For about a decade now there has been a growing uneasiness with regard to Nietzsche: Might he not be more inaccessible, more unapproachable and more inevitably "betrayed" than any philosopher before or since? Might he not be more veiled and also more thoughtlessly read, and therefore more richly endowed with a future, than any other philosopher?

How did all this come about? No doubt first of all because the apparent ease with which he can be read, an ease due to his seductive "style" (polemic, poetic, aphoristic) as well as to what can pass superficially for a lack of "technical" vocabulary, gave rise to the illusion that this philosopher lay within easy reach of everybody. Thence, inversely and at the start, came disdain on the part of the "specialists" for a philosophy which is so little concerned with being "coherent" and so manifestly antiphilosophical that it could easily be dismissed as belonging more in the ranks of "literature."

The warning indicated by the subtitle of Thus Spoke Zarathustra had not been understood: a "book for all" and "for nobody." Then also a number of extraneous factors moved in to obliterate Nietzsche's thought: prejudices (e.g. the one propagated by Gide about his supposed "aestheticism"), myths (e.g. the one consisting of the belief that his insanity sold out his work, whereas it merely interrupted it), falsifications and misconceptions (the most odious and most often repeated one being that about his supposed antisemitism). But the obstacles do not stop here. Of Nietzsche's unfinished works, more than half are posthumous fragments, and the editions available to us in translation up to the present time have represented the texts in a partial and mutilated fashion, without due respect for either the manuscripts or the chronology. Finally, if we line up the "literary" versions of Nietzsche (in Thomas Mann, Musil, Jünger, Borges) as well as the strictly philosophical commentaries (by Heidegger, Jaspers, Fink, Klossowski) we are faced with a disconcerting diversity of interpretations testifying all the more to how difficult it is to encompass the vast field opened up by Nietzsche's thought.
However, Nietzsche’s inaccessibility might well derive from something more fundamental, namely his strange and ambiguous language vis-à-vis the traditional language of philosophy. Indeed Nietzsche develops, in direct opposition to the tradition and its language, a language of his own, a form particularly insinuating, insidious, complex — and designed for the purpose of subversion. On the one hand, when making use of current metaphysical oppositions (which, for him, all come down to the Platonic opposition between the “true world” and the “apparent world”), he does so with a view to eradicating and abolishing these very distinctions; there is thus inevitably an ambiguity weighing upon his use of terms having a precise meaning within the tradition, terms such as “true” and “false,” “good” and “evil.” On the other hand, the key words of his own vocabulary (Will to Power, Nihilism, Overman, Eternal Return) elude conceptual logic. Whereas a concept, in the classical sense, comprises and contains, in an identical and total manner, the content which it assumes, most of Nietzsche’s key words bring forth, as we shall see, a plurality of meanings undermining any logic based on the principle of identity. In so far as they include significations which are incompatible with one another, these words could be understood as bursting at the seams: a word such as Nihilism designates at once the most despicable and the most “divine” mode of thought. But they function above all to burst open some traditionally accepted identity (e.g., Will, Ego, Man). The recourse to polysemy and the attempt to destroy the great identities of the tradition base themselves on a theory of language which takes language as a machine fabricating false identities. And for Nietzsche every identity is “false,” in particular any identity born of conceptualization. As he says, “every concept arises from identifying what is not identical” (Truth and Lie in the Supra-Moral Sense, § 1). Every concept results from a series of metaphorical transpositions (so primeval that they are always forgotten), the “truest” concept being simply the one which corresponds to the identification, i.e., image, which is most familiar and most common (most effaced in its character as a mere image). Far from attaining to the “truth,” a concept, just as language in general, functions as an instrument of “gregarization”: viz, it is an identification for the greatest number.

With the help of the Nietzsche-Register appended to the Kröner edition of Nietzsche’s complete works (Verlag Alfred Kröner, Stuttgart), the translators were able to locate about two-thirds of the quotations cited by Professor Haar. All references are to paragraph rather than page numbers and indicate also that the translation follows the German more closely than the French.