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CULTURAL BARBARISM AND THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

AN ANALYSIS OF THREE CASES OF HERO-WORSHIP IN 19th CENTURY GERMANY

By

Gregory R. Chemnitz

History Honors Paper
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I.

The 19th century produced numerous intellectual currents which were expressions of an incompatibility with the modern age. In reaction to the emergence of a new, urban, petty bourgeois world the 19th century intellectual often assumed the role of a prophet, warning of the decadent course of history while portraying an ideal form of existence which could eventually be achieved. One manifestation of this expression of dissent was Romanticism, and especially German Romanticism. In Germany there arose a passionate outcry for the internal purification of man and the return to an earlier condition. Associated with this was the worship of the hero, an ideal type of man that had once flourished, but had since been betrayed.

German Romanticism produced three great intellectuals within this genre: Richard Wagner, the artist emerged in revolutionary politics in the year 1848, placed his hero upon the operatic stage. Friedrich Nietzsche, writing in self-imposed isolation around the year 1880, introduced his hero as a literary character in a philosophical discourse. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a generalist scholar who was actively supportive of Wilhelminian politics, writing near the turn of the century, presented his hero as a character in an historical survey. Notwithstanding these contextual differences however, these three men shared a particular type of alienation and an ideal vision which placed them firmly in the German Romantic tradition. An understanding of the reasons for and the characteristics of their common intellectual heritage should facilitate an understanding of the manifestations of 19th century German alienation, as well as an understanding of the cumulative effect of their works upon the German mind in the 20th century.

II.

Richard Wagner drove the seeds of discontent and revolutionary impulse from the one goal which preoccupied his entire life--the promotion of his artwork. Wagner was obsessed with the problem of restoring art to the form and function it had once had in the Hellenic world, and thus providing the fertile soil upon which his own artwork of the future could grow. His unbridled determination to achieve this goal led him first to an acute sense of alienation from the contemporary world of opera and then to a direct confrontation with the social and political order. The hero for Wagner was an instrument for overthrowing that order and in some respects a representative of the future audience in Wagnerian theatre. Hence an understanding of the derivation and the nature of this hero in the thought of Wagner the revolutionist is inseparable from an understanding of the alienation of Wagner the artist.

Throughout his life Wagner expressed his dissatisfaction with the historical evolution of art. The history of art, and specifically of drama, was for him a gradual disintegration from the apex which had been realized in ancient Greece to its most decadent state in contemporary theatre. In Greece man was united with nature; his every action and word were the immediate expression of 'necessity'. The complete man-- "the man of understanding united with the man of heart and the man of body"-- was part of a community of all those men who feel a common and collective 'Want' which is so strong that it becomes a collectively felt 'Need'.¹ This community-- the Volk-- was invested with special significance by Wagner. He felt that true drama must spring from a common impulse and must appeal to a common interest. Greek art was the expression of the public conscience, of the Volk. People from all walks of life assembled for performances of the great tragedies to witness the image of them-

¹Charles A. Lidgley, Wagner (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1899), p. 97

selves and the significance of their actions. Through the dramatic depiction of Mythology, the Volk recognized their Gods in the heroic image of man and realized the intimate relation of man with nature. In its union of rhetoric, the chorus, and scenery the Greek drama was truly representative of life itself.²

These virtues of Hellenic culture were, according to Wagner, gradually dismembered by a long historical process. First, with the decline of Athens, the unified artwork split into its component parts. Then philosophy and science severed man's unity with nature. The Romans, in accordance with their realism and materialism, replaced the drama with circus spectacles. Christianity, in turn, was not congenial to drama because its teachings degraded the instinct and emphasized life hereafter.³ Dramatic character-drawing since Shakespeare has declined because of the influence of the State which forces man into conformity and suppresses "the right of free personality".⁴ Finally, and for Wagner most importantly, instead of being the common property of the Volk, art had become the servant of industry and the luxury of the moneyed few. The Greek artist had found his own reward in artistic success and public approval; now the artist had made art an article of commerce. Art had been taken away from its natural birthplace--the Volk: "With the Greeks, art lived in the public conscience: with us it lives only in the conscience of private individuals."⁵

² Ibid, p. 110

³ H.F. Garton, Wagner: The Dramatist (London: John Calder Ltd., 1977), p. 72

⁴ Ernest Neumann, Wagner: As Man and Artist (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937), p. 209

⁵ Ibid, p. 183

It was this line of reasoning which in 1848 led Wagner to conclude that the artwork of the future could only be realized by a radical transformation of society. The political unrest during this time period gave him further cause to believe that the condition of art which he so much deplored was a natural outgrowth of the established order. When the revolutionary ferment exploded in Dresden, Wagner revealed the sincerity of his rhetoric by joining Bakunin in rebellion. Upon being exiled from Germany, he embarked on a torrent of political, philosophical, and aesthetic writing from 1848 to 1851, in which he set forth his hopes not merely for a political revolution but for a total regeneration of mankind. Throughout such prose writings as Art and Revolution, The Work of Art of the Future, and Opera and Drama, Wagner pleaded for the birth of a new kind of man who could restore art to its original wholeness. Only when the slaves of industry have been elevated to "free, strong men" will art once more be the property of all. Thus art and revolution must go hand in hand in their struggle for one great goal: "This goal is strong and beautiful Man: may Revolution give him the strength, Art the beauty!"⁶

The new man can however only be realized, Wagner asserted, when he is impelled by instinctive 'Need' and not subjected to an imaginary and arbitrary power, such as the State. In the state-governed community men's actions are conditioned, not by inner conscience, but by the threat of sanctions and a false sense of duty. Rather than providing the individual with a natural and flexible surrounding, the State lays down for the individual in advance. "So shalt thou think and deal."⁷ In order then to create the free individual it is necessary to annul the state. The ideal community of the future will be one in which all will act according to a common ins-

⁶Garten, p. 73

⁷Richard Wagner, "Opera and Drama", Part II, Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. II, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd., 1895), p. 196

inctive impulse and in which the only "social Religion" will be the "free self-determining of the Individuality."⁸ With the liberation of the Volk community man will once again be in his natural surroundings, acting out of 'necessity' and not from arbitrary dictation. Thus Wagner eagerly anticipated social and political upheaval, that would usher in a new man and the ideal community. Only then, in his judgement, would the virtues of the Hellenic world have been regained and the art-work of the future will have found its proper home.

While his prose writings during these turbulent years were the most coherent expression of Wagner's hopes for man's regeneration, the most important medium of this expression--both for Wagner himself and for history--was his art. The political revolutionary was submerged by the artist, and beginning in 1848 he sought comfort and promise for his revolutionary faith in the realm of history and myth. It was while he was conducting research for his artistic projects that Wagner found his hopes for the future rested with the hero. The heroic figures of the past began to appear in his vision as saviours, as representatives of the new man, and as examples of greatness which the struggling Volk could identify with and find inspiration from.

The first such hero which Wagner considered for a dramatic project was the German Emperor, Fredrich Barbarossa. A popular legend in Germany held that a 12th century Hohenstaufen Emperor was sleeping within a mountain, ready to wake when the Volk could be in need of him.⁹ The Emperor Barbarossa seemed a proper model for just such a saviour, and accordingly he became the subject of a spoken play that Wagner began in early 1848. Soon after starting this project, however, Wagner became dissatisfied with historical subjects altogether. He came to the conclusion, as he ex-

⁸Ibid, p. 202

⁹Garten, p. 61

plained in A Communication To My Friends, that man in his historical context was determined by social and political circumstances, instead of determining them. Pursuing this line of thought, he turned to myth, where man is the "free creator of circumstances." His studies directed him to the legends of the Middle Ages and ultimately to ancient German mythology. In these sagas Wagner finally found his desired subject matter: "What I here saw, was no longer the Figure of conventional history; but the real naked Man, in whom I might spy each throbbing of his pulses, each stir within his mighty muscles, in uncramped, freest motion; the type of true human being."¹⁰

Wagner found in such pagan myths as the German Nibelungenlied and the Icelandic Edda the heroic character of Siegfried and his fight for the Hort, the hoard which is the symbol of worldly power.¹¹ Upon making this discovery Wagner wrote an essay, The Wibelungen: World History Out of Saga, in which he drew parallels between Siegfried and Frederick Barbarossa. Siegfried's struggle for the Hort was given mythical identity to the Emperor's striving for the Holy Grail, which Wagner considered a symbol for "real property" in the modern world. The essay depicts Barbarossa as sleeping within the mountain of popular legend, lying next to the sword with which Siegfried once slew the dragon. It concludes with the revolutionary challenge which preoccupied Wagner in his years in exile: "When will you return Frederick, you glorious Siegfried! and strike the evil, gnawing dragon of humanity?"¹²

Subsequent to the writing of this essay, Wagner's interest in the figure of Siegfried superseded his interest in the character of Barbarossa, and dominated the creative achievement and thought of the artist during the next twenty years. At the

¹⁰Wagner, "A Communication To My Friends", Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. I, p. 358.

¹¹Garten, p. 62.

¹²Ibid, p. 63.

same time his revolutionary expectations underwent continuous revision until they were ultimately extinguished. But even as they decreased, the heroic proportions of Siegfried were never diminished by his creator. Indeed, as Wagner revised his artwork to match his increasing pessimism, the character of Siegfried in Wagnerian drama grew in stature by assuming a more tragic role. For Wagner the revolutionist Siegfried represented what in part man will become, whereas for the disillusioned Wagner he epitomized what in part man could have been. But he remained an ideal throughout.

Wagner drafted his initial sketch on the subject of Siegfried in the same year in which he had devoted his attention to the figure of Barbarossa. Originally he only intended the draft to satisfy his "inner promptings", and not to become the basis for a new opera. But during his years in exile he came to the conclusion that the mythological drama of the Siegfried saga would be ideal substance for his new art-form and would serve as a liberating force for the struggling Volk; for in the portrayal of the hero, "as in the convex mirror of its being, the Volk learns to know itself."¹³

The music-drama which Wagner created to serve his revolutionary purpose was perhaps his greatest and yet his most inconsistent artistic creation. Entitled The Ring of the Nibelungen, it reflects the transformation in Wagner's social and political Weltanschauung. The beginning and the end do not cohere: a work which begins as a metaphor for the overthrow of modern society, weakened by legislative impotence and industrial greed, concludes as a metaphor for the renunciation of politics in the ultimate redemption of the world through love. But two things remain consistent from beginning to end. One is the moral message that gold is the "demon strangling manhood's innocence"¹⁴; the gold, representing the power of evil as opposed to love,

¹³Wagner, "Opera and the Nature of Music", Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. II, p. 60

¹⁴Wagner, "Know Thyself". Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. VI, p. 268

is stolen from nature and carries a curse which wreaks destruction on what was once an innocent, pure world. The other is the heroic nature of Siegfried; he alone of all the characters of this world can redeem the curse and when he fails to do so, becomes the most tragic victim of it.

Wagner's hero in this drama should only be interpreted as a figure of protest and not as a model of the complete ideal man. Siegfried represents the antithesis of the weak, cowardly, dishonest, and corrupt man which Wagner loathed in his own society. When Wagner proclaims that Siegfried is the "most complete man" he could conceive of, the "man of the future, who must create himself through our destruction",¹⁵ he is echoing the cry of so many other intellectuals of 19th century Europe who, disgusted with the modern condition of man, longed for what they believed was the heroic and innocent manhood of a bygone era. Wagner felt he had discovered in German mythology the true nature of man as he once was and as he should be. This is evident in his own explanation of the artist's method:

In the object he has represented the artist says to himself: "So art thou; so feel'st and thinkest thou. And so wouldst thou do; if freed from all the strenuous capric of outward haps of life, thou mightest do according to thy choice."¹⁶

Man in his natural state, Wagner believed, was a man of free action, one who makes no moral appeal to the world to believe in him, but acts fearlessly according to the dictates of his own nature. He felt that the joy in life, and the all-conquering fearlessness of the man of the past was lacking in the man of contemporary society.

In The Ring of the Nibelungen, Wagner intended to depict what he felt to be this stark contrast between the man of the past and the man of modern times. The character of Siegfried, representing natural man with all his virtues in their raw essence, is placed in the context of a weak and corrupt world representing modern society.

¹⁵Letter to August Rockel, 25/26 January 1854. Wagner: A Documentary Study, ed. Barth. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 184.

¹⁶Wagner, "The Play and Dramatic Poetry", Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. II, p. 155.

Siegfried's primary virtues are his spirit of freedom, his lack of fear, his desire to overcome obstacles in the pursuit of adventure, and his innocent constitution which gives him characteristics of honesty, trustworthiness, and loyalty. His antagonists in the drama have exact opposite qualities. The Gods, representing the State, are restricted in their actions by legal and moral norms, and hence suffer from a lack of freedom. The giants, symbolizing the bourgeoisie, are victims of greed and a desire to go on living in comfort. And finally, the Nibelungs or dwarfs, who epitomize modern decadence, suffer from great fear and a desire to gain increasing power for their own base purposes. Just as the hero is portrayed in stark and absolute terms by Wagner, so too are the figures of contemporary society given exaggerated characteristics.

This black-and-white approach is partially a product of the revolutionary impulse in Wagner; he believed that if the worthlessness of his society was clearly perceived by the populace, they would then have the resolve to overthrow the established order: "Once it is recognized, it also is doomed."¹⁷ It is also an artistic mechanism used by Wagner to get the utmost possible from emotional appeal. He wanted to represent the "purely-human" (das Rhein-Menschliche) or natural man in contrast with the conventional and thereby accentuate the emotionally appealing sensual aspects of man.¹⁸ Finally, the sheer simplicity and coarseness of the Siegfried figure gives credence to the belief that Wagner merely meant the hero to represent post-revolutionary man on a very broad symbolical level. Siegfried stands more for the missing virtues of the incomplete man of the present than he does for the complete superman of the future. Using Wagner's own criteria, he is the "man of the body", maybe even the "man of the heart", but not the "man of understanding."

¹⁷Wagner, "The Revolution", Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. VIII, p. 231

¹⁸Paul Beekker, Richard Wagner: His Life In His Own Work, trans. M.M. Bozman (Freeport: Books For Libraries Press, 1931), p. 237

The dramatic scenario of the Ring cycle must be analysed when studying the Wagnerian hero. It is perhaps the most revealing treatment of Wagner's early political and social outlook, albeit in allegorical form.¹⁹ At the beginning of the cycle the world is inhabited by the dwarfs of the inner earth, the giants of the mountains, and the gods of the air. Both Wotan, the king of the gods, and Alberich, the king of the dwarfs, aspire to world dominion, but each does so on different terms. Alberich, by stealing the gold from which he forges the ring, the symbol of power, and by renouncing love, tries to govern the world by sheer force. Wotan, on the other hand, aims at ruling by laws, engraved in runes on the shaft of his spear. The major thrust of the entire drama concerns the clash between these two mutually exclusive ambitions. Alberich is portrayed as a whip carrying capitalist who forces his subordinate dwarfs to work in drudgery within the bowels of the earth. Wotan is depicted as a ruling statesman imprisoned in his own system of rules.²⁰ Both characters seal their fate when they violate the innocent state of nature--Alberich by stealing the gold from the Rhine, and Wotan by cutting his spear from the world-ash tree. The god however increases his guilt when, unable to pay the giants who have built Valhalla, he steals the ring from Alberich thereby breaking his self-imposed rule of world dominion by law. The two giants, upon receiving the ring as payment, quarrel and one kills the other. The survivor turns himself into a dragon and, like

¹⁹ Wagner never did explain the symbolical significance of every scene, but the obviousness of the implication and his hints in several letters supports the allegorical interpretation. The most familiar of the interpretations of the Ring's allegorical content, including that of Shaw and Newmann, were written by men either close to Wagner himself or to the Bayreuth circle. Additional evidence of symbolical content is Wagner's choice and revision of the source material for The Ring of the Nibelungen. He changed the mythological sagas to suit his own purposes and selected what he needed from several sources. (For a discussion of these changes see W.J. Henderson, Richard Wagner: His Life and His Dramas, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1901), pp. 364-422

²⁰ For an interesting interpretation of Wotan and Alberich see George Bernard Shaw, The Perfect Wagnerite, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967)

most money-worshipping people in Wagner's eyes, chooses to guard his newly acquired treasure in dormant contentment.²¹ The world has been cursed by the theft and misuse of the gold and can only be redeemed when the gold is returned to the Rhine.

This is a brief summary of the story which sets the stage for the entrance of the hero who might restore innocence again. By portraying such a world of evil and corruption, Wagner has truly revealed his disgust of contemporary society. The hero makes his entrance when Wotan, whose guilt has been compounded, is forced to withdraw from the world he had hoped to rule and to create a free man who, "free from divine protection rids himself of the law of the gods."²² This free man could then win the ring from the hoarding dragon and restore it to the depths of the Rhine. Wotan is impotent to do so for he can not wrest the ring from the dragon without committing yet another violation of his own laws. This development in the drama has considerable allegorical content. As Shaw points out, the story depicts a world that is waiting for the new man to redeem it from the lame and cramped government of the State. Man, and not the established order, is supreme.²³ The hero is man in his natural condition, man who has not been subdued by arbitrary command, but rather creates his own laws to suit his own needs. As Wagner himself explains in The Revolution: "Be his own will the lord of man, his own desire his only law, his strength his whole possession, for the only Holiness is the free man and naught is higher than he."²⁴ This figure does not represent a future anarchist but rather the virtues of the new man who is part of the struggling Volk community. He is the creation of Wagner the optimistic revolutionary, who could triumphantly proclaim:

²¹ Ernest Newman, The Wagner Operas, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 238

²² quote by Wagner, Garton, p. 98

²³ Shaw, p. 29

²⁴ Wagner, "The Revolution", Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. VIII, p. 236

In godlike ecstasy they leap from the ground. The poor, the hungry, the bowed by misery, are they no longer; proudly they say "I am a Man!" The millions, the embodied Revolution, the God become Man rush down to the valleys and the plains and proclaim to all the world the new gospel of Happiness.²⁵

The first "God become Man" who is created by Wotan to redeem the world is Siegmund, the son of Wotan and a mortal woman. He is given little chance to succeed however, for he unknowingly violates two moral laws--adultery and incest--and Wotan is forced to kill his own son. This is further evidence of Wagner's rejection of the established order: both legal and moral codes are threatening to the free man of the future. Wotan's first attempt to let a free man, unrestrained by laws, win the world for him has failed. However before Siegmund's death, the hero was able to beget a son whom Brunnhilda, Wotan's daughter, manages to save against the god's will. This son is Siegfried, and his tragedy extends over the latter two dramas of the Ring cycle. He is different from Siegmund; ignorant of his descent, carefree and untroubled by any past. Brought up in the depths of the forest, he is an innocent child of nature. The entrance of Siegfried was undoubtedly intended to make the viewer feel as if a fresh, clean gust of air had swept across the stagnant atmosphere of the stage. He enters carrying a slain bear across his shoulders and shouting in utter joyfulness of life. After viewing the vast amount of treachery and weakness previous to this point the spectator cannot help but like this new fresh force on stage. But the strong representative contrast between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary conditions is intensified in the process.

Siegfried must first contend with the dwarf Mimi, who is Alberich's brother. Mimi had found the child Siegfried in the forest and had raised the hero with the evil intention of using him to capture the gold from the hoarding dragon. For Wagner the dwarf represented much of the decadent characteristics which were plaguing the

²⁵Ibid, p. 238

modern age. There is also strong evidence to suggest that he stood for the 19th century industrial magnate and possibly a semitic figure as well.²⁶ Mimi is shown to be in constant terror of what he does not understand and what is superior to him. He is always mistrustful and he is never to be trusted. Above all his greed for wealth and power knows no limits; He wishes that the "world will kneel" to his rulership and that "others will make eternal wealth for him."²⁷ Siegfried detests him for his weakness, physical deformity, and crippling fear. This disgust only increases when the dwarf tries to gain his confidence by claiming that he is Siegfried's father and is entitled to some reward for his tender care. At this point the plea for revolution is once again proclaimed by dramatist as the hero defiantly exclaims:

To go forth from the forest into the world, nevermore to return!
How glad I am to be free, nothing compels or constrains me
I flee from here, flowing forth
nevermore, Mimi to see you again²⁸

The dwarf then becomes desperate in his greed and his fear of the now incensed Siegfried, and begins plotting to weaken the hero: "By brains and cunning I'll... keep my head unharmed."²⁹ In an attempt to instill fear into Siegfried, Mimi appeals to his experience of the terrors of the forest, of its dark places, its threatening noises, and finally describes the frightening dragon who is guarding the gold. But Siegfried longs for adventure and is only filled with wonder and curiosity. In stark contrast to the dwarf, he seeks to overcome challenges and knows no fear. In the last encounter between Mimi and Siegfried, the hero perceives that the dwarf is trying to poison him and ends his troubles with the despicable creature by beheading him. As Robert Donnington points out, this action is for Wagner a spiritual and not a physical execution. Siegfried asserts his own will by beheading the evil and covetousness

²⁶ George G. Windell, "Hitler, National Socialism, and Richard Wagner", Journal of Central European Affairs, 1963, p. 489

²⁷ Act I, Scene 3, Siegfried

²⁸ Act I, Scene 1, Siegfried

²⁹ Act I, Scene 3, Siegfried

contained in Mimi's head.³⁰ The beheading of Mimi represents post-revolutionary man's beheading of decadence and capitalist greed.

The outcome of the confrontation of Siegfried and Mimi, the capitalist, is similar to the result of his conflict with the dragon, representing the bourgeoisie. The giant had transformed himself into the image of his own gigantic fear, as a deterrent to others who might seek to gain the gold.³¹ He remained idly lying in a cave, satisfied with the mere possession of the gold and reluctant to make better use of it. When Siegfried seeks him out and disturbs his sleep the dragon loses his temper and fights. But to his own great astonishment, Siegfried is victorious. In the dragon's last parting words, he indicates his thankfulness for the hero's having put an end to his desolate life, and warns Siegfried of the treachery in the forest. This scene reveals Wagner's contempt for bourgeois complacency and perhaps his conviction that its destruction would eventually be welcomed by the complacent themselves.

After slaying the dragon, Siegfried notices the gold in the cave but is not at all impressed by it. Instead he longs for a female companion and gains the help of a bird in finding a sleeping Brunnhilda. This is obviously a reference to post-revolutionary man's preference for love and beauty over material possessions. The search for the female leads Siegfried into his third major confrontation. This time it is Wotan the god who blocks Siegfried's path. The hero does not recognize his grandfather and has no respect for the stranger, even though he is a god. Wotan by this point recognizes that Siegfried is the truly free man he had envisaged, and he decides to test the god's authority. He raises his world-governing spear and declares: "My hand still holds the symbol of sovereignty." Siegfried is not at all perturbed and smashes the spear in two. The god, representing the governing order of the mod-

³⁰ Robert Donington, Wagner's Ring and its Symbols, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 202

³¹ Shaw, p. 49

ern age, can only declare: "Forward then! I cannot stop you."³² Siegfried truly represents the new man now that the God is impotent. He has overcome much of the decadence of his mythological world and ours, and has triumphed over the shackles of law and state.

The final conflict which Siegfried faces is the central subject of the final opera in the cycle. This subject is what motivated Wagner to begin writing the entire cycle, as evidenced by his first sketch in 1848 entitled Siegfried's Death. The life of Siegfried, which up till the final opera is triumphant, becomes a tragedy when the hero is the victim of treachery. Siegfried is stabbed in the back, his only vulnerable part, by yet another dwarf, the son of Alberich, whom the hero had taken into his confidence. One of the purposes behind depicting Siegfried's death was Wagner's desire to enlarge his heroic proportions. Before meeting his death, Siegfried is forewarned by the Rhinemaidens that treachery is very near. The hero does not become concerned over this warning--in fact he welcomes the challenge. That Wagner found this quite heroic is evidenced in a letter he wrote to August Reckel, wherein he asserted that Siegfried "knows the most important thing, that death is better than living in fear... You must admit it: the gods in all their glory must pale before this man."³³ More importantly however, there is evidence that Siegfried, at least originally, was intended to take the role of a Christ-like martyr. In an early essay written in 1848, Wagner claimed that Siegfried bore a striking likeness to Christ himself. Like Christ, he was God become man, and "as a mortal man he fills our souls with fresh and fierce sympathy: for as a sacrifice for his deed of blessing us, he arouses the moral motive of revenge--we long to avenge his death upon his murderer and thus to renew his deed."³⁴ Thus Siegfried would represent a figure

³²Act III, Scene 2, Siegfried

³³Wagner: A Documentary Study, p. 184

³⁴Hans Kohn, The Mind of Germany, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 195

of immense heroic stature, of a kind similar to Christ, and would serve to arouse the Volk to take up arms against those very same forces of decadence and evil represented in the Ring cycle.

The original intended role for the Siegfried character was the motivating force behind the entire creation of The Ring of the Nibelungen. While he was engaged in writing the dramatic project, however, Wagner underwent a transformation in his revolutionary convictions which led to revisions in the message of the scenario. The poet who began the work was an optimist with strong political persuasions. The poet who concluded the work was a pessimist who had abandoned all hope for a change in society. This change in ideology began shortly after the Dresden uprising³⁵ but was primarily the result of disillusionment over Louis Napoleon's seizure of power and the influence of Schopenhauerian philosophy. The defeat of revolutionary stirrings in France convinced Wagner of the futility of political revolt, while the profound pessimism of Schopenhauer's philosophy convinced him of the futility of life. By 1854 when the finishing touches were applied to the story of Siegfried, the hero had become for Wagner an unrealizable goal.

In a letter to Franz Liszt he confessed that the victorious connotations of The Ring of the Nibelungen draft had become inwardly alien to him.³⁶ In order to remain consistent with his growing pessimism, Wagner made two alterations in the dramatic scenario: the God, Wotan, is portrayed as a tragic figure who accepts death with his own free will, while the conclusion signifies that the world can only be redeemed by love. But interestingly enough no alteration was made in the heroic exploits of Siegfried. Although he had become an unrealizable ideal, he still represented an ideal nonetheless. In that same letter to Liszt in which he expressed his

³⁵Newmann, The Wagner Operas, 356

³⁶Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Wagner and Nietzsche, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 21.

dissolusionment, Wagner admitted that he had decided to finish the project only for the sake of his cherished hero.³⁷ But no better evidence exists that Wagner remained faithful to his ideal than the christening in 1868 of his only son with the name of Siegfried.

III.

For the maturing Friedrich Nietzsche, the transformation of Richard Wagner's weltanschauung and art became an important impetus behind the development of his own hero figure. As Nietzsche became increasingly disillusioned with the man whom he felt was the one incomparable genius of his age, his faith in the modern world disappeared entirely, causing him to search for his hero beyond contemporary man. But his disappointment in Wagner was really only the catalyst of his despair; the sense of alienation from contemporary society had long been apparent in Nietzsche's philosophical outlook. Wagner's adoption of pessimism and renunciation represented for Nietzsche yet another symptom of modern decadence and the approaching crisis of nihilism. The modern era, he felt, was experiencing a clash between the laws of life and the ideals which had made it seem worth living. It was a time of great danger which could only be overcome by the heroic efforts of man striving for a new goal.

He came to realize, however, that precisely because the modern age was in a period of ideological and moral fluctuation, it was also a time of great opportunity, when man could discard the decadent ideas and institutions of the past and finally achieve his potential. When in 1876 Nietzsche severed his relationship with Wagner, he had come to the realization that his despair in losing his faith in present-day genius was unwarranted. He rejected his "superstitious belief in genius" and declared in a letter: "Now for the first time I could attain the simple view of real human

³⁷ Diskau, p. 21

life."¹ Just as Wagner in 1848 had become interested in man in his natural state, so too did Nietzsche in 1876 turn his attention to the "free spirit". Convinced of the approaching crisis of recognition that "God is dead", the philosopher now eagerly awaited it, hoping that by freeing man from the shackles of superstition, it would open the door to man's regeneration. Not genius but the free spirit, the Overman, would be mankind's goal. Nietzsche devoted his remaining philosophical efforts to guiding humanity toward this new ideal. From 1876 to his insanity in 1888 he completed his greatest works, including Human, all-Too-Human, Thus Spake Zarathustra, Beyond Good and Evil, Toward a Genealogy of Morals, and The Twilight of the Idols. Each reflected a troubled mind, impatiently awaiting the birth of a new kind of man.

The Overman was a very satisfying ideal for the philosopher who so much shunned his own age. He not only replaced the man of artistic genius as Nietzsche's hope for the future, but went beyond what Nietzsche felt man had ever been or thought he could be. With the collapse of superficial belief structures, man could rise from the depths of stagnation and become what he had for so long been prevented from becoming. No longer finding his identity only as a member of a group; no longer dominated by the depersonalizing forces of mass society, he will be free to realize his own unique potential which "lies high above you or at least above that which you understand as I."²

Nietzsche's hero is indeed a unique figure, rising beyond the simple figure of a Siegfried. Whereas Wagner's hero was designed to merely affirm the healthy qualities lacking in modern man, the hero of Nietzsche is more of the complete man--a

¹Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), p. 46

²Rose Pfeffer, Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus, (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1972), 9. 269

synthesis of physical spontaneity and intellectual vitality. He is the new man who has mastered his instinctual drives, sublimating them into creative pursuits. And whereas Wagner gave primary significance to the Volk community of which regenerated man was merely a component, the philosopher believed that the ultimately self-justifying ends can only be great individual lives, and not classes, society or even mankind. In a direct reference to Wagner, Nietzsche stated: "But new people are trying to conceive the flock as an individual and ascribe a higher rank to it than to the individual--deepest misunderstanding."³ The Overman is quite different from most other ideals as well. In some respects he occupies a lonely position in intellectual history simply for the reason that he represents a figure which is antithetical to traditional Western values: The "free spirit" is to exist in a world "beyond good and evil", where there is no God, no truth, no natural rights, and no absolute morality.

But although Nietzsche's hero is a unique one in several respects, he nonetheless is the creation of an intellectual who was firmly rooted in the ideological currents of the 19th century. Discontent with the present and idolizing the past, Nietzsche based his thinking on many of the same conceptions which were adopted by his contemporaries. What made Nietzsche and the Overman unique was that the philosopher often took contemporary thought one step further. Working upon the same basic ideas as others, Nietzsche expanded them into original and in some cases extreme views. The Overman is the product of a fertile imagination emersed in the intellectual world of the German Reich. In some fundamental respects this hero does not stand outside that world.

Like many German thinkers, including the post-revolutionary Wagner, Nietzsche's entire thought was based on pessimistic foundations. In his early years the philo-

³George Allan Morgan Jr., What Nietzsche Means, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943), p. 123.

sopher was an ardent admirer of Schopenhauerian philosophy. He adopted its precedence given to the instinct over the intellect, its stress on the supremacy of the will, and its antichristian pessimism. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche consistently believed that life is based on the ceaseless and painful struggle of the will. He was opposed to any optimistic doctrine which denied that suffering is a part of life since he felt that such views were motivated by fear of uncertainties and contradictions, and that they revealed man's fear of reality.⁴ But Nietzsche also went beyond Schopenhauer's philosophical ideas in the development of his own metaphysics. In one sense he was more of a pessimist than even the author of The World as Will and Idea. This is evident in his doctrine of the will to power, a will not merely to live, but to gain predominance and to creatively alter the environment. Life for Nietzsche is essentially "appropriation, injury, conquest of the foreign and weaker, oppression, harshness, imposition of its own form, assimilation and at least, at mildest, exploitation."⁵ Even more importantly, pessimism was merely a premise that must be overcome in order to lead to an ultimately positive philosophy. The pessimism of Schopenhauer or Wagner was weak, he felt, because it seeks to escape from suffering, to will nothingness rather than to will life. He found to his dismay such weak pessimism in The Ring of the Nibelungen:

For a long while Wagner's ship sailed happily along... Siegfried continues as he began: he follows only his first impulse, he flings all tradition, all respect, all fear to the winds. Whatever displeases him he strikes down... There can be no doubt... Wagner sought his highest goal. What happened? A misfortune. The ship dashed on a reef; Wagner had stuck fast to a contrary view of the world... and he translated the Ring into Schopenhauerian language. Everything goes wrong, everything goes to wrack and ruin, the new world is just as bad as the old one: Nonentity, the Indian Circe beckons.⁶

⁴Rohan D'o. Butler, The Roots of National Socialism, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1968), p. 156

⁵Morgan, p. 61

⁶From Nietzsche's The Case of Wagner, The Philosophy of Nietzsche, ed. Geoffrey Clive, (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1965), p. 263

Schopenhauer and Wagner, he insisted, failed to understand the true meaning of pessimism: suffering and struggle are productive powers that should not be abolished but overcome, cancelling out that which is passive and weak, but preserving and developing that which is necessary and ultimately productive.⁷ The fundamental elements of struggle, pain, and opposition do not justify renunciation, but in fact can serve as a valuable creative force. Hence Nietzsche oddly enough reached an affirmative judgement of life by first recognizing its negative and destructive aspects.

Nietzsche's underlying pessimism sufficiently influenced his characterization of the Overman so that the hero assumed Siegfried-like proportions. In accepting the struggles and chaos of life as necessary and even constructive, Nietzsche designed an ideal man who was well-adapted to such a life. The free spirit would have the courage to accept life as meaningful and jeyful in spite of its inevitable tensions, pain, and evil. Moreover what we consider to be evil, would be for the new man a positive power. He would have to be unfettered by conventional morality, since the passions and primitive instincts are vital for the great man's well-being. Even cruelty was one of the elements in Nietzsche's vocabulary when he described his ideal and the new morality beyond good and evil. He would rather have the Overman resemble Cesare Borgia than Parsifal since he felt that all great men have superbly demonstrated qualities of injustice and exploitation.⁸ It is perhaps true that Nietzsche essentially had meant that to try to abolish man's wild passions is unnecessary and wasteful since they are absolutely essential to the motivation of creative achievement; he simply wanted the "bad instincts" to be given a new form

⁷Pfeffer, p. 44

⁸R.J. Hollingdale, Nietzsche: The Man and His Philosophy, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 195

which is not destructive. But when Nietzsche argued that there is more hope for the free spirit and man's creative powers in a Cesare Borgia whose instincts have not been sublimated than there is hope in a Parsifal, he apparently seemed to be favoring the predominance of instinctual qualities beyond anything else. And therefore, like Siegfried, the Overman can be easily interpreted as an antithetical figure, a protest against modern timidity. The exaggerated prose which Nietzsche used when describing his hero provides additional support for assuming that the philosopher meant more to shock his readers than to inform them.

It was Nietzsche's perception of history that aroused his hopes as well as his doubts that the Overman will ever be realized. History afforded him examples of individual greatness and thriving cultures; but it also alerted him to what he felt was an increasing levelling of humanity. Nietzsche was the alienated intellectual par excellence. He had no other hope for the society of his age than to see its death and transfiguration. And like many of his contemporaries he eagerly anticipated the recovery of ancient virtues. He judged historical epochs according to the quality and number of great men it produced and on this basis conceived of the necessary conditions in which the Overman could develop.

When Nietzsche's faith in Wagner collapsed, so too did his faith in contemporary society.⁹ In accordance with his pessimistic faith, the philosopher then sought to revive the conditions in which man's "bad instincts" were not suppressed by a code of morality and an oppressive mass society. Such conditions, he thought, had existed in the pre-Homeric age of Greece, where the "splendid blonde beast" could be found "prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory."¹⁰ In that age men accepted all their passions; they rejoiced in the world as it is, in spite of, or

⁹Jaspers, p. 66

¹⁰Hollingdale, p. 227

even because of, its terrible features; they glorified nearly all that modern men fear and despised the security, comfort, and consideration that modern men desire.¹¹ More importantly, for Nietzsche, their conquests of "mellow civilizations" revitalized decadent cultures. In fact he maintained that all higher cultures begin with the releasing of fresh "evil" passions through barbarian conquest.¹²

The glorious age of the Greeks was directly the result of a barbaric mixture of ideals and values. There the Dionysian elements of barbarism combined with the Apollonian forces of sublimity and measure to produce a never-again equalled variety and perfection of great men.¹³ There also the "agon" or contest encouraged each person to develop his peculiar gifts and consequently produced "free-individuality."¹⁴ The aristocratic society of the Greeks permitted the necessary "pathos of distance" between classes and the institution of slavery--both crucial for the development of superior men.¹⁵

It was the morality of the Greeks and the Romans, or rather the lack of it, which Nietzsche especially admired and which he hoped to regain for the free spirit of the future. The noble man in the past created his own values to suit his own needs. He may have helped those of a lesser status, but always out of an overflow of his own power, never out of pity. He followed only one rule: "What is injurious to me is injurious in itself."¹⁶ Above all he despised the cowardice, timidity, dis-

¹¹F.A. Lea, The Tragic Philosopher: A Study of Friedrich Nietzsche, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1957), p. 233

¹²Morgan, p. 334

¹³Pfeffer, p. 38

¹⁴Morgan, p. 337

¹⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Helen Zimmern, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 257.

¹⁶Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, p. 260

trustfulness, and dishonesty of those of a lower rank. The morality of the noble man is what Nietzsche called "master-morality". He felt that it suited well those heroic individuals who recognized that what we today consider good and evil are inseparable in the total affirmation of life.

The barbaric elements of Greek society, the aristocratic structure, the argon, and the master morality all comprise the model of what Nietzsche envisioned for the future. He believed that only in such conditions could the Overman exist. A major reason that he felt such an affinity with Greek society was that subsequent history indicated to him that individual greatness was very difficult to come by in any other conditions. Nietzsche did not believe that the great man he desired could arise from natural selection or historical advance. In the struggle for mere existence it is not the superior man who stands out and survives, but the mediocre, the "herd" man: "Species do not grow in perfection: the weak always master the strong--that is because they are the larger number; also they are more clever...cunning."¹⁷

Nietzsche felt that the cunningness of the "herd" man was aptly demonstrated by the "slave rebellion" in morals. This rebellion resulted, on the one hand, from the long, slow slave-insurrection, which brought the classical world to an end; and on the other, from the Judaic ideology of Christianity under which the insurrection triumphed.¹⁸ The morality of the slaves is characterized by the notion of "evil" representing the distinguishing qualities of the ruling class, and the notion of "good" representing whatever serves to keep suffering at a minimum. Chiefly motivated by fear and the desire for power, it preaches "equal rights" and a condition of comfort and safety for all.¹⁹ It prevailed, Nietzsche believed, not only against

¹⁷Pfeffer, p. 156

¹⁸Lea, p. 239

¹⁹Hollingdale, p. 162

the aristocracy of Rome, but also against the vibrant Teutonic barbarians, whom he felt might otherwise have evolved a culture even higher than the Greeks. With the triumph of slave morality, individual greatness had come to an end. For a thousand years the predominant type of "higher man" who graced Europe was the ascetic priest or saint.²⁰

Nietzsche attributed the chief cause of modern decadence to the triumphant morality of the "herd". This morality is manifest in various forms, including religion, democracy, socialism, and the modern national state. Christianity, although it is inwardly losing hold of its dogmatic foundations, still influences the populace with its sentimental humanitarianism and cult of pity. The egalitarian movement is encouraging the increasing mixture of classes and the dominance of the middle class, so that the modern age can only be characterized as "one herd and no shepherd",²¹ The state has succeeded especially well in imposing an external standard of good and evil upon people and must be discarded: "only where the state ends, there begins the human being who is not superfluous."²²

In Thus Spake Zarathustra Nietzsche referred to the man of modern times as the "Last Man", the antithesis of the Overman. He is the culmination of the present-day "mass-man", born of industrialism, believing in a worldly hereafter. He is incapable of evil, because all his passions have been extirpated. The Last Man is the perfect tool of the totalitarian state, only seeking comfort, security, and mass-produced entertainment. He is happy just to be happy: "We have invented happiness, says the Last Man, and blinks."²³ Nietzsche symbolized him in the figure of a dwarf

²⁰Lea, p. 240

²¹Jaspers, pp. 260-262

²²From Thus Spake Zarathustra, The Portable Nietzsche, ed. Walter Kaufmann, (Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1977), p. 163

²³Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 130

and a jester. The dwarf accompanies the prophet of the Overman, Zarathustra, on his mountain climb, but jumps off Zarathustra's shoulder when he cannot bear the heights of the mountain cliffs and the absence of the mists below. He is an optimist who is content with life, lacking the courage to face reality as it truly is. The jester is first seen by Zarathustra mocking a tightrope dancer and "his dangerous vocation", and then jumping over him, causing his death. The tightrope walker represents present-day man, suspended over the void between his present state and the Overman: while the jester is the man who fears the irrationality of the creative individual.²⁴

Just as the dwarfs of the Nibelungen were a direct threat to the life of Siegfried, so too, Nietzsche believed, does the Last Man endanger the realization of the Overman. Nietzsche expressed his concern through the warnings of Zarathustra: "Overcome these masters of today, O my brothers--these small people, they are the Overman's greatest danger."²⁵ The coming crisis of nihilism will see the confrontation of two movements:

The one movement is unconditionally: the levelling of humanity, great ant-hills etc..

The other movement, my movement, is conversely the sharpening of all antithesis and clefts, abolition of equality, the production of supreme men.

The former generates the Last Man, my movement the Overman.²⁶

"Who shall be the master of the earth?" was therefore Nietzsche's primary concern. He had no faith in historical inevitability. Whether in the end, victory fell to one or the other, depends on the decision and determination of man. This is why he considered his philosophical work so very important, and could quite sincerely declare: "I hold the future of mankind in my hand."²⁷ Through his writing he hoped

²⁴Pfeffer, p. 41

²⁵Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 399

²⁶Morgan, p. 358

²⁷Lea, p. 247

to give mankind a new goal, the Overman, which could then be consciously striven for. However, like Zarathustra, he often became disillusioned with man's recognition of his own predicament. Our civilization, he felt, had reached a "mellow", over-cultivated state. The reading public was not acknowledging the importance of his message. Thus the philosopher was driven to find hope in past history: "Problem: where are the barbarians of the twentieth century?"²⁸

The search for the superior man, which led Nietzsche to find faith in a nostalgic longing for Hellenic society, also led him to advocate that the Overman should exist in an innocent state of nature. If man was greatest when he was in harmony with nature, then the important thing is to bring him back to it. Nietzsche considered his philosophy as an assault against the "perversion of nature" and the "desecration of man".²⁹ He wanted to reestablish the ancient Greek unity, and "to consider man again as a part of nature."³⁰ According to Zarathustra's discourses, the man who wishes to become the Overman would have to undergo a transformation which would restore him to natural innocence. The first stage would be a period of self-criticism, refusing to complain of hardship, seeking the truth above all else. Nietzsche calls this self-searching the spirit of the camel. The second stage is likened to the spirit of the lion which slays the dragon representing old rules and standards. Man in this stage must answer the command "thou shalt!" with a "sacred No". The third and final stage is the spirit of the child who affirms a new existence, and creates his own values:

Innocence is the child, and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a game, a self-rolling wheel, a first movement, a sacred Yes.³¹

²⁸Butler, p. 164

²⁹Jaspers, p. 149

³⁰Pfeffer, p. 187

³¹Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 139

Nietzsche referred to this stage as the "innocence of becoming". When man has reached it he has become the Overman.

The innocence of becoming is the stage of existence beyond good and evil, wherein man recognizes the biological truth that even man's spiritual and intellectual side are but parts of his earthly evolution. It is a condition free of all guilt and responsibility, where no one can be blamed or punished for things being as they are and acting "thus and thus". It is the purity of nature, uncorrupted by human values and morality. The Overman will be in a state of perfect freedom since he will act from the inner necessity of his own nature, and not from compulsion or coercion.³² Nietzsche also believed that the final stage will not be free of strife and conflict. The innocence of becoming implies acceptance of the world, without bitterness or horror, and without supernatural consolation. The free spirit will have to suffer in the destructive forces of nature as well as rejoice in creative activity.³³ His refinement and sublimity will be the result of sublimated conflict and chaos within.

In the third stage of the three metamorphosis leading to the Overman, Nietzsche combined all the elements of his thought which were associated with individual greatness. The child at play will have overcome the struggle and pain of life by creatively putting it to good use. His natural passions will not have been extirpated and will provide him with the necessary energy for further "elevation". Like the free individualities of ancient Greece, he will have created his own values beyond good and evil. And once again man will have become a part of the universality of the cosmos, in total harmony with nature.

³²Pfeffer, p. 202

³³Pfeffer, p. 62

IV.

In some respects Houston Stewart Chamberlain can be considered a successor to both Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner.¹ He discovered through the elder Wagner the importance of intuition, the usefulness of art as an ancillary to a mystical religion, the preciousness of genius, and the affirmation of the theory of race.² Like Nietzsche he searched history for the conditions which were best suited to the sprouting of great men, and he believed that a higher type of man could and must be realized.³ Moreover, the similarity in thought between Chamberlain and his two predecessors is also evident in the type of hero which is portrayed in Chamberlain's historical work, The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century. The heroic figures in that work resemble Siegfried and the Overman in that they represent the virtues of uncorrupted man in full possession of his instinctual drives. Although Chamberlain's heroic ideal is more complete than Wagner's and not as complex as Nietzsche's, he does adhere to a German intellectual trend, and by his own example links this 19th century trend with 20th century German thought. Like the heroes of Wagner and Nietzsche, the hero of Chamberlain is threatened by historical forces and modern dangers. And as with the creation of Siegfried and the Overman, he is the ideal of an alienated individual discontent with the present, nostalgic for the past, and yearning for a triumphant future.

Chamberlain envisioned an ideal that was congruent with the intellectual currents in which he was so totally emersed. Although born an Englishman, he received much of his education in Germany, where he eventually made his permanent home. His idolization of Richard Wagner led him to become involved in the Bayreuth circle and

¹Konrad Heiden considered Chamberlain to be the successor to both men. See The Fuehrer, trans. Ralph Manheim, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1944), p. 234

²Jean Real, "The Religious Conception of Race: Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Germanic Christianity", The Third Reich, ed. Jacques Rueff, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), p. 248

³Heiden, p. 234

to marry one of Wagner's daughters. In The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, which he began in 1896 and finished 19 months later. Chamberlain hoped to make an able contribution to the Bayreuthian movement.⁴ Utilizing his vast sweep of knowledge ranging over the fields of literature, music, biology, botany, religion, history, and politics, he attempted to prove that the Teuton was not only the hero of history, but also that he had created the fundamental foundations of the world. He approached this task with the belief that the function of an historian is both to "enlighten the understanding" and to "awaken enthusiasm".⁵ The nineteenth century, he felt, was a transitory stage between the chaos and downfall of the old world and a "new harmonious culture".⁶ Chamberlain hoped that his book would awaken enough enthusiasm so that man could consciously achieve that new culture. But as the Teuton had laid the foundations for the present, so too could only he be relied upon to achieve the new world. The Teuton was the only hero, and only the hero could overcome the chaos of the present and usher in the dawn of a new day. The actual life of the Teutonic hero, Chamberlain claimed, "is and cannot but be the living source of all subsequent developments".⁷

The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century is a book which, from beginning to end, extols the doctrine of racial difference and superiority. Civilization and culture were not perceived by Chamberlain to be the expression of a general progress of mankind, but rather were the work of a definite, individual racial type.⁸ The man who belongs to a distinct race is endowed with extraordinary, if not supernatural, powers.

⁴Real, p. 254

⁵Houston Stewart Chamberlain, The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, trans. John Lees, (New York: John Lane Co., 1914), vol. I, p. xcvi

⁶Chamberlain, vol. I, p. xcvi

⁷Ibid, vol. I, p. 5

⁸Ibid, vol. I, p. lxxiii

and is elevated high above the man who is of indefinite race.⁹ The primary law of life should be the preservation of "individualities", and therefore such notions as natural rights, good and evil, eternal peace, and universal brotherhood are null and void.¹⁰ Any ideology, institution or historical force which serves to fuse humanity and mix the races is for Chamberlain a threat to life itself. These are the basic principles with which he conducted his rather subjective analysis of history.

He began his analysis with Greek civilization, where he found the really "complete" and "harmonious" man. The Hellenes combined all the elements of life--discovery, science, industry, economy, politics, philosophy, and art.¹¹ His philosophical and artistic genius was primarily the result of his "plasticity" of form, which Chamberlain defined as the inbreeding of related but individualized branches of the main racial stock.¹² Such inbreeding can best be achieved in "barbarous regions, under definite, probably hard conditions of life", such as existed in ancient Greece.¹³ Although he considered the Hellenic man to be deserving of great reverence, Chamberlain regarded him to be more of a model for "emulation" than imitation. He lacked the ennoblement of spirit provided by the Christian religion and suffered from a lack of patriotism, not realizing that man isolated from his racial surroundings is no longer whole.¹⁴

The period between the decline of Greece and the rise of the Teutonic peoples was, according to Chamberlain, a process of gradual disintegration. It was the period

⁹Ibid, vol. I, p. 269

¹⁰Ibid, vol. II, p. 226

¹¹Ibid, vol. II, p. 253

¹²Ibid, vol. I, p. 277

¹³Ibid, vol. II, p. 254

¹⁴Ibid, vol. II, pp. 254, 347

of what he called the "Volker-chaos", in which Greeks, Romans, Syrians, African nongrels, Armenians, Gauls, and Indo-Europeans of many tribes were all mixed together into a seething, heterogeneous mass of humanity wherein all character, individuality, belief, and custom were lost. Only two pure races--the Teutons and the Jews--remained unscathed by the Volker-chaos, but only the Teutons were the legitimate inheritors of the ancient world. They knew how to make the most of the three great legacies which they had inherited: poetry and art from the Greeks, law and statecraft from the Romans, and the teaching of Christ. Beginning in the 5th century, the Teutonic warriors conducted a racial struggle against the forces of contamination which had disfigured and spoiled the ancient heritage. The battle was conducted on the dual level of religion and the state. To the shallow universal tyranny of the Roman Church and Catholicism, the Teutons opposed their own religious and political separatism. This triumphed in the 16th century with the constitution of national states and the affirmation of a Germanic Christianity that, starting with the Reformation, was ridding itself of Jewish elements. With the rise of their self-consciousness, the Teutons, from the year 1200, began replacing the decadent culture vainly upheld by the less gifted races with a rightful and even more glorious successor to the culture of the 19th century.

Chamberlain's depiction of the Teutonic hero's entrance into the historical scene bears a striking resemblance to the entrance of Siegfried upon the operatic stage. According to Chamberlain, the Teutonic warriors of the 5th century must have been a refreshing sight to behold, in contrast with the weakness and corruption of the Volker-chaos and the Roman Empire. He described them as "splendid barbarians glowing with youth, free, making their entry into history endowed with all those qualities which fit them for the very highest place."¹⁵ These same people who

¹⁵Ibid, vol. I, p. 575

"suddenly sprang out of woods" and "would rush naked to battle" were the Saviours of history. By conquering the Western Roman Empire, the barbarians arrested the chaotic intermingling of the races, the decline of culture, and the bankruptcy of morality. Chamberlain refuted the contention that the barbaric invasions ushered in the Dark Ages: "but for the Teuton", he stated, "everlasting night would have settled upon the world". He only regreted that the Teuton did not destroy more than he did.¹⁶

In describing the virtues of his hero, Chamberlain struck a familiar chord. He considered the perfect example of Teutonic virtues displayed in the Eastern Goth, Theodoric. This man could not write, and to sign his name he had to use a stencil. Far more importantly, the Goth barbarian at once knew how to appreciate the beauty of Roman art, "which the bastard souls in their hunting after offices and distinctions, in their greed of gold had passed by unheeded." Immediately upon entering Rome he sought to preserve and restore the monuments of art.¹⁷ The rich endowments which Theodoric and all Teutons possess include a robust physical health, great intelligence and imagination, and an untiring impulse to create.¹⁸ Three moral and spiritual criteria in particular distinguish the Teuton: the sense of freedom, loyalty, and the union of great idealism with practical sense. Freedom is not for Chamberlain an abstract right but something which is well-earned. The Germanic hero is "by nature free" because of his creative powers and his loyalty to himself. By his creativity, Chamberlain meant that he possesses a public freedom which creates his own state and an individual freedom which creates works of art. By his loyalty, he meant that the Teuton chooses his own ideal and his own leader, as opposed to

¹⁶Ibid, vol. I, pp. 494-495

¹⁷Ibid, vol. I, p. 322

¹⁸Ibid, vol. I, p. 574

the slave who serves his masters whoever they may be.¹⁹ Chamberlain referred to this loyalty to the self as the "morality of the man who is born free", and to slave subordination as the "morality of the weak".²⁰ This master-slave relationship is similar to the moral code which Nietzsche espoused, but whereas the philosopher wanted a totally autonomous man, Chamberlain's hero is to be led, albeit by a person of his own choosing.

The recognition of the moral criteria of the Teuton, Chamberlain maintained, is inseparable from the recognition that the barbarian "Saviour" was as much a man of cruelty as he was a man of creativity. His accomplishments were achieved by a selfishness of purpose, free enquiry, and an "insatiable ravenous hunger". Only through his greed and his disregard of all rights save his own right to rule, could he have achieved victory. In fact in the very places where he was most cruel--as, for instance, in England, Prussia, and North America--he laid the surest foundations for civilization and culture.²¹ Chamberlain revealed his concern that the cruelty of the Teuton should be misunderstood, as he declared: "We must not let moral scruples bias us: the more unscrupulously a power asserted itself, the greater was its capacity of life."²² Here again the hero seemed to assume for his idolater the personification of an impassioned outcry to the modern reader, an outcry pleading for the preservation of the man of vitality and a reexamination of our moral restrictions.

It is in the realms of religion and art that Chamberlain's hero is supposed to have achieved his greatest success, and in which the pillars of a new world will ultimately be erected. Jesus Christ, Chamberlain felt, was not a Jew, but was the

¹⁹Ibid, vol. I, pp. 542-552

²⁰Ibid, vol. I, p. 547

²¹Ibid, vol. II, pp. 228-229

²²Ibid, vol. II, p. 6

greatest of Arayan heroes. Through his teachings and his example a "Teuton religion" was born which will eventually reach unheralded heights of moral and spiritual greatness. The essence of Christ's significance lies in the fact that in Him God was made man.²³ Instead of saying "Christ is God", the formula of a demarcating Semitic faith, the Teuton was now saying "God is Christ", the formula of a living faith. From Christ the Teuton learned that religion had nothing in common with ethics or the chronicles of history. The Arayan would find God within himself and religion to be merely the expression of a respect felt primarily for himself.²⁴ The true Teuton religion, Chamberlain insisted, is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Buddha and 19th century pessimism. Like Nietzsche, Chamberlain appears to have harbored some disagreement with post-revolutionary Richard Wagner's renunciation of worldly existence. The teaching of Christ did not imply a selfish, solitary absorption into a Nirvana, into a sensuous paradise, but the birth of the whole world into a new life, where the Kingdom of Heaven is within man.²⁵ Through Christ's example the Teuton learned that the man of religion is not restricted to an ascetic existence and a "milk-and-water" religion. Jesus was primarily a hero overflowing with life, proud and combative, attending banquets, and condoning the sins of the flesh. His meekness was that of the hero sure of victory. His humility was the humility of the master "who from the fullness of his power bows down to the weak." The birth of Christ signalled the birth of a new kind of man, the "new Adam", who has conquered his "slavish instincts" by a "conversion of the will", thereby acquiring the self-control necessary for creative and spiritual development.²⁶ The "new Adam" was the

²³Ibid, vol. I, p. xxviii

²⁴Real, p. 279

²⁵Chamberlain, vol. I, p. 187

²⁶Like Nietzsche, Chamberlain maintained that creativity is linked with sublimation: "the motive power of culture is that inner, creative process, the voluntary masterful conversion of the will." (Ibid, vol. I, p. 190)

Teuton and it is only through him that the message of Christ will one day be completely realized.²⁷

Chamberlain felt that Teutonic Christianity was still in its infancy and had not yet cleansed itself of contaminating influences. The Reformation had been unable radically to cut the sinister link between Christianity and Judaism; therefore it was necessary to revive and pursue the Reformation's aims. The most urgent task facing the Teutons was to foster a specifically religious renaissance. He hoped that through art, and specifically through Wagnerian opera, such a renaissance could be achieved.²⁸ The art of the Teutons was closely related to their religion in its naturalism and symbolism, wherein the "true heroism centered in the inner motive, not the outward success" was the definite ideal.²⁹ Only through such art could the personality of Christ be revealed completely to the Teuton. Without it the grandest of Teutonic heroes would remain an abstraction or become a mere idol.³⁰ Whereas Wagner had originally intended Siegfried to replace the martyr role of Christ, it seems as if Chamberlain considered the Wagnerian hero to be representative of Christ himself, or at least of his "inner motive".³¹

In addition to his moral, religious, and creative virtues, the Teuton also possesses a characteristic which, Chamberlain believed, makes him as much of a vulnerable hero as a noble one; the Teuton was innocent when he entered history and is

²⁷Ibid, vol. I, pp. 187-200

²⁸Real, pp. 280-281

²⁹Chamberlain, vol. I, p. 507

³⁰Real, p. 281

³¹It is interesting to note that Nietzsche had believed that Wagnerian art would achieve the exact opposite result of what Chamberlain had hoped: Nietzsche stated: "I frankly confess that I had hoped that by means of art the Germans would become thoroughly disgusted with decaying Christianity—I regarded German mythology as a solvent, as a means of accustoming people to polytheism." (Morgan, p. 231) Perhaps this is a simple case of both Wagner idolators reading into their beloved music exactly what they wanted to read.

still paying for that innocence. He made his entrance as an idealistic, defenseless "child", who was easy to lead astray. Chamberlain found this trait still present in the Teuton of modern times. While it ennobles the Teuton and makes him more deserving of love, it also poses the greatest danger to his cherished existence. In The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, Chamberlain hoped to warn his hero of the dangers surrounding him. He stated in the concluding pages of volume one: "while every enemy of our race, with full consciousness and the perfection of cunning, follows his own designs, we--still great, innocent barbarians--concentrate ourselves upon earthly and heavenly ideals."³² The Teuton himself is to be blamed for his unfortunate tendency to over-estimate foreign values and to underestimate his own accomplishments--a weakness which his enemies quickly exploited to their own profit. This explained why so many Teutons were attracted by a foreign ideal and became servants of anti-Germanism. Thomas Aquinas is, according to Chamberlain, a perfect example of this weakness, a Teutonic genius who sold his services completely to Rome.³³

However it is not the Teuton's weakness but his enemies strength and "cunning" which gave Chamberlain his greatest concern for the future. These enemies are institutional, ideological, and racial in nature. The growth of the modern state and the arbitrariness of legal norms are preventing the inner personality of the individual from obeying the necessity of his nature.³⁴ Large-scale capitalism has separated the proletariat from nature and has brutalized the masses.³⁵ Much of religion is still based on "cowering slavish fear" and the destruction of all independent judgement.³⁶

³²Chamberlain, vol. I, p. 576

³³Ibid, vol. I, pp. 552-564

³⁴Ibid, vol. II, p. 241

³⁵Real, p. 277

³⁶Chamberlain, vol. I. p. 575

The dogmas of abstract science, particularly the theory of evolution are also harmful.³⁷ Of much greater danger is the increasing mixture of the races and the growing menace from the yellow, black, and Slav races. Chamberlain feared that the number of true Teutons are becoming much less numerous than a few centuries ago.³⁸ But the major threat comes from the Jews; "the Jewish element is so threatenly perilous to our spirit," Chamberlain proclaimed.³⁹ The Jewish religion with its materialist, complicated and formalized character has already exerted a rationalizing influence on the Arayan.⁴⁰ It was also with the Jews, who condemned the "wise" and "joyous heroes", that the negation of the things of this world arose, only to become a major current of thought.⁴¹ And was it not the Jews who crucified the greatest of Teutonic heroes?⁴² Chamberlain feared that the emancipation of the Jew in Europe would seriously contaminate the Teutons, both in terms of racial mixture and intellectual influence. It was with this danger primarily in his mind that Chamberlain conducted his entire writing of The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century. Purporting to have intended his work as an historical analysis, he also admitted to having based his analysis on preconceived notions and on its effectiveness to garner action. His fears and his hopes were frankly revealed in his concluding words to volume one--words that are ominous in their warning and in their challenge:

No arguing about "humanity" can alter the fact that this means a struggle... Where the struggle is not waged with cannon-balls it goes on silently in the heart of society... But this struggle, silent though it be, is above all others a struggle for life and death.

³⁷Real, p. 277

³⁸Chamberlain, vol. I, p. 578

³⁹Ibid, vol. I, p. 250

⁴⁰Ibid, vol. I, pp. 233, 250

⁴¹Ibid, vol. I, p. 10

⁴²Ibid, vol. I, p. 236

The writings of Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain bear a remarkable unity--even a common multifaceted theme. Each writer desired to recapture the heroic innocence of a former existence and thereby to realize the internal purification of man in a new, revitalized culture. Each envisioned an ideal type of man whose very existence is threatened by inferior and evil forces. Each assumed the role of a prophet seeking to teach the prospective hero to conquer his foes and recover his former greatness. And each author assumed that since civilization and culture are essentially the creative achievement of irrational impulses in man, it is necessary to unchain the intuition and primitive passions if the new heroic age is to be realized.

The similarity of these three examples of hero-worship is partly attributable to common intellectual influences on the hero-worshippers themselves. All three were major figures in the circle centering around Bayreuth. Both Nietzsche and Chamberlain were at least for a certain time enthusiastic followers of Wagner and his art. Although Nietzsche and Chamberlain never met one another, their association with Wagner provided a focal point for common exposure. However the best explanation for the similarity lies with the common affliction of the three men. Each suffered from the same ailment of alienation which struck so many men who witnessed what they felt were the transformations and inadequacies of 19th century society. For Wagner the evils of contemporary society were those which were destructive to art; for Nietzsche they were the poison to individual greatness; for Chamberlain they were the contaminants of the pure Aryan race. But in several instances they were the same evils for all three men. Each objected to the increasing might of the state over the individual, the enfeebling influence of a decadent Church and morality, the stagnating growth of bourgeois complacency and philistinism, the rising urbanism which was dramatically severing man's unity with nature, and the predominance of the pursuit of power and

wealth over the appreciation of art and beauty. Their conception of history was marked by a sense of disintegration and impending doom. Their alienation, like that of many other German Romanticists, attempted to swim against the current of history rather than with it.

Their repugnance for the modern world led them to depict an ideal man who blatantly contrasted with it. As opposed to imprisoned man in the modern state, their hero was the "free-personality", the man who determined social and political circumstances instead of being determined by them. They rebuked the frailty of modern times in their depiction of a fearless and cruel hero, whose "master-morality" was diametrically opposed to the all-pervasive "slave-morality" of their day. They denounced the benevolence and material comfort of the age for a life of adversity and perpetual struggle, where alone man could thrive and grow. In contrast with the man of urban environment, the ideal man was not only reunited with nature but with his childhood as well. The child who was close to nature and who possessed an immediacy of perception lacking in the overeducated adult was recaptured in all his natural innocence. Finally, their hero unhesitatingly shunned the crass materialism which the modern age revered. A new culture was envisioned--one which was uncorrupted by the "gold strangling manhood's innocence."

If there was one particular feature which characterized Romantic thought it was the significance attributed to the irrational in man. German Romanticism embraced what was called the "Entfesselung mythischer Urkraft gegen civilisatorische Tücke"--the unchaining of mythical primeval folk-strength against the perfidy of western civilization.¹ This plea is manifest in one form or another in the writings of Wagner, Nietzsche, and Chamberlain. The irrationalism in the thought of these men was born of

¹Hans Kohn, The Mind of Germany, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 14

the experience that life is too complex to be understood, that nature is driven by mysterious forces which science cannot comprehend, and that conventionalized society is harmfully rigid and superficial. Their works were filled with claims that the will controls reason, not reason life; that this heroic will and no intelligence performed the great deeds of history; that man is supreme when he is governed not by thought but by a Volk instinct, as Wagner espoused, by the primitive Dionysian instincts, as Nietzsche asserted, or by a racial intuition inherent in the blood, as Chamberlain maintained. Consequently they associated cultural vitality and individual greatness with the primitive and the barbaric. But when they had discarded reason they no longer could expect a natural human evolution toward the goal they sought. Their goal remained somewhat obscure and open to broad interpretation, while their means for achieving it suggested violence and coercion.

Finally, it is quite apparent that the depiction of the hero in all three instances was complimented with significant, if not predominant, emphasis given to a depiction of the hero's mortal enemy. Wagner, Nietzsche, and Chamberlain each had a conspiratorial view of history and society. History taught them that the uncorrupted and glorified life of earlier communities had been destroyed by evil hands. The corruption of the past, the decadence of the present, and the conceivable crisis of the future were attributed to the evils of history as personified in the figure of a "cunning" dwarf or the character of the "cunning" Jew. Just as the figure of the hero was designed to represent a conglomeration of virtue, his opponents were attributed with all the vices of the age. While these stereotypes permitted the three authors to simplify their message, they also encouraged simplified interpretation. The authors might not have been surprised to learn that their passionate warnings would be heeded by the radical German elements in the 20th century. They invited

misinterpretation, even if involuntarily. But although they might not have been surprised, they almost certainly would have been disappointed, and justifiably. For if their writings had any effect at all, it was merely to invoke the destruction of their enemies and certainly not the reign of their heroes.

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