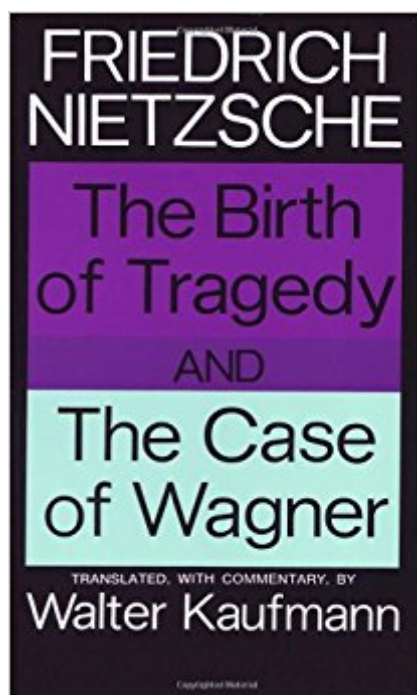


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# The Birth Of Tragedy And The Case Of Wagner



## Synopsis

Two representative and important works in one volume by one of the greatest German philosophers. *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) was Nietzsche's first book. Its youthful faults were exposed by Nietzsche in the brilliant "Attempt at a Self-Criticism" which he added to the new edition of 1886. But the book, whatever its excesses, remains one of the most relevant statements on tragedy ever penned. It exploded the conception of Greek culture that was prevalent down through the Victorian era, and it sounded themes developed in the twentieth century by classicists, existentialists, psychoanalysts, and others. *The Case of Wagner* (1888) was one Nietzsche's last books, and his wittiest. In attitude and style it is diametrically opposed to *The Birth of Tragedy*. Both works transcend their ostensible subjects and deal with art and culture, as well as the problems of the modern age generally. Each book in itself gives us an inadequate idea of its author; together, they furnish a striking image of Nietzsche's thought. The distinguished translations by Walter Kaufmann superbly reflect in English Nietzsche's idiom and the vitality of his style. Professor Kaufmann has also furnished running footnote commentaries, relevant passages from Nietzsche's correspondence, a bibliography, and, for the first time in any edition, an extensive index to each book.

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## Customer Reviews

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How did it happen that during the ascendancy of Greek civilization - the very foundation of Western civilization as we know it - a dramatic art form expressing the most terrible tragedies was entertained? And how was it that during the pinnacle of that culture this tragic art form declined and its elements went underground? The author is not inclined to gloss over the essential tragedy inherent in human existence. The destruction of the individual is inevitable, and all individuation eventually causes suffering. He proceeds through the mythic context (the mythic context being essential to the Greek world view) of the gods Apollo and Dionysius. Apollo includes dream imagery, illusion, or anything that involves form; on the other hand, Dionysius includes intoxication, ecstasy, primal oneness, and the energy of music. They may be conceived as distinct and opposing, but it's their complementary state that spells balance and substance in art. Nietzsche states, "The same impulse that is symbolized in Apollo gave birth to the entire Olympian world." The Olympians consisted of a pantheon of twelve gods and goddesses who had wrested control from the Titans, an older pantheon that represented the barbarism of Nature. Apollo was a mainstay of the Olympians, but Dionysius grew out of a cult religion and was only added later. Nietzsche states that the Greeks, being quite aware of the horrors of existence, felt compelled "to interpose the

radiant dream-birth of the Olympians between themselves and these horrors". From that "radiant dream-birth" grew the myths. The book does not go into extensive detail about the myths featured in the tragedies, not like a scholarly work would; but a very important myth that it does touch on is the Prometheus myth of stealing fire from the gods. Stealing fire was like stealing power and control, and represented a defiance of divinity. Not much can be gleaned of Greek music, but we do know that the dramatic dithyramb (the word is derived from the Greek), sung and danced by a chorus in honor of Dionysius, was a basis of what became Attic tragedy. It was the music that made the tragedy bearable and elevated it; and it was the music that rose out of tragedy in the spirit of Dionysius. The author links the decline of tragedy to what he sees as an over-reliance on reason and logic, which he pins squarely on Socrates. This over-reliance brings about an optimism that cannot be justified in life and therefore rings hollow in all art forms; and is not fertile ground for tragic dramatic art. The arguments very much tend toward the polemical, most notably in the linking of Socrates and Euripides with the decline of Greek tragedy. Here, Nietzsche tends to think about the overreach of reason and logic during the nineteenth century rather than the tremendous achievement and significance of Greek thinkers such as Socrates during ancient times. Some sections of the book are particularly speculative such as his musings on lyric poetry and the rebirth of tragedy. He, himself, in his self-criticism of this book disparaged his youthful enthusiasm, especially in regard for Richard Wagner's music. But despite the criticism of this book, its insights, especially concerning myth, art and tragedy, make it definitely worth reading more than once.

Many can write more informed opinions on this book. I can merely say I have read it 7 times in the last two years and each time I gain a new insight into Nietzsche's thoughts about how humans can live joyful, productive lives in the face of constant reminders that the world and existence are unpredictable, cruel, often vicious and threatening. The ideas presented here are expanded in his later work. He has a terrific sense of humor. I prefer Walter Kaufmann's translations.

Deep and difficult to read, but good.

The description on this product isn't accurate as it's translated by William A Hausmann and not Walter Kaufmann, strange mistake.

As described!

A lifelong resource.

Great! I love these Dover thrift editions... wish more were philosophy instead of stories...I highly recommend "meditations"

thanks!!

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