

# The True Nietzsche

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**F**riedrich Nietzsche, the Bacchic philosopher of energy and dark sayings, has been mutilated more than any other great modern thinker. It has been common to revile him as the proto-Nazi, an anti-Semite and a statist. In a period of mounting anti-Semitism, in which a dying world must find some helpless minority people as the usual ritual bull to dismember, it is very important to understand Nietzsche. Was this seer, who had such a deep influence upon romantic natures like Georg Brandes, Thomas Mann and Emma Goldman, a muscle-and-war Wotan or Thor, playing, long after his death, the Jew-baiting satyr in a *Walpurgisnacht* that has by no means ended? The answer is "no." Nietzsche's works must be taken out of villainous hands, and Walter Kaufmann, the author of *Nietzsche*, has performed a considerable service in this respect alone. His *Nietzsche* should relieve many ardent but troubled admirers of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

Nietzsche's brief, but torn, life can be divided into three parts. At twenty-four years of age he was a brilliant philology professor at the University of Basel. But with no mind to be a college philosopher, he wrote a heterodoxical book on aesthetics, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). He had the greatest reverence for Greek learning and already

considered himself a Socratic nature. After ten years as a lecturer, he resigned because of ill health. He left the university for the same reasons that he relinquished his enthusiastic friendship with Richard Wagner—soul-sickness. Nietzsche, who had said that his own youth would have been unendurable without Wagner's music, had such an aversion for the composer in the role of the Teutonic prophet that he could no longer go to his home. Whenever Richard or Cosima Wagner sent him an invitation, he got migraine headaches and even vomited. The anti-Wagnerian phase was the beginning of the second part of the life of this Alpine mountain sage who wanted to be twenty thousand leagues above humanity, Junker mankind in particular.

But the most significant portion of Nietzsche's life is the third, that of his madness, for it was at this time that he became famous, and oh, what infamy there is in this prostitute, Renown, especially Nietzsche's! Up till the time of his insanity, he had been basely neglected; so little heed was paid to the first three sections of *Zarathustra* that he considered it futile to write or to print the last part. Then a terrible irony occurred. Nietzsche became known through his sister, Frau Forster, who had married in 1885 Dr. Bernard Forster, organizer of an anti-Semitic colony in Paraguay called Germania Nueva!

This marriage agitated Nietzsche a good deal and gave him those queasy feelings that often tell people much more than their minds do. Dr. Forster had already been involved in some unsavory street-car incidents in which Jews were roughly handled. Forster was one of those typical, unlearned Herr Doktors with which Germany and our own land is so unhappily glutted. Despite all the babble about German culture, Nietzsche had written that after the death of Goethe there were no more than four gifted

writers in the country, Schopenhauer, Heine, Lessing and Nietzsche. Lessing, a beautiful nature and the author of one of the most noble books of criticism, *The Laocoön*, had said more or less the same things about German poetry and civilization. It must be remembered that Lessing's friendship for Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish philosopher, was considered an act of social courage; and that Heinrich Heine had found the German professional and writing classes so hostile that he lived almost all of his life as an exile in Paris. What Hitler later regarded as Jewish corrosive wit, the Heinesque doubt, was just as abhorrent to the average academic in Heine's time. Dante, one of the greatest of the world's believers, had written: "I love to doubt as well as to know."

We see, then, how sterile were the educated classes in Germany, and also how pessimistic; for otherwise how could so negligible a population of Jews as there was in Germany be regarded as a menace to the nation? The German fear of a few hundred thousand Jews was the expression of a gross professional mind incapable of intellectual appetite or vision.

In 1870 anti-Semitism was officially organized in Germany, so that the period was ripe for the Wagnerian propaganda which Dr. Forster was peddling. This poltroon did not even have a first-hand knowledge of Wagner's musty intellectual goods or of the composer's militant vegetarianism, which Hitler later adopted to show the German people how to be content on a Third Reich vegetable plate. Then there was Wagner's dreamy idealism of the antivivisectionist that had a remarkable appeal for the Forsters as well as for the sinewy Siegfried anti-semite. (Both Wagner and Hitler were themselves very small and droll Siegfrieds.)

Germania Nueva in Paraguay soon collapsed. The colo-

nists accused the Forsters of swindling them, and Forster took his own life. The widow returned to Germany to take care of her stricken brother. Mr. Kaufmann writes: "The tragedy was played out . . . and a satyr play followed."

Nietzsche had watched from a distance Wagner's efforts to establish Bayreuth as the Holy City of anti-Semites; this attempt to elevate Bayreuth Nietzsche called "cultural philistinism." He had criticized Kant because he "clung to the university, submitted to governments"; he had condemned Hegel for writing, "The State is the actuality of the ethical ideal"; and he had the sharpest contempt for the serving-maid in Luther, who had said: "If they take from us body, goods, honor, child, and wife: let it go—the Reich yet remains to us!" He denounced race politics, another word for Jew-baiting, calling himself a "good European," an "anti-anti-Semite," and he showed the plainest abomination for what he called the "extirpation of the German spirit in favor of the German Reich." In a letter to Overbeck he said ". . . there is a special anti-Semitic interpretation of (*Zarathustra*) which makes me laugh very much." Nothing helped; the anti-Jewish *Parteigenossen* presented him to the public as a Teuton *Politiker*.

It had been a great sacrifice for Nietzsche to relinquish Wagner's friendship. In *Zarathustra* he wrote: "What does he know of love who did not have to despise just what he loved!" He had loved Wagner and had a secret, Dionysiac passion for Cosima Wagner, the illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt. He was a very lonely genius and not particularly lucky with women. There was a Fraulein Lou Salome, a disciple of his thinking; he hoped she would become his wife. She later wrote a book about him instead, marrying another author of much less artistic worth than Nietzsche.

The migraine headaches worsened despite the invigorat-

ing Alpine walks. This sick man was an apostle of health, and mountain-mind climbing is characteristic of all his remarkable books. By 1889 the poor mind was lost; Nietzsche was living in that grubby factory city, Turin, in hilly Piedmont, when he had his first fit of madness. Cesare Lombroso, author of *Genius and Insanity*, was also living in Turin at the time of Nietzsche's collapse. Nietzsche saw a rough coachman flogging a horse, and he fell, his arms flung around the horse's neck! He was taken to the clinic at Jena and then removed to the asylum for the insane. His friend, Overbeck, who came to help him, would never repeat what he referred to only as the Dionysiac mutterings of Nietzsche, already as mad as Ophelia cheeping bawdy valentine verse. The lunatic Nietzsche sent out notes to friends, signing himself as the Greek god of wine; one scrawl he posted to Cosima Wagner addressed her as Ariadne and called himself Dionysus.

Mr. Kaufmann writes that Frau Forster had gained the exclusive right to all of her helpless brother's works; and here the comedy and the deluxe fraud begin. What intellect had Frau Forster for her noble task? Mr. Kaufmann tells us that she asked Rudolf Steiner, a Goethe scholar, "for lessons in her brother's doctrine." She published almost every year his "collected works," suppressing anti-teutonic maxims or epigrams; finally she patched together thousands of random and disparate jottings and scribblings and issued them under the misleading title of *The Will to Power*.

Charlatans had always gathered around Nietzsche, causing people to ask whether he was not himself a quack-salver as well as homosexual. There was Doctor Schuler who promised to cure Nietzsche through a Corybantic male dance; Schuler had looked up ancient texts to find the suitable armour the youths should wear in the cultic dance

which was to heal the great, hurt mind.

The madness made many query Nietzsche's worth. But the sages that have had the profoundest influence upon our age have been deformed or crazy or tubercular; paradoxically, their works have had enormous intellectual force and sanity. Kierkegaard was crippled; Hölderlin, the German mystic poet, was out of his mind; Schiller was consumptive, and our own Randolph Bourne was a miserable little hunchback.

What does Nietzsche teach? There are more parables crannied in that eagle's eyrie than can be put down in this essay. In an age of desperado inertia, weak in character, he shows us that in great willing is art and morality. What is important is to ascend the moral mountains, and though we roll down each time from the summit like the Sisyphean rock, it is our will to return that is Vision. Or to speak after the manner of Zarathustra, let us say, "It is my striving that is my Temptation."

We have made language so common that we have ceased to be symbolic readers. Unless we examine the total intellect of the poet as his text we shall misinterpret Blake or Shakespeare just as foolishly as Nietzsche has been distorted.

It seems that our task today is to save our savants from the disgrace the mediocre heart would heap upon them. Nietzsche paid very dearly for the ideas that he has bequeathed to us. It may be that the solitude he required for his apothegms drove him mad; perhaps he craved insanity; what other physic had he? Socrates took the hemlock, to perpetuate his ideas. Miserable irony; but no matter, he was a monarch of the spirit, and if we ourselves are moral and desperate readers, we can find in every book that Nietzsche wrote the hard alpine stuff for our wills. The great Goethe said, "Who overcomes himself, his freedom finds."