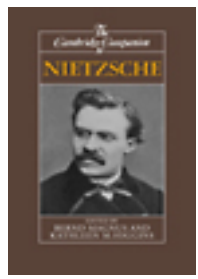

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Chapter

2 - The hero as outsider pp. 71-89

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2 The hero as outsider

I. THE NIETZSCHE LEGEND

For many years Nietzsche lived in a room in a house in Sils-Maria, in the Upper Engadine in Switzerland. The room is kept as he lived in it and it has often been photographed. It contains a bed, a writing-table with a lamp on it and a wash-table, and a small sofa. The walls are of wood, and the floorboards are partly covered with a carpet. There is a single window and through it you can see part of the village of Sils and the slopes of the mountains that lie beyond it. It is a typical small room in an Alpine village house.

He lived in this room in the summer months and would have lived in it all the year round if the winters had not been too cold for him. The winters in the Upper Engadine can be very cold.

From this room he wrote on 20 July 1888 that he had succeeded in securing a publisher for a book on the aesthetics of French drama by the Swiss author Carl Spitteler. This "little piece of humanity on my part," he said, was "my kind of revenge for an extremely tactless and impudent article by Spitteler on my entire literature" which had appeared the previous winter. He added: "I have far too high an opinion of the talent of this Swiss to let myself be disconcerted by a piece of *loutishness*."[1]

Though Spitteler's article, which appeared in the Bern *Bund* on 1 January 1888, clearly failed to win Nietzsche's approval, it must have given him some satisfaction nonetheless, for it was the first general account of his "whole literature" to appear anywhere. The modesty of the accommodation he occupied in Sils-Maria corresponded to the modesty of the reputation he enjoyed while he lived there. At the beginning of 1888 he was known to almost no one.

A quarter of a century later another journal, the British *Educational Review*, published an article called "Did Nietzsche Cause the War?" The war it meant was the world war that had started in 1914. Nietzsche's reputation was by now not at all modest.

Here is Clarence Darrow, writing in 1916: "Since his death, no philosopher on earth has been so talked of as Nietzsche . . . The universities of the world have been turned upside down by Nietzsche . . . Nietzsche has helped men to be strong – to look the world in the face."[2]

Here is Giovanni Papini, writing in 1922: "I declare to you I do not know of any modern life nobler, purer, sadder, lonelier, more hopeless than that of Friedrich Nietzsche." Nietzsche was "pure, saintly, martyred"; it was "of love, shut in and unappeased, that Nietzsche died. We slew him – all of us – by our common human behavior."[3]

And here is Alfred Bäumler, writing in 1937: "When today we see German youth marching under the sign of the swastika, our minds go back to Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, in which this youth was invoked for the first time . . . And when we call out to this youth 'Heil Hitler!' we greet at the same time, with the same cry, Friedrich Nietzsche!"[4]

What these, and other comparable denunciations which I shall refer to later, have in common is that they are implausible. "Did Nietzsche Cause the War?" invites the answer "No." The connection between the *Untimely Meditations* of 1873–6 and National Socialism is invisible to the sober reader. And Darrow and Papini would excite even in someone who knew nothing of Nietzsche the suspicion they are being carried away from reality by an excess of emotion.

Anyone at all interested in Nietzsche and his philosophy will have encountered claims as to his status and character which, though they may conflict or even be incompatible with one another, share this element of implausibility. They belong to a cloudier, less palpable, and less believable world than that occupied by the room in Sils-Maria.

The world they belong to is not the real world but the world of legend. They refer to – or rather are – Nietzsche as legend.

2. THE NATURE OF LEGEND

Legend is fiction presented as truth. The word is often used as if it were synonymous with myth, but legends differ from myths in that,

while myths, being fictions about gods, are necessarily set in what is imagined as the very remote past, legends, being fictions about heroes, can attach themselves to the people or events of any period, including the most recent.

A half-conscious awareness of this is probably manifested in the misuse of the word "legendary" as a term of high approval, as in "the legendary gathering at Woodstock." The person using the word does not intend to assert that the event never took place but that it was so singular it has become the subject of legend. "Legendized" is the correct word.

If I speak, then, of Nietzsche as legend I am not using the word in a metaphorical sense but saying that Nietzsche's life became legendized, became the subject of a legend. Though the facts of his life are of consequence to anyone who wants to understand why he thought as he did, they are of small cultural significance compared with that of the legend.

Very many people to whom Nietzsche's philosophy is and must remain wholly unfamiliar are entirely familiar with the legend. His idealized head – the stiff black hair, the deep-sunk eyes staring at a point about fifteen feet in front of them, the overarching eyebrows, and, fronting all like the scoop of a bulldozer, the "Nietzsche mustache" – has for nearly a century been a familiar icon: that is to say, a sacred symbol bearing some of the features of the thing symbolized.

The imprecision, some of it willful, with which such freighted words as "legend" are employed today – how many legends in their own lifetime can you think of from, say Valentino to Jim Morrison? – makes it necessary for us to become clear in our minds what a genuinely legended figure is and, beyond that, how it could come about that as unpromising a candidate as a German philosopher could become a figure whose portrait is as immediately recognizable as that of any statesman or film actor.

3. THE *NACHMÄRZ* REPRESSION

The conditions which made it possible for a German philosopher to become a legend and culture star have their origin in the period of reaction and repression that followed the failure of the German revolution of March 1848. The agitated period that preceded the revolt in Berlin is known as the *Vormärz* [Before March], the reactionary pe-

riod that followed it as the *Nachmärz* [After March].[5] Restrictions on what would now be called civil liberties and freedom of expression became general and were applied not only to political and social life but to almost every region of public activity; and among the most affected regions was philosophy.

Convinced that revolutionary acts could only be a direct consequence of revolutionary ideas, and that revolutionary ideas could in turn only be a direct consequence of philosophical theories, the representatives of a reinvigorated state and church purged the philosophy departments of the universities of everything that struck them as being subversive of the existing order. The purge was mild enough compared with comparable exercises in our own century, but it was based on the same belief that ideas can be ordered out of existence and that if philosophers are instructed to abandon them they will do so. This belief is false, however, and when it is acted on it necessarily produces effects different from those foreseen.

As every philosophical topic of interest to anyone but a professional logician or epistemologist was banished from the German universities of the 1850s – and that was the practical outcome of the political and ecclesiastical censorship – philosophy was not brought to heel or reduced to an obedient servant of state and church, as was of course the intention. What happened was that German philosophy split into two: into an academic philosophy to which no one any longer paid attention and whose reputation sank to an unprecedented low for Germany, and a freelance philosophy existing outside and independently of the university whose practitioners were able to discuss those questions, alone of interest to the nonacademic public, which the academic philosopher was inhibited from approaching.

4. THE SCHOPENHAUER LEGEND

The first large beneficiary of this creation of a freelance market in philosophy was Schopenhauer. For thirty years Schopenhauer had been willfully hostile to the academic establishment of his time and apparently determined to fail to become part of it; as a consequence his influence had been severely limited. Now the *Nachmärz* repression handed him a public: a German audience eager to listen to "philosophy," to which academic philosophy, however, no longer dared to say anything. Aided by a finer literary style than any Ger-

man philosopher had hitherto had at his command, he then became not only the most widely read philosopher in Germany but also the pioneer of a species of literary figure previously unknown to German letters: the freelance philosopher sustained only by the popularity his performance procured him.

It was quite possibly Schopenhauer's exceptional success, combined with his isolation as a hostile exile from the academic world, that now assisted to produce what has been called a "transference of interest from the problems of philosophy to the men who produce this philosophy."[6] Interest in the private lives of Kant or Hegel had been largely limited to the enjoyment of anecdote. Kant's punctuality, by which you could set your watch each day as he walked past the window, represented the normal level of engagement with the life and personality of Kant. Generally speaking, Kant, Hegel, Fichte were "philosophy professors," and that summed up their characters.

This relative indifference to what these men themselves were like was, moreover, not confined to the nonacademic world, in which they had never been popular in the ordinary sense of the word. Academic discussion of their philosophies, even vigorous partisanship for or against, was conducted almost as though these philosophies had produced themselves. The degree of abstractionism attained to – the atmosphere produced of self-enclosed mind-problems lacking a "real" or "human" dimension – was among the reasons university philosophy ceased to have contact with the larger German public. This certainly contributed to the decline of the word "academic" to a pejorative word meaning "having no relevance to the affairs of the real world."

But the type of freelance philosopher who was an outcome of the *Nachmärz* bifurcation of German philosophy was, in strong contrast to this, all but compelled to exhibit publicly at least some aspects of his personality if only because they were his only credentials, or at any rate the only ones he could decently present in his posture as a thinker existing outside and above the system and its "qualifications." And that "transference of interest from the problems of philosophy to the men who produce this philosophy" would naturally have been promoted by such higher visibility.

Interest in Schopenhauer thus swiftly took a personal turn – but it was a personal turn of a specific and fateful kind. It is aptly symbolized by the fact that his earliest influential advocate was quite happy

for Schopenhauer to refer to him as his disciple: a word recalling, if not the relationship of Jesus's disciples to Jesus, at least that of Plato to Socrates. Objectively, Schopenhauer's life had hardly more to recommend it as an object of public interest than the lives of Kant or Hegel had. Nor was his personality calculated to excite general affection or sympathy. Yet when in this case the interest of the public was transferred from the philosophy to the man, it was transferred not to the real man but to the man as he represented himself to be and as, under his guidance and inspiration, his "disciple" Julius Frauenstädt depicted him.[7]

In Frauenstädt's presentation the neurotic genius – misanthropic, misogynist, and irascible to the point of caricature – is inverted into a patient and passive sufferer of misfortunes he had in reality mostly brought upon himself. Although there exists no evidence that anyone was ever exceptionally hostile toward Schopenhauer, Frauenstädt's 1849 essay, "*Stimmen über Arthur Schopenhauer*" ["Prejudices about Arthur Schopenhauer"] has for its theme the academic stupidity, blindness and malevolence responsible for burying the greatest contemporary philosopher in silence and obscurity for a quarter of a century. If you ask why he should have been singled out for such treatment, the answer is that he was a genius and all the rest were mediocrities defending their territory against him: which sounds plausible until you reflect that Kant and Hegel were, presumably, also "geniuses" yet were spared comparable persecution.

It is plain that Frauenstädt's interest in the facts of Schopenhauer's life was confined to those which he could put to use, and he was not interested at all in discovering the true motivations behind his subject's actions. What he was writing was not biography or even, in the last resort, polemic on behalf of Schopenhauer's *Weltanschauung* (worldview); what he was writing was legend.

5. THE PRECONDITIONS OF THE SCHOPENHAUER LEGEND

The Schopenhauer legend is the medieval legend of the knight errant translated from the physical to the mental sphere. Alone, more likely to be opposed and hindered than aided and succored by those about him, he ranges through the world in search of adventures of the mind. He slays falsehoods and rescues truths; he enters into

dialectical combat and always wins; grown old, he leaves as his legacy a model mode of being and way of life: fearless independence.

For such a legend to come into existence two things had to occur together: Schopenhauer had actually to possess an exceptional mind and the German academic world had to have no place for him. During the greater part of his life his estrangement from the university had been largely of his own doing, but with the advent of the *Nachmärz* purge it became enforced: no one would have been permitted during that period to teach what Schopenhauer taught ("atheism," for example).

Thus it was not until about 1850 that the necessary concrete reality existed upon which the legend could be erected. There were other reasons for Schopenhauer's sudden rise to fame and influence after so lengthy a period of obscurity, but these conditions contributed most to the fact that the real Schopenhauer so quickly vanished behind the legend of the solitary knight errant of truth.

6. NIETZSCHE'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE SCHOPENHAUER LEGEND

Such a legend may seem to be only a harmless piece of storytelling. It might even seem to benefit its subject inasmuch as it may attract to him the attention of those to whom a "philosophy professor," however gifted, would make no appeal. But the advantages it may have are outweighed by the disadvantage that the legend is capable of existing in the absence of the philosophy of which it was initially created to be the vehicle. The knight errant can go his merry way inspiring thousands to a life of fearless independence while the "truths" he rescues disappear into the background mist. And this is what happened in the case of Schopenhauer.

To Richard Wagner, who first read Schopenhauer's masterpiece, *The World as Will and Idea*, in 1854, the philosopher was the great resolver of the riddle of life, and it was in this sense that he sought to propagate his philosophy. Schopenhauer the man, whether the real man or the legend, hardly enters into Wagner's writings about him. A generation later, however, we find that Nietzsche is capable of revering Schopenhauer almost as greatly as Wagner had done, while first doubting, then denying, and finally ignoring his philosophy.

It is a commonplace of commentary on Nietzsche's early essay

"Schopenhauer as Educator" that it contains next to nothing about Schopenhauer's philosophy. It is almost wholly concerned with Schopenhauer as an exemplary type of man, or at least of philosopher. Academic philosophers, Nietzsche says, are harmless and pusillanimous, "and of all their art and aims there could be said what Diogenes said when someone praised a philosopher in his presence: 'How can he be considered great, since he has been a philosopher for so long and has never yet *disturbed* anybody?' But if this is how things stand in our time," he goes on,

> then the dignity of philosophy is trampled into the dust; it has even become something ludicrous, it would seem, or a matter of complete indifference to anyone: so that it is the duty of all its true friends to bear witness against this confusion, and at the least to show that it is only its false and unworthy servants who are ludicrous or a matter of indifference. It would be better still if they demonstrated by their deeds that love of truth is something fearsome and mighty. Schopenhauer demonstrated both these things – and will demonstrate them more and more as day succeeds day.[8]

In "Schopenhauer as Educator" it is not Schopenhauer's philosophy but Schopenhauer's legend which "educates"; and what it educates to is an admiration for and determination to live a life of fearless independence in the service of truth. That what this "truth" amounts to is in the last resort a matter of indifference, a position almost but not quite arrived at in the essay, is declared unambiguously in a quatrain Nietzsche subsequently wrote on Schopenhauer:

> Was er lehrte, ist abgetan;
> Was er lebte, wird bleiben stahn;
> Seht ihn nur an –
> Niemandem war er untertan!
>
> [What he taught has been done away with;
> How he lived will remain;
> You have only to look at him –
> He was subject to no one!]

To Nietzsche at least the philosophy of which the legend was once the vehicle is dead, but the legend lives vigorously on.

7. POETIC JUSTICE?

Perhaps the hackneyed term "poetic justice" is applicable to what happened to Nietzsche when he too became a famous freelance Ger-

man philosopher. Like Schopenhauer he philosophized outside and in hostile independence of the academic world (technically he was even more "independent" than Schopenhauer, inasmuch as, unlike Schopenhauer, he possessed no philosophical degree); like Schopenhauer he had command of a literary style out of the reach of the academic philosophers of his time; like Schopenhauer he was in his personal life a "solitary"; and like Schopenhauer he acquired "disciples" who, heirs of those who had transferred their interest from the problems of philosophy to the men who produced this philosophy, embraced his legend and ignored his books.

8. NIETZSCHE'S ILLNESS

Let us return to the room in Sils-Maria. It is the mid-1880s and the Nietzsche legend does not yet exist. The "proud and lonely truth-finder" – Nietzsche's description of Heraclitus[9] but before long to be applied to him – is a chronic invalid wondering whether Sils is still warm enough or whether, with winter coming on, he must remove to somewhere warmer. He feels more truly at home in the high Alps than he does anywhere else and likes to celebrate their coldness and remoteness in rhapsodic prose: but his nervous system can endure only so much of them.

Here is how he came to be living in this way. It is a medical story with a strong bearing on the character of the legend and especially on its more megalomaniac features. A few years ago it was a story that could no longer be told of anyone, but things have of course changed in the medical sphere since a few years ago.

Nietzsche attended the university at Bonn for a short time. His friend and fellow student Paul Deussen tells us that in February 1865 Nietzsche told him he had gone on a trip to Cologne, and that the cab-driver who had driven him around had, without his wishing it, taken him to a brothel. "I suddenly saw myself surrounded by half-a-dozen apparitions in tinsel and gauze who looked at me expectantly," Deussen says Nietzsche told him. "I stood for a moment speechless. Then I made instinctively for a piano in the room as to the only living thing in that company and struck several chords. They broke the spell and I hurried away."[10]

Deussen, who became one of the West's great Sanskrit scholars, was celebrated among his friends and acquaintances for the quality of his memory. The brief anecdote he relates is thus of importance

because it connects us in what are almost certainly Nietzsche's own words with the probable origin of his illness. It also exposes as legend the story of Nietzsche the great mind "driven insane" by solitude, lack of understanding, and the vulgarity of the world around him – by Papini's "love shut in and unappeased" – as the aspect of it that conflicts most crassly with reality.

In 1867 Nietzsche, now a student at Leipzig, was treated by two Leipzig doctors for a syphilitic infection; but there existed no cure for syphilis and the disease took its course. In 1869 he was appointed to the chair of classical philology at the university of Basel, in Switzerland; in 1871 he began to suffer from recurring migrainelike headaches, stomach disorder and general exhaustion, and in the February of that year he was granted leave of absence from Basel "for the purpose of restoring his health." No such restoration was possible, however, and the symptoms persisted. As the consequence of a general breakdown at Christmas 1875, he was again allowed time off from teaching, and in October 1876 the university let him go for a full year. In April 1879 he sustained so violent and protracted an attack of migraine and vomiting that he decided he must ask the university to release him for good, and he was retired on a pension.

Hereafter he conducted what he called a "daily battle against headache" and against a "laughable diversity" of ailments which continued until, in the autumn of 1888, everything suddenly cleared up, he experienced a feeling of boundless euphoria, and in the first days of 1889 collapsed into insanity. He was taken to a psychiatric clinic, where he was diagnosed as suffering from "paralysis progressiva." During the course of the next eleven years he slowly but inexorably declined into the condition commonly called general paralysis of the insane, and during his final years he was plainly aware of nothing.

Except for the extended length of time that elapsed between mental breakdown and death, which is atypical, this progress exhibits most of the typical symptoms of destruction by syphilis, and Nietzsche's story of being taken to a brothel is a plausible account of where he contracted it. His medical history is exceptionally well documented but in no way mysterious or uncommon.

Nietzsche's mental breakdown initially ignited two opposite reactions in the relatively few people who already knew something of what he had written. On the one hand there were those who, already disturbed by his works, recalled or were informed that his father had

died of "encephalomalacia" and thus felt entitled to conclude that Nietzsche had perhaps "inherited" insanity from him and had been mad all along. That this is an unscientific conclusion hardly needs pointing out. The word, obtained by translating the vernacular words for "brain" and "soft" into Greek and putting them together, describes a condition of the brain. The supposition that this condition produces "insanity," which can then be transmitted genetically, however, is really a piece of folklore, on a level with Wagner's discovery, communicated by letter to Nietzsche's physician, that the cause of Nietzsche's headaches and general malaise was "excessive masturbation." The thinking here, again, is prescientific.

The other reaction to Nietzsche's breakdown was to idealize it into an "ascent" above and beyond the concerns of the mundane world. Here is Gabriele Reuter, writing in the 1890s: "I stood trembling beneath the power of his glance. . . . It seemed to me that his spirit dwelt in boundless solitude, endlessly distant from all human affairs";[11] Ernst Bertram, writing in 1918, refers to an "ascent into the mystic";[12] Rudolf Steiner refers to the "unfathomable exultation" of Nietzsche's facial expression.[13] Here, true to the nature of legend, fiction replaces fact: a spirit dwelling in boundless solitude usurps in the legend the place occupied in the real world by the author of Nietzsche's philosophy.

9. NIETZSCHE'S EARLY LIFE

Nietzsche's life can be divided into four unequal parts: 1844–69, child, youth, student; 1869–79, university professor; 1879–89, freelance philosopher; 1889–1900, invalid. Of the books he published or intended to publish, three, *The Birth of Tragedy*, the four-part *Untimely Meditations*, and the first part of *Human, All Too Human*, belong to the second division. The remainder – the second and third parts of *Human, All Too Human*, *Daybreak*, *The Gay Science*, the four parts of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *The Wagner Case*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *The Anti-Christ*, *Ecce Homo*, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* and the *Dithyrambs of Dionysus* – belong to the third. The multitude of notebook entries some of which were published after his death under the title *The Will to Power* also belong to this third period. It was only in this period, 1879–89, that Nietzsche's life assumed the form

that supplied the necessary real foundation upon which the legend could subsequently be erected.

Nietzsche was born on 15 October 1844 in the village of Röcken, near the town of Lützen, which is near the city of Leipzig. At the time he was born, Röcken was in Prussian Saxony, and Nietzsche was thus a citizen of Prussia. All the above-mentioned places are now in what was called eastern Germany until 1989.

Nietzsche's father was the village Lutheran pastor, and his father's father had been a superintendent, the Lutheran equivalent of a bishop. Nietzsche's mother was the sixth of the eleven children of the pastor of a neighboring village. He was his parent's first child, and he was named after the reigning king of Prussia, of whom Pastor Nietzsche was an admirer. The king's birthday was also 15 October, which meant that when he was a boy, Nietzsche's birthday was a public holiday. He could hardly have been born more comfortably embedded in the church and state that were to reassert their authority in the *Nachmärz* 1850s.

Nietzsche's origin in a country parsonage is worth dwelling on because it supplies a corrective to the "proud and lonely truth-finder" element of the legend which conflicts with and obscures the fact that he was in reality a product of that *Pfarrhaustradition* [parsonage tradition] to which so many of Germany's intellectual elite have belonged. The facts of his biography second the conclusion to which an unprejudiced reading of his works, and especially a reading in the chronological order of their production, must surely lead – that his origins lay not in the clouds but in Protestant Christianity, of which he is manifestly an outcome. From the point of view of the Catholic church, the sin of Protestantism is its refusal to accept faith on authority – a refusal which must in the end lead to a loss of faith. Protestantism is a halfway stage between belief in God and atheism. From this point of view Nietzsche's origin in Protestantism must seem unquestionable: he must, indeed, if one takes him seriously, appear as the inevitable end of the course inaugurated by Luther. This way of viewing Nietzsche possesses over the legend of the solitary seer the advantage that it is sustained by biography: Nietzsche was in fact the heir of generations of Protestant clergymen and, in his own person, a son of the parsonage.

The earliest stage of Nietzsche's existence came to an end when his father died of "encephalomalacia," and the family – he, his

mother, his younger sister, Elisabeth, and two maiden aunts – had to vacate the manse to the pastor's successor. Nietzsche was then four-and-a-half years old. The family moved to Naumburg, a small town in Thuringia in eastern Germany. Nietzsche lived there from 1850 until he left for the Pforta boarding school in 1858. His mother remained there for the rest of her life, and he was returned there after his mental collapse of 1889.

In 1850 Naumburg was still surrounded by a wall; the gates were shut at night. The Kaisersaschern of Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* is modeled on Naumburg, and the word it irresistibly brings into mind is "medieval." The town could, of course, not have been truly medieval in 1850; but the exaggeration contained in the image assists toward an understanding of Nietzsche's subsequent attitude toward "the Germans" and his answers to the question "What is German?"

Here again biography acts as a corrective to legend. Before the era of German predominance in Europe that followed the foundation of the Reich in 1871, conservatism, inertia, and a sinister kind of quaintness were the characteristics universally ascribed to German society and the German nature. Germany was the European backwater where all things that are outmoded could be expected to have their home; and we must remember that this Germany, which anyone now living can experience only in imagination, was Nietzsche's real world during his formative years.

The first effect on a new reader of Nietzsche's writings of the 1880s, on which his reputation rests, is the feeling how "modern" he is, and this modernity obscures his origins and thus to some degree the sources of his judgments. It is a little as though a writer residing in Connecticut had been born and raised in Mississippi: his answer to the question "What is American?" might easily startle his neighbors who had spent their whole lives in New England.

From 1858 to 1864 Nietzsche attended Schulpforta. It was already clear to him that he was not going to follow his father and grandfathers into the church. He had no specific idea of what he was going to do; but Pforta placed a strong emphasis on the Greek and Roman classics. He discovered these presented him with no difficulty, and he thus became a classicist. There seems to have been no other reason for this choice of discipline.

"Classical philology," as the study of the life, language, and letters

of antique Greece and Rome was called in Germany, was a field in which Nietzsche later distinguished himself, and it is probably not too much to say that he revolutionized the way in which we perceive the Greeks. Of even greater consequence than the influence he had on Greek studies, however, was the influence his Greek studies had on him. Their most general effect was to demonstrate to him that a high civilization – the highest, indeed, as he quickly came to think – could be raised on a moral foundation wholly at variance with the Christian; and that Christian morality was not the only one. It would be right to call Nietzsche one of the great Hellenophiles: only he had first to redefine Hellas before he could admire it.

Nietzsche's universities were, as indicated, Bonn and Leipzig. At Bonn he studied theology and philology, but soon dropped theology. At Leipzig he discovered Schopenhauer and Wagner and became the star philological student. In 1869 he was appointed to the chair of classical philology at Basel at the almost unprecedentedly youthful age of twenty-four and awarded his doctorate by Leipzig without examination, on the basis of work he had already published. Basel wanted him to change his nationality from Prussian to Swiss. The first part of this request he was able to comply with, but he never achieved the residential qualification necessary for the granting of Swiss citizenship. He was thus for the remainder of his life stateless.

Nietzsche taught at Basel, very successfully it seems, for a little under ten years. He gained a modest notoriety with his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which now enjoys a reputation as a counterblow to the "sweetness and light" school of Hellenism. On its publication in 1872, however, it was considered seriously unscholarly for the work of a professor of classical philology; and its vehement advocacy of Wagner placed his academic career increasingly in jeopardy. In an overview of his life, however, Nietzsche's Basel years seem transitional. It was not until his incapacitation through illness had compelled him to relinquish an academic life that he became, in every really important respect, himself.

10. NIETZSCHE AS SOLITARY WRITER

Nietzsche now entered upon the decade of independence which constitutes the essential material of the legend, but which the legend falsifies in essential respects. The life he led was an unusual one,

certainly, but there are many witnesses to the groundlessness of the legend which depicts him as a remote, self-enclosed ascetic wholly devoted to a solitary pursuit of the higher truth. On the contrary, almost every report we have speaks of him as being to an uncommon degree urbane and civilized.[14] Everyone who remarks on the matter, for instance, notes the attention he paid to dress: he never appeared in public without being well turned out.

Because he was often ill, Nietzsche was often in bed throughout the day; and because he was a writer, he was often equally out of the public eye because he was sitting behind a desk. The latter point needs to be stressed. If we take into account the mass of unpublished material he wrote as well as the published books, we come to realize that between his thirty-fifth and forty-fifth years Nietzsche wrote a very great deal. Whatever else he might have done or suffered during these years, he was for much of the time sitting alone writing. This is something you have to forget if you want to see him, as the legend would have you see him, as being to an abnormal degree solitary and a loner.

The "solitude" that characterized Nietzsche's existence was, indeed, soberly considered only the solitude of the unmarried man without family: it was in no sense a life lived in desert isolation. Where he lived was dictated by his medical condition, inasmuch as he needed warmth in winter and coolness in summer. He spent summers in Switzerland – from the summer of 1881 in Sils-Maria – in winter on the French and Italian Riviera, chiefly in Nice or Genoa. Sometimes he was back in Germany (Naumburg, Marienbad, Leipzig), sometimes in Venice. When he collapsed he was staying in Turin. Except for his returns to the room in Sils, he never established himself anywhere but was repeatedly on the move, and this may perhaps be considered the sign of a restlessness abnormal in a man as sick as he was; notice, however, that his choice of resting-places does not suggest precisely asceticism.

The hook by which the legend attaches itself to the real man is in fact not any self-sought solitude but Nietzsche's intellectual independence as a philosopher during this decade, of which his footloose wanderings through Germany–Switzerland–France–Italy can be seen as an objective correlative. That he was perforce "free" of the university and never afterward attached himself to any other place or institution offers a biographical parallel to the freedom

which characterized his thinking. It also provides a hold for the legend of the unencumbered solitary to cling to. This consideration does not, however, apply to the paralytically immobile icon of the self-absorbed "thinker," which people who have never read a line of what he wrote have no difficulty in recognizing as "Nietzsche." It is the idealized head, not of Nietzsche as a thinker, but of Nietzsche as he appeared during the only time the graphic artists who created the icon ever saw him, which was when he had ceased to think at all.

II. THE ROLE OF ELISABETH FÖRSTER-NIETZSCHE

After Nietzsche's mental breakdown the most important figure in his life was his sister, Elisabeth, who was the chief instrument in the creation of the legend. Though many others made their contribution, it is she who is in the last resort responsible for the fact that Nietzsche is so much better known than his books are.

Two years younger than her brother, Elisabeth survived him by thirty-five years, or by forty-six if we add the eleven years of his incapacitation. While he was still quite unknown to the world at large she founded the "Nietzsche Archive" in the family home at Naumburg and then transferred it to a villa in Weimar, the cultural capital of Germany. Her role model seems to have been Wagner's widow, Cosima Wagner, who after Wagner's death preserved his "heritage" at Bayreuth something in the style of the priestess of a mystery cult. Elisabeth aimed to do the same for Nietzsche. The difference between them was that Cosima understood Wagner very well and acted in what was almost certainly the way in which he would have acted had he been alive, whereas Elisabeth seems to have had no notion of what Nietzsche stood for, or of what philosophy is, or of what is meant by intellectual integrity.

Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche's inadequacies are copiously documented and are not, at this time, in need of further substantiation. Until his suicide in 1889, Elisabeth had been married to Bernhard Förster, an anti-Semitic politician and proto-Nazi, and they had together founded a colony, New Germania, in Paraguay. After her husband's death and the colony's apparent failure – it has in fact survived to the present day in a rudimentary form – she returned to Germany and adopted Nietzsche as a substitute "life-task." So far as

she could she imposed Förster's values on the "Nietzsche Archive" and adapted Nietzsche in accordance with them. Ignorant of philosophy, she visualized a "philosopher" as a hybrid of solitary seer and elevated saint, and this is how Nietzsche appears in her biographies of him. Ultimately, he is to her a commodity, which she marketed in exchange not so much for money as for prestige, for a place of prominence in the new Germany.

Assisted by an acute commercial sense and the new copyright laws, Elisabeth gained control of everything Nietzsche had written – to prevent anyone else from acquiring it was one of the functions of the Archive – and as "Nietzsche's sister" laid claim to a unique ability to understand and interpret him. The legend we have been discussing was an outcome of her efforts.[15] Others more talented (to put it mildly) than Elisabeth contributed to the propagation of this legend, and in select cases (e.g. Stefan George) to its greater refinement and intellectualization; but the heart of it remained unaffected and it has come down to us intact.

12. THE DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE NIETZSCHE LEGEND

The Nietzsche legend is the modern legend of the isolate and embattled individual: the hero as outsider. He thinks more, knows more, and suffers more than other men do, and is as a consequence elevated above them. Whatever he has of value he has created out of himself, for apart from himself there is only "the compact majority," which is always wrong. When he speaks he is usually misunderstood, but he can in any case be understood only by isolated and embattled individuals such as himself. In the end he removes himself to a distance at which he and the compact majority become mutually invisible, but his image is preserved in his icon: the man who goes alone.

As in the case of Schopenhauer, the legend possesses an obvious attractiveness. It has certainly enthralled very many who would not have found enthralling, or even comprehensible, the philosophy of which it is supposed to be the vehicle, but from which it has broken free to enjoy an independent existence. It is certainly not going too far to say that thousands who claim to have been enlightened by Nietzsche, and believe what they claim, have in reality been se-

duced by the legend of the man who went alone, the high plains drifter of philosophy.

There have also been many, however, who have encountered the legend and found it repellent; and they have concluded that the philosophy must also be repellent. Here the legend proves to be very harmful indeed. "Most people," I was told recently, "regard Nietzsche as a very intelligent nutter." I don't doubt that this is true. I also don't doubt that "most people" have never read a line he wrote. How, then, can they have an opinion of him, unfavorable or otherwise? They have encountered the legend, which is part of the cultural air we breathe, and have formed an opinion of that, in the illusion they were forming an opinion of the man and his philosophy.

NOTES

1 Letter to Franz Overbeck, 20 July 1888. Carl Spitteler (pseudonym of Felix Tandem, 1845–1924), a leading Swiss poet and writer, received the Nobel prize for literature in 1919.
2 Clarence Darrow, "Nietzsche," in *Athena* (1916), reprinted by Enigma Press, Mount Pleasant, Michigan, 1983.
3 Giovanni Papini, "Nietzsche," in *Four and Twenty Minds* (1922), reprinted by the Enigma Press, 1983.
4 Alfred Bäumler, "*Nietzsche und der Nationalsozialismus*" (1937), quoted in Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner*, vol. IV (1947), p. 511.
5 The general aspect of the *Nachmärz* is familiar enough to students of German history, but the effect of the *Nachmärz* reaction specifically within the field of philosophy is treated in detail in Klaus Christian Köhnke's *Entstehung und Aufstieg der Neukantianismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986), to which I owe much of the present and following paragraphs.
6 Julius Ebbinghaus, *Schulphilosophie and Menschenbildung im 19. Jahrhundert* (1943), quoted in Köhnke, p.116.
7 For Frauenstädt's voluminous contribution to the Schopenhauer literature see Arthur Hübscher, *Schopenhauer-Bibliographie* (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt, 1981). His earliest eulogy of Schopenhauer dates from 1840; the essay "*Stimmen über Arthur Schopenhauer*," in which the legend appears small but perfectly formed, appeared in 1849; and his first full-sized book on Schopenhauer (376 pages), *Briefe über die Schopenhauer'sche Philosophie*, was published in 1854. Schopenhauer's *Parerga*

und Paralipomena, which first ignited general interest in him, appeared in Berlin in 1851.

8 "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Untimely Meditations* (CUP, 1983), p. 194.

9 In lecture 10 of *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*.

10 Paul Deussen, *Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche* (Leipzig, 1901), p. 24.

11 Quoted in Erich Podach, *Der kranke Nietzsche* (Vienna, 1937), p.251f.

12 Ernst Bertram: *Nietzsche: Versuch einer Mythologie* (1918), p.361.

13 Quoted in C. A. Bernoulli, *Franz Overbeck und Friedrich Nietzsche: eine Freundschaft* (Jena, 1908), vol. 2, p. 370.

14 For example, *Conversations with Nietzsche*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (OUP, 1987), contains recollections of Nietzsche by over fifty people who knew him, and he produced upon them all the impression of an almost excessively courteous and self-possessed companion. Some, it seems clear, subsequently had difficulty in identifying the Dionysian God-destroyer of the 1890s and afterward with the gentleman they had met and talked with. But all the documents relating to Nietzsche's life before his mental breakdown witness to the same thing.

15 Descriptions and, sometimes, documentation of Elisabeth's leading role in the creation of the legend and in the elevation of Nietzsche to a cult figure and culture hero can be found in most contemporary accounts of Nietzsche's life, even brief ones (e.g. the article on him in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1982). No recommendable account of her own life exists, and probably no account is needed outside the context of her involvement with her brother.