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Book Review

Philipp Felsch, **How Nietzsche Came in From the Cold: Tale of a Redemption.** Trans. Daniel Bowles. Polity Press: Cambridge, UK, 2024.

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The title of this book, *How Nietzsche Came in From the Cold: Tale of a Redemption*, is both misleading and to the point. On the surface the book is centered, not on Nietzsche but on Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, two enterprising men, both academically inclined, who grappled in an existential way with the philosopher's books. Montinari would eventually become a highly influential Nietzsche editor. A large part of this book is allotted to showing how that transition occurred. Colli was more active and made his living as a professor; but he was at heart an intellectual entrepreneur, contacting publishers, proposing contracts, and supporting his friend as best he could. It appears that while Colli was a leader and intellectual entrepreneur, Montinari did the work.

A number of anomalous decisions led to their success. Not the least was the support of the East German authorities, who underwrote their project. Colli had suggested to the prestigious Italian publishing house, Einaudi, that someone should edit Nietzsche's unpublished papers, probably a mammoth task. The East German government seem to have supported this venture, and they made things easier for the Italians at every turn. As Wolfgang Harich, a philosopher and journalist, remarked, Mastering Nietzsche's famously difficult handwriting was bad enough. But unfathomable help arrived through the support of the East German authorities. "That they had confidence in Colli and Montinari is incomprehensible. Indeed, that they would leave a German author, and an enemy of the state at that, to a couple of Italians possessing no proven expertise at all, …., could not have been foreseen."

Beyond that, the book answers secondary questions. After the catastrophic Second World War, Nietzsche's unpublished and largely inchoate papers were carted away to Moscow as the spoils of war. Further, Nietzsche's *Nachlass* lay in the Goethe-Schiller Archives in Weimar, which was located in the German Democratic Republic, otherwise known as "East Germany." This was a socialist country, known to be so anti-Nietzsche that for decades few plaques or other markers indicated his former presence. Why should this of all countries take enough interest in Nietzsche that they allowed the publication of his arcane notebooks? And why was this work performed by two Italians and not Germans or Russians?

Beyond this, Nietzsche's notebooks present obstacles peculiar to themselves. Anyone who has looked at facsimiles of the notebooks can see that they constitute a grab bag of heterogeneous material (philosophical insights, hotel costs, early drafts of books

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and letters), most thrown in a jumble on the page. We should not forget that Nietzsche was virtually blind and probably could not see what he was writing. His notes were sometimes written from front to the back of notebooks and sometimes from back to front. What principles did the editors follow when choosing which texts to print and in what order? And how did they read them, given the legend that Nietzsche's friend, Heinrich Köselitz (otherwise known as Peter Gast), was one of the only people who could decipher the philosopher's handwriting?

Most of these questions are answered only incidentally in this book. Felsch's focus lies elsewhere, mostly in the ways the production of Nietzsche's posthumous publications were affected by Nietzsche's changing reputation and by his reception, particularly in France. Nonetheless, anyone perplexed by the above-mentioned issues will have most, if not all their questions answered, as Felsch spins out his astonishing narrative, mostly centered on Montinari.

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The book opens with an account of the early youth of Colli and Montinari, the first a teacher confined to the provinces because of World War II, the latter his devoted student. Both were viscerally anti-fascist, a dangerous stance in the summer of 1943 when the Americans had just invaded Sicily and Mussolini was deposed. As Felsch observes, "Italy became a war zone" (38), and the two men, steeped in Nietzsche and the ancient Greeks, were not particularly equipped to flourish in this situation.

Civil unrest seems to have destabilized them both, although in many respects it freed them as well. After the war, Montinari received a scholarship in West Germany. However, he seems to have spent considerable time in East Germany as well. Drawn perhaps by its leftist, and indeed communistic approach to government, Montinari cast about in the East, seeking some kind of employment. Having failed, he returned to Italy, only to be drafted into the military, a tour of duty which he completed before going back to Germany. That ruined land had been partitioned into parallel but quite different states, each offering a practical demonstration of different ideologies: capitalism in the West, communism in the East. Although he still could not find employment, Montinari was happier in the East.

During this time of flux he found his vocation. The publication of Nietzsche's *Nachlass* (unpublished documents) had been suggested in West Germany but was rejected because of the philosopher's unsavory reputation. International relations being what they were, who could secure permission from the Soviets? —and who could be persuaded to live in the East, as would be necessary to anyone who performed the actual work. On the positive side, Karl Schlechta, himself a pivotal editor of Nietzsche, had revealed the extent to which Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche had misrepresented many of her brother's texts. The intellectual world would require new editions because the older ones could not be trusted.

Colli suggested such a comprehensive edition to the Einaudi press in Italy, and, to encourage acceptance, he proposed that he knew just the man to serve as editor. He required a fanatic, and he found one near at hand in the person of his friend Montinari. The latter eagerly signed on, probably because he would be working on Nietzsche and because he believed that the silent, lonely, grinding work he faced would force him to find

an alternative to his hitherto nomadic existence. "I think I have finally figured out who I want to be," he wrote (93).

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As Felsch informs us, the Russians had indeed absconded with Nietzsche's paperwork after the war. However, for political reasons, they sent them back, offloading more than one hundred large wooden crates on the street in front of the Goethe-Schiller Archive in Weimar. And there the *Nachlass* remained until Montinari arrived, to drag them inside and out of the elements. Inside he found "an almost unfathomable abundance of material: fair copies and first printings, lecture notes, portfolios full of loose pages with ideas, concepts, and excerpts" (97). Having brought them into the Villa Silberblick, where Nietzsche had lived in his final years and died, Montinari now took residence, watching over the memorabilia, like an acolyte worshiping a secret god, or a miser savoring his treasure.

Felsch suggests that "[Montinari] had never got over this experience" and Montinari concurred. "This journey to Weimar [was] perhaps the most important event of my life…. I was moved in a very peculiar, ineffable way when I held a manuscript of Nietzsche's in my hands for the first time" (95). So Montinari became "the perfect reader," the hitherto unstable Italian settling down to work long and hard, doing his best to turn out editions worthy of Nietzsche. He and Colli became known at the publishing house, not necessarily positively, as "Nietzsche boys" (97).

Felsch examines the difference in character between Colli and Montinari, and how this affected their approach to Nietzsche. "While Colli saw in Nietzsche a modern-day mystic who enabled him to flee to an imaginary Greece, Montinari viewed him as a radical figure of enlightenment, a proponent of inconspicuous insights won through methodological stringency" (7).

Felsch's book is subtitled *Tale of a Redemption*, but the reference is not clear. He probably had in mind this metamorphosis as Montinari changed slowly from a communist intellectual into an apolitical philologist. He also became focused, dedicated, and driven in a way he had not been before. This commitment was confirmed by an unexpected source. Like so many citizens in post-war East Germany, the philologist attracted the attention of the Ministry of State Security and thus acquired a handler, his very own snoop. The absorbed Montinari was so virtuous that the spy thought he must be a real communist. "All luxury leaves him unmoved," the watcher fondly reported. "He only wants to work" (132–133).

Felsch examines the paradox of "Nietzsche's aggressive intelligence [being] apprehended by means of the most tedious pedantry" (9–10). He also observes that virtually all contemporary positions could be inscribed on this blank sheet: "Nietzsche played the role of a canvas onto which the entire spectrum of twentieth-century ideas could be projected." First, Heidegger, then the French, paid so much attention to these posthumous papers that they were soon considered as important as books published when Nietzsche was alive.

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Felsch repeatedly makes clear that some of Montinari's greatest rivals (when anyone noticed him at all) were other Nietzscheans—such giants as Martin Heidegger, Karl Löwith, Karl Schlechta, and, to an extent, Erich Podach—scholars of varying views, who had largely made up their mind and were not sure whether anything further needed to be done.

Still worse were the French, who, following Foucault, were just discovering views which were anathema to Montinari, but undeniably ripe with the future. Gilles Deleuze had lured the two Italians from their respective lairs in Pisa and Weimar, bidding them join philosophers and express their views at a later conference in the Abbey of Royaumont, just north of Paris. The topic was to be Nietzsche. Unfortunately, the two Italians felt unwelcome and believed themselves sidelined when assigned an unpopular time slot for their presentation. But worse, they had to listen as Michel Foucault argued views which were abhorrent to the two outsiders. After all, their own fact-based, philological method, devoted to establishing an Urtext, and therewith a normative source, could hardly have made them feel comfortable at the conference.

Imagine then Montanari's response as he listened to Foucault espouse views which he would publish in his essay, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx." "[Foucault] was not just making the case for nullifying the regulative authority of the *Urtext*, but also identifying the question of exegesis as the key problem facing the intellectual situation of the age" (126). This was a moment of triumph for 'hermeneutics,' as new seminars, periodicals, courses, and assemblies took over the centers of learning and disseminated the new approach to thought. Slightly exaggerating and with a bow to Susan Sontag, Felsch summarizes the two Italians' response dramatically as, "… the French philosophers seemed to their minds like rapists" (128).

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Felsch's book is so rich in revelation and thoughtful interpretation that we could continue for pages and still be only beginning. He discusses misattributions in past versions of Nietzsche's text – that, for example, Montanari discovered that "Richard Wagner in Bayreuth" was in large part cobbled together from books by the Master himself. He also wrote, "Nietzsche's borrowings from books he read overshoot all predictions. Did I tell you that I found two aphorisms from *The Will to Power* attributed to Nietzsche that are nothing more than the translation of two passages from Tolstoy and Renan? We must be on our guard" (135).

For all his successes, Montinari was upset to learn that a text which had been advertised as new had long since been published – and quoted on the jacket of a volume in the Kröner edition. This dealt his own edition, which prided itself on its inerrancy, a heavy blow. Meanwhile, a French edition had been published and to an extent was a competitor with Montinari's version. (There was also an Italian edition.)

Approximately a decade after the conference in Royaumont a second conference, titled "*Nietzsche aujourd'hui?*" was held in Cerisy-la-Salle. Foucault was absent, teaching in Buffalo, but otherwise, nearly all the big names in French philosophy attended, including Sarah Kofman and Sylviane Agacinski. However, social interactions had become more informal and direct. The point was to question the rules of cultured academic discourse.

It was at this conference that a sentence in the *Nachlass*, "I have forgotten my umbrella" became notorious.

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Up to this point in the book Felsch had dealt almost exclusively with academic conferences and dialogues between Colli and Montinari. But as ever more editions of Nietzsche proliferated, ever more unprofessional discussants began to take part. De Gruyter, the company which eventually published the German version (the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*), also issued the *Kritische Studienausgabe*, a paperback printing which was less expensive and more accessible to the general public. For better and worse, control of the discourse was less mediated by the academies and untrained people felt empowered to speak their mind.

Meanwhile, the approach to Nietzsche associated with Foucault gained the ascendency in informal discourses. As Felsch notes, the sudden addition of nearly five thousand pages (the contents of those original 100 wooden boxes) to the Nietzsche corpus also shifted the work's center of gravity to the unpublished fragments. "Spanning nearly 5,000 pages, these fragments – from the young professor's excerpts to the last notes of madness – were featured like an ongoing 'intellectual diary' kept for over two decades" (162).

Colli was enraged, Montinari horrified. As the latter confessed, "Everything comes undone and leaves behind a feeling of failure" (163). Nietzsche had returned, not as the guarantor of freedom, but as a postmodern subject. "Our edition," Montinari wrote, "has played an integral part in this return" (163).

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As the length of this review indicates, Felsch's book is provocative, wide-ranging, splendidly written, and vividly translated. It is irresistible to read and difficult to put down. Few people would think that an account of Colli and Montinari would be of much interest – much as many people doubted the usefulness of publishing Nietzsche's *Nachlass*. Clearly these skeptics were wrong. Best to buy it now. Don't wait for the paperback version.