the same family. Although Breuer doesn't like Max very much, he confides in him and asks his advice. Max tries to help, and through the book Breuer realizes that Max is a very good friend to him.

## Elisabeth Nietzsche

Elisabeth Nietzsche is Friedrich Nietzsche's sister. Although Elisabeth never enters the action of the novel, she is referred to by both Friedrich Nietzsche and Lou Salome, and we hear her voice through letters to her brother. Elisabeth does not approve of Friedrich's relationship with Lou Salome and tries to get Lou deported for immoral behavior.

## Frau Becker

Frau Becker is Dr. Breuer's current nurse. She is older, not attractive, and very good at her job. She is efficient and takes care of Breuer as she would a child. Mathilde is comforted by the fact that her husband spends all day with Frau Becker and not with a younger, single nurse like Eva Berger.



# Objects/Places

## Venice

The novel begins in Venice where Breuer has gone for a break from his stressful schedule. He visits Venice again during Freud's hypnotism at the end of the book. Whereas at the beginning Venice was a place of retreat, at the end it is a place where he feels lonely and out of place. This contrast helps Breuer to realize that he doesn't want to escape his life after all.

## Vienna

The bulk of the novel takes place in Vienna where Dr. Breuer practices medicine and Sigmund Freud goes to school. The year is 1882. The weather is most often cloudy and cold, and Breuer longs for the sunshine.

## Dr. Breuer's Office

Dr. Breuer's office is always bustling. He is highly sought by patients, and they arrive early because he usually takes them on a first come/first serve basis. Dr. Breuer's office is efficiently run by his nurse Frau Becker. When he is in his office, he feels powerful and in control. When he begins treating Nietzsche at the hospital instead of at his office, he feels that he is no longer completely in control and this makes him feel nervous.

## Dr. Breuer's Home Study

At home, the only place Breuer feels really comfortable is in his office. This is where he goes after Friday night dinners to play chess with Max. His office is also where he talks with Freud and where Freud hypnotizes him in Chapter 21.

## Lauzon Hospital

The Lauzon Hospital is the hospital that Friedrich Nietzsche is admitted to when he agrees to help Dr. Breuer with his despair in exchange for help with his own migraine headaches. Nietzsche is given the best available room, and the two men sit in armchairs in front of a fireplace while they try to work through their obsessions.

## Nietzsche's mustache

When Nietzsche is nervous or distracted, he pulls out a comb and grooms his unwieldy mustache. It's like a security blanket to a child.



## **Nietzsche's Letters**

Nietzsche writes many letters to his few friends, but these letters are used by Lou Salome to help Dr. Breuer in his treatment of Nietzsche. Nonetheless, he continues to write letters to her but they become more and more invective.

## **Breuer's Fiacre**

Breuer's fiacre is the carriage that carries him around from patient to patient. He spends hours every day inside the fiacre. The fiacre is filled with medical journals and books that he reads while he travels.

## **Breuer's Pigeons**

Breuer has been internationally recognized for his equilibrium studies involving the inner ear. He used pigeons for these experiments. During his hypnotism at the end, he sets the pigeons free in an attempt to start over and make his own decisions. The pigeons in the cage represent him, imprisoned by expectations.

## **Nietzsche's Guesthouse**

In the middle of a night, Breuer is summoned to a guesthouse because Nietzsche is ill and unconscious. The proprietor of the guesthouse is an ex-military man. The guesthouse is austere and devoid of decoration, and it suits Nietzsche very well.



# Themes

## Fear

Fear is a theme throughout *When Nietzsche Wept*. At the beginning, Dr. Josef Breuer is amazed by Lou Salome, not only because she is beautiful and very intelligent but also because she seems to not have any fear. She is unafraid of what will happen to her if she bucks all social customs. Her lack of fear draws others to her, especially those who are paralyzed by their own fears.

Dr. Breuer struggles with despair for most of the story, but the real source of his despair is his fear. Dr. Breuer fears aging and death. He is afraid that he will not live his chosen life before he dies. In order to avoid thinking about his aging and unavoidable death, he focuses on something he can control, his fantasies about Bertha.

Likewise, Nietzsche is consumed with a fear. He is not afraid of getting old and dying, but he is afraid of being alone his entire life. He is afraid that when his death comes, he will be alone and no one will realize he has died. He falls in love with Lou Salome, and when he is rejected by her, he feels that his fate is sealed, that he will be alone for the rest of his life. Both men realize they need to face their fears in order to enjoy their lives in the present.

## Callousness of Women

The callousness of women is another theme in *When Nietzsche Wept*. In the story, the men seem very vulnerable to the women around them. The men often play the role of victim while the women play the role of tormentor. Nietzsche was raised in a family of women who had high expectations of him and controlled him. He is very nervous about women, especially since his failed relationship with Lou Salome. He has a poor relationship with his sister Elisabeth as well.

Breuer married a very beautiful, capable woman, but he blames her for the failures in their marriage. Even when he recognizes that his own actions and obsessions are building a wall between them, he blames Mathilde for making him feel guilty about his own actions. Until he conquers his fears about death and aging, he cannot see Mathilde for who she really is. Once he does, however, he sees her as a partner in life's sojourn.

## Freedom

Freedom is another theme in the story. The most obvious symbol of this theme is the birdcage full of pigeons in Breuer's study. He has used the pigeons for many years in his laboratory experiments as he has studied equilibrium in the inner ear. When he feels trapped and wants to flee his marriage and his patients, he fantasizes about letting the pigeons go free, allowing them to fly out the window. Of course, he doesn't really set



them free, but his desire to do so shows how much he wants freedom from his current situation.

On the surface, Nietzsche's life appears to be very carefree. He doesn't have a wife or children to provide for. He doesn't even have a home to maintain. He lives at boardinghouses and wears old clothing. His simple meals are brought to him, and he doesn't even have a set schedule. Nietzsche doesn't feel particularly free, however. He is a slave to the migraine headaches that beset him on a regular basis. He is ill more often than he is healthy, and this takes a serious toll on his mental state and his work. By the end of the novel, Breuer has helped him through several migraines, and his improved health gives him a measure of freedom he has not previously enjoyed.





# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written mostly in the third person limited point of view. The reader gets to hear Dr. Breuer's thoughts throughout, especially in the dialogue scenes between Nietzsche and Breuer, but we don't get to hear the other characters' thoughts. Using the third person limited point of view allows the author to direct us to the character development of one particular character, Dr. Breuer, in this case. At the beginning of the story it is apparent that he is a very powerful man and not very humble. By the end, however, it is possible for the reader to see intimate details about how he has been humbled and changed by his relationship with Nietzsche.

For much of the book, Nietzsche remains a sort of enigma because of the limited point of view. The author compensates for this, however, by using letters to and from Nietzsche interspersed throughout the novel. These letters and poems allow the reader to know precisely what Nietzsche is thinking and feeling, but only in limited doses.

Nietzsche is not the only character whose development is affected by letters. Lou Salome is first introduced by her own words in a note she has written to Dr. Breuer. Lou's letters, however, do not show the reader much about her personality. Throughout the book she remains a bit untouchable, which is exactly how the men view her.

## Setting

The story is set mostly in Vienna in the year 1882. Medical research is thriving, and Dr. Breuer and Sigmund Freud are highly involved in the medical community. Nietzsche is not a member of the Viennese medical community. He has traveled to Vienna just to consult with Dr. Breuer. He is an outsider, not just in Vienna, but everywhere he goes.

The weather is cold and gray. The characters are always dressed in heavy coats, trying to stay dry. The gloomy weather adds to the gravity of the subject matter. Despair and cloudy skies go together. Despair would not be quite the same on a sunny spring day. The most serious talk of all those between Dr. Breuer and Nietzsche takes place in a graveyard. However, the psychological discoveries made during that talk in the cemetery lead to the recovery of both men.

Venice is another setting in the story. When the story opens, Dr. Breuer is vacationing in Venice to get away from the stresses of his job. This is where Lou Salome first finds him. Later, when Dr. Breuer imagines himself leaving his current life, he dreams he goes to Venice and starts over. He shaves off his beard and buys new clothes, but he cannot get away from the feeling that he has lost everything that is important to him.



## Language and Meaning

The vocabulary of the story is quite medical. Of course, many of the modern medical terms we use today have changed from their 1882 counterparts. Thus, depression is called "melancholia," and mental illness is called "hysteria," which, incidentally comes from the Greek word for "womb," because it was assumed that only women suffered from hysteria.

Nearly all of the characters are well-educated, and their conversation reflects their education. There are references to Greek and Roman myths, showing that the characters are widely read. The prose is not rich with metaphors and a lot of symbols, but the descriptions of philosophy are powerful and inspiring.

The letters and case notes at the beginnings and endings of chapters are printed in italics so it's easy to differentiate between the main text and the letters. There is a poem Nietzsche writes to Lou Salome at the end of one of the chapters. The poem is free form and strong in its praise and condemnation of Lou Salome. The conversations are also punctuated with italics and words in all capital letters.

## Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-two chapters and follows the story chronologically. The letters that dot the novel help the reader keep track of how much time has passed. The novel begins on 21 October 1882 and ends on 18 December of the same year. Although the story fits within the confines of these two months, there are many references to events that happened before the beginning of the story, though they're not written as flashbacks.

After Dr. Breuer and Friedrich Nietzsche begin to treat each other at the Lauzon Clinic, each man keeps notes, and these notes are included at the ends of the chapters. These notes give us insight into what the men are really thinking about their sessions together. The sessions begin on a duplicitous pretext, but they both overcome their false motives and genuinely learn from each other as their friendship deepens.

In addition to these clinical notes, there are many letters and poems in the novel. There are letters from Elisabeth Nietzsche to her brother Friedrich, a letter from Richard Wagner to Nietzsche, letters from Lou Salome to Breuer and to Nietzsche, and various other letters offered to give us insight into the major characters.



## Quotes

"There she was! The woman walking down the Riva del Carbon, entering the café. Only she could have written that note—that handsome woman, tall and slim, wrapped in fur, striding imperiously toward him now through the maze of tight-packed tables. And as she neared, Breuer saw that she was young, perhaps even younger than Bertha, possibly a schoolgirl. But that commanding presence—extraordinary! It would carry her far!" Page 3

"How I wish! But not in this decade, Josef. I've no time even to think. The only thing a clinical aspirant at the Vienna General Hospital has ever written is a postcard. No, I was thinking, not of writing, but of reading these books. Oh, the endless labor of the intellectual—pouring all this knowledge into the brain through a three-millimeter aperture in the iris." Page 37

"He put down the mirror. Forty-two years left! How could he endure forty-two more years? Forty-two years of waiting for the years to pass. Forty-two years of staring into his aging eyes. Was there no escape from the prison of time?" Page 48

"And Nietzsche's freedom! What would it be like to live as he lived? No house, no obligations, no salaries to pay, no children to raise, no schedule, no role, no place in society. There was something alluring about such freedom. Why did Friedrich Nietzsche have so much of it and Josef Breuer so little? Nietzsche has simply seized his freedom. Why can't I? groaned Breuer." Page 75

"Certainly, Breuer thought, my feelings about Nietzsche have nothing to do with guilt. As a physician, I have done all that duty calls for; I cannot fault myself in that regard. Frau Becker and Max were right: What other physician would have put up for any length of time with such an arrogant, abrasive, and exasperating patient?" Page 135

"He is a curious mix—intelligent yet blind, sincere yet devious. Does he know of his own insincerity? He says I help him. He praises me. Does he know how I hate gifts? Does he know gifts scratch my skin and destroy my sleep? Is he one of those who pretends to give—only to elicit gifts? I shall not give them." Page 169

"Soon Bertha, the empress of his mind, glided into view, flattening and scattering other thoughts, demanding his sole attention." Page 172

"I didn't create the word and, Lou, I wish I had—then I would be able to bear all the guilt that things turned out between us the way they did. Goodbye, dear Lou, I didn't read your letter to its end but I'd read too much already. . ." Page 218

"But not even morbidity could spoil the mood of this walk. He thought of Nietzsche's definition of friendship: two who join together in a search for some higher truth. Was that



not precisely what he and Nietzsche were doing that day? Yes, they were friends." Page 246

"That same afternoon, the patient in room 13 at the Lauzon Clinic, Eckart Muller, boarded a fiacre to the train station and thence traveled south, alone, to Italy, to the warm sun, the still air, and to a rendezvous, an honest rendezvous, with a Persian prophet named Zarathustra." Page 301

"Doctor Breuer, I must see you on a matter of great urgency. The future of German philosophy hangs in the balance. Meet me at nine tomorrow morning at the Cafe Sorrento. Lou Salome." Page 1

"'A deep man needs friends,' he began, as if speaking more to himself than to Breuer. 'All else failing he still has his gods. But I have neither friends nor gods. I, like you, have lusts, and no greater lust than for the perfect friendship, a friendship inter pares — among equals. What intoxicating words, inter pares, words containing so much comfort and hope for one such as me, who has always been alone, who has always sought but never met one who belonged precisely to him.'" Page 273



## Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast the characters of Dr. Breuer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Do they have similar struggles? Can they truly understand one another?

Compare Nietzsche's obsession of Lou with Breuer's obsession of Bertha. How are the two women different? How are they similar?

Discuss the symbolism of Breuer's pigeons. Will setting the pigeons free help him more than it hurts him? What do they mean to him?

What role does Freud play in this story? Is he more of a teacher or more of a student? Is he a character foil to Dr. Breuer?

Why do you think Nietzsche talks about embracing isolation when it is one of his greatest fears? Does his past have anything to do with this?

During the hypnotism scene in Chapter 21, did you find yourself siding with Josef or Mathilde during their argument? Why?

How do you feel about the fictionalization of historical figures? Is there any way for an author to accurately portray a historical figure put into a different setting or story?