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# FORGOTTEN FATHERLAND

BEN MACINTYRE

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**THE SEARCH FOR  
ELISABETH NIETZSCHE**

B L O O M S B U R Y

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The search for Elisabeth Nietzsche

Ben Macintyre

B L O O M S B U R Y  
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

*For My Father and Mother*

I know my fate. One day there will be associated with my name the recollection of something frightful, of a crisis like no other before on earth, of the profoundest collision of conscience, of a decision evoked *against* everything that until then had been believed in, demanded, sanctified. I am not a man. I am dynamite.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,  
*Ecce Homo*, 'Why I Am Destiny', I

# Contents

*Map*

*Foreword*

1 Asunción Docks, Paraguay, 15 March 1886

2 Terra Incognita

3 Up the Creek

4 The White Lady and New Germany

5 Knights and Devils

6 Elisabeth in Llamaland

7 Will to Power

8 Mother of the Fatherland

9 Nueva Germania, March 1991

Plate Section

Acknowledgements

*Notes*

A Note on the Author

By the Same Author

*List of Illustrations*

# Map



## Foreword

This book is [the story of](#) two journeys, one through a remote, largely forgotten part of central South America, the other through the thickets of the vast, sometimes impenetrable literature which surrounds Friedrich Nietzsche: both were in search of his sister, Elisabeth.

More has been written, more bafflingly, about Nietzsche than about perhaps any other modern thinker. Scholarly biographies have traced the philosopher's life in depth and detail; but his sister, whose life was in some ways rather more remarkable than his, usually lurks malignantly in the footnotes, the undergrowth of history. It seems as if her lamentable influence on Nietzsche and the grim prescience of her ideology have often been too much for his supporters to contemplate, too easy a weapon for his opponents to beat him with.

The story of Elisabeth Nietzsche is important partly because of the effect she had on her brother and his philosophy, both during his life and most emphatically after his death. She made him famous and she made him infamous; with her connivance, his name became associated with Nazism; but, without her, he might never have been heard of at all outside a small circle of scholars. But her life is also illuminating in itself. Her ideas foreshadowed one of the darkest periods in human history, but for more than forty years she enjoyed fame and wealth as one of Europe's foremost literary figures; no woman, except perhaps Cosima Wagner, was more celebrated in the cultural world of pre-war Germany. She died just at the moment when people who shared many of her views were about to plunge Europe into devastating war and unleash the Holocaust of European Jewry.

Most fascinating of all to me was the unwritten story of New Germany, the racist colony Elisabeth helped to found in the middle of South America over a century ago. That community was a reflection and realisation of those beliefs – anti-Semitism, vegetarianism, nationalism, Lutheranism – which Elisabeth shared with her husband, Bernhard Förster, one of the most notorious anti-Semitic agitators of his day. Elisabeth later tried to graft these ideas on to Nietzsche, the anti-anti-Semite, anti-nationalist and self-proclaimed 'Anti-Christ'. A measure of her success is the fact that Nietzsche's name has still not fully shaken off the taint of fascism.

It is not the primary intention of this book to discuss, once more, whether the Nazis had any justification when they cited Nietzsche in support of their evil aims. The consensus today is that they did not. I believe Nietzsche would have been appalled at the use which the fascists (ably abetted by his own sister) made of his philosophy. His own words are, I think, sufficient to show that he would have damned Nazism comprehensively. Nietzsche had made no secret of his distaste for his sister's Paraguayan colony, and he refused to have anything to do with it from the start; in his last years of sanity he distanced himself from his sister, her husband and the South American project, and his biographers have tended to follow suit, largely ignoring Elisabeth and wishing her colony and her ideas into oblivion.

Nietzsche never doubted that he was 'a destiny'. His ideas continue to shape our

own, the problems that obsessed him are as relevant now, perhaps more relevant, as when he first addressed them. Our own world is more anomic even than his was, our need for Nietzschean individuality still more pressing. It is as easy to disagree with Nietzsche as it is hard to dislike him, in spite or because of his cussedness. He is feisty and irritating and fiercely challenging, permanently either moving the goalposts or trying to brain you with them. Some of his thoughts are mistaken, but he has views on everything; all are worth hearing, none is boring and some are surely right.

What follows is in part a personal reading of Nietzsche, not an interpretation of him, still less an explanation. (Nietzsche was constantly worried about not being understood, but would probably have sneered at those who claimed they do.) If this book sheds light on his books or still better encourages the reading of them, then so much the better. But this is not a philosophy book. Anyone who expects to find here another diagnosis of Nietzsche will be disappointed and those who already believe they understand Nietzsche will be disgruntled, as such people normally are; but, as the man said, 'one has to get rid of the bad taste of wanting to be in agreement with many'.

This is rather the story of a journey in search of a singular, if singularly nasty, woman. But Elisabeth Nietzsche was not just bigoted, ambitious and bloody-minded (although she was all of these things and more), she was also a woman of extraordinary courage, character and (she would have been gratifyingly annoyed by the word) *chutzpah*. Through sheer willpower she founded one New Germany in the middle of Paraguay and then helped to found another, half a century later, in the shape of the Third Reich. She was awful, in both senses of the word.

What T. S. Eliot wrote about footfalls applies as well to footnotes:

Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden. My words echo  
Thus, in your mind.

The footnotes which had told, tantalisingly, of Elisabeth's experiment in South American *Lebensraum*, fifty years before the Nazis, echoed in my mind. I decided to follow in the footnotes of Elisabeth Nietzsche to Paraguay, a savage and beautiful country that deserves its anonymity as little as Elisabeth herself. There can be few peoples, except perhaps the Germans under Hitler, who have been more brutalised by history than the Paraguayans; but there are fewer still, again excepting the Germans, who have overcome their past with more courage and determination.

The revolution overthrowing the communist regime in East Germany in 1989 opened up that region's history to close self-scrutiny for the first time in nearly half a century. In December 1946, the large house in Weimar where Elisabeth had lived and which she had turned into a shrine to her brother's work was closed and sealed on the orders

of the Red Army; the German staff of the Nietzsche Archive was disbanded and the head archivist, Elisabeth's gallowglass, was arrested and later disappeared, presumed killed. Soon after, the Nietzsche Archive was incorporated into the Goethe–Schiller Archive, the Nietzsche Foundation (established in 1908) was dissolved and Elisabeth's house, Villa Silberblick, was used from time to time as a guest house. The study of Nietzsche, the adopted philosopher of fascism, was discouraged by the self-proclaimed anti-fascist state.

In 1991 Villa Silberblick was finally reopened on the orders of the unified German government (it is now a museum), and unrestricted public access was permitted to the Nietzsche papers, still in the Goethe–Schiller Archive in Weimar. The primary source for the biographical sections of this book (Chapters IV–VIII) is that collection; citations and some secondary sources are specified in the Notes; other material was gathered from interviews in Paraguay, Switzerland and Germany. Where I have seen the relevant unpublished documents, translations are my own; in all other instances, translators are cited in the Notes. In quoting from Nietzsche's works, I have relied on the excellent translations of R. J. Hollingdale.

Elisabeth was a passionate, if selective, hoarder of documents, and the Elisabeth Nietzsche Collection in Weimar contains a wealth of unpublished material: Elisabeth's diaries and memoranda; her own letters (more than 30,000 in all), letters from her brother, husband, mother and the colonists of New Germany; newspaper clippings and photographs spanning the years 1844–1935; souvenirs and business records. From these, as well as a number of other collections and the published writings of the Nietzsche family, I have tried to create a narrative of Elisabeth Nietzsche's long, eventful life.

See notes on [Foreword](#)

# 1

## Asunción Docks, Paraguay, 15 March 1886

Late in the afternoon the little Montevideo steamer docked at the decrepit quay below the Plaza de Palma, and fourteen families of sweating, travel-weary German immigrants climbed unsteadily down the gangplank into Paraguay. People said later it was the hottest day that year.

Their leader was immediately identifiable. A tall, gaunt man with emphatic eyebrows and a thick spade beard which started high on his cheekbones and jutted straight out from his face. His mouth was almost entirely concealed behind a bushy carpet of hair. He wore, as always, a tight frock coat with an Iron Cross pinned on the lapel, and his booming voice and fierce manner gave him the air of an avenging prophet; which is exactly what he thought he was. His name was Doktor Bernhard Förster of Charlottenburg, and he was in the Utopia-building business.

His wife Elisabeth was equally conspicuous. A small, restless woman with her hair tied back in a tight bun, and topped with a lace bonnet. She was dressed in black, as formal and severe as her husband, and seemed oblivious to the heat. At thirty-nine years old she was still beautiful, her face round and unlined with a slightly snubbed nose, though her looks had always been marred by a squint. One piercing black eye looked directly ahead, while the other seemed to focus on something several feet to the right. In German they call it a ‘Silberblick’ or silver view. Even her best friends used to say that the effect at close quarters, through her pince-nez, was thoroughly unnerving. She had been born Elisabeth Nietzsche, the second child of a Lutheran pastor from Saxony, and the sister of an eccentric, and as yet quite unknown, German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Elisabeth, although she considered herself to be cosmopolitan, had seldom set foot outside Germany, and never outside Europe. Until her marriage to Bernhard Förster, less than a year earlier, she had lived a sheltered bourgeois life with her mother in a small house in Naumburg. Yet of the hundred or so Germans who disembarked at Asunción docks in the heat of that March afternoon, it was Elisabeth who was probably the least put out by her new surroundings. Her penetrating voice, with the provincial Saxon accent she had tried but never been able to conceal, grew shrill as a gang of mulatto peons clumsily manoeuvred her large piano down the gangplank.

Asunción in 1886 cannot have been a welcoming sight. Much of the city was still in ruins after the War of the Triple Alliance, an unwinnable bloodbath waged by Paraguay against three far more powerful neighbours. The years of carnage had left three-quarters of the male population dead, and the countryside devastated by famine and disease. The skyline above the port was still dominated by the half-built edifice of the Presidential Palace. This was to have been the imperial seat of Francisco Solano Lopez, the country’s war-hungry President, and a symbol of Paraguay’s military power. He had died an ignominious death in the last battle of the war and building had stopped abruptly; now there was neither the money nor the manpower to finish it. It

loomed, a rotting testament to the dictator's vanity.

If some of the German settlers stared in understandable horror at the crumbling, malodorous remains of the Paraguayan capital, Elisabeth and Bernhard Förster certainly did not. They were, by nature, a couple immune to second thoughts. Paraguay was to be the setting for the most glorious moment of their lives, the culmination of a dream no less grandiose and hopeless than the one which had inspired the dictator Lopez to model himself on Napoleon. Bernhard Förster was by inclination, indeed by profession, an anti-Semite who, like another of his type fifty years later, sought to build an empire out of race hatred; Elisabeth Nietzsche was a willing accomplice – to both of them, as it turned out. A few European settlers had come to Paraguay before, impelled by poverty, greed or adventure. Most, it is true, had perished or disappeared. The Försters' motivation was both more simple, and more terrible, than any who had preceded them.

Every one of the German men and women who now loaded their few possessions on to oxcarts, the great-wheeled *carretas*, and moved with painful slowness along the quay had been selected on the basis of their genetic purity, their Aryan racial characteristics. Most were from Saxony, victims of an economic crisis in Germany that had left much of the peasantry landless and nearly destitute; but many also shared the Försters' ideal of a [community](#) cleansed of Jewish influence, of the taint of Jewish capitalism. It was the Jews, they all agreed, who had forced them out of the Fatherland, Förster spoke of Germany as a 'stepfatherland', a place where honest German virtues were being blighted, where culture was at the mercy of Zion. In South America, he said, they could found a New Germany, where Germans would be able to cultivate the genuine German *geist*, where fruit and vegetables grew in abundance (the Försters were militantly vegetarian), and where their Lutheran religion could prosper in pristine isolation. New Germany, in the midst of the Paraguayan wilderness, would be the nucleus for a glorious new Fatherland that would one day cover the entire continent.

In 1883 Förster had been sacked from his Berlin teaching post for racist agitation, and had travelled through central South America in search of a suitable site for his colonial project. He had chosen Paraguay, depopulated, fertile and above all uncontaminated by Jewry. For two years after his return he had peddled his message through the cities and villages of Germany, while Elisabeth Nietzsche distributed his racist pamphlets and collected funds for the venture. In Berlin [they had](#) been ridiculed, but in rural Saxony, over foaming *biersteins*, they had been heard and understood. The Fischer family had been among the first converts, then the Schuberts, who claimed to be of the composer's family, and the Schüttes, who made musical instruments in Chemnitz. Some agreed to vouchsafe their savings, as a downpayment on the land Förster said he could find at cheap rates, but most had no savings to offer. Förster said it did not matter; they could pay after their first bountiful harvest in the promised land. Fritz Neumann, a young, intelligent artisan, came from Breslau with his family; Oscar Erck, a big-fisted farmer from the south, sold his land to become Förster's henchman. The number of Förster's followers grew slowly but steadily; they were a mixed crew, but all claimed pure Aryan ancestry.

There had been a few last-minute recruits. Max Stern, for example, a dark-haired

carpenter who said he was from Frankfurt, had appeared while they were loading their possessions and families on to the steamer *Uruguay* in Hamburg harbour. Förster and his wife had welcomed him aboard. ‘[Others will follow](#)’, they promised, as the boat prepared to set sail. Elisabeth was sure that her intellectual brother, whose health, she said, would certainly benefit from the excellent Paraguayan climate, would one day agree to join them, even though he had repeatedly denounced the anti-Semitic venture. Once the colony was established, Förster assured his disciples, thousands would flock to the new Fatherland from the old one where they were ‘[wasting away in sickness and poverty](#)’.

The voyage from Germany had been one of the purest horror: a month at sea on a rotting hulk, alive with cockroaches, awash with vomit, living off weevily biscuits and rancid cheese. They had spent a few days plunged into the bemusing hustle of Montevideo while Doktor Förster arranged their passage, and then five days up the Paraná River in a swaying, clanking steamer. At night, animal howls echoed from the dense riverbank undergrowth as the boat churned past; the dark-skinned boathands spoke a language of twittering birds, they mocked the Germans’ discomfort, frightened the children and spat horribly. At night the mosquitoes had pounced in dense fizzing clouds, and microscopic bugs, which the boathands called ‘*polverinos*’, burrowed under their skin and laid tiny yellow eggs which festered at once if scratched. Two days before they reached Asunción, the Fischers’ youngest daughter had suddenly died. At Montevideo she had been pale but talkative; then one night she had vomited blood and started a fever; the next morning she was dead, curled up in the hold next to her sister. They had buried her on one of the few clear patches of riverbank, under a huge tree with red flowers.

That first evening in Paraguay Elisabeth and Bernhard Förster checked into the city’s only remaining hotel, while the rest of the immigrants bedded down for the night in makeshift huts next to the customs house, the *Aduana*, an incongruously grand building and another of the dictator Lopez’s architectural innovations. It had been built so that its lines followed the contours of the steep river bank, and it looked ready to topple into the water at any moment. Across the river the Gran’ Chaco stretched away to the west, a vast tangle of sharp undergrowth, tall trees and deep swamp. It was through this sort of terrain that the settlers would have to travel before they reached the area, about one hundred and fifty miles to the north, that Förster had already christened ‘New Germany’. The final part of the journey would take at least another week, by boat up the broad Rio Paraguay and then across country, by horse and oxcart.

Förster had already lectured his colonists on the correct attitude: ‘[Despite the many difficulties](#), the emigrants will know they have partaken in a great project. This mission has a name: the purification and rebirth of the human race, and the preservation of human culture.’ Perhaps those words ran through their minds, as the handful of Aryan pioneers sat in the foetid atmosphere of Asunción harbour and waited for another boat to take them upriver.

See notes on [Chapter I: Asunción Docks, Paraguay](#)

## 2

# Terra Incognita

‘I’m going to the Paraguayan jungle to find a one-hundred-year-old Aryan colony set up by the sister of the great German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and I need some suncream, mosquito repellent and a hat.’

The man in the survival shop in London’s Euston Station batted a laconic eyelid, just one, for the sake of form. These shops are used mainly by two sorts of people: those who think they might be in danger of getting killed and want to prevent it; and those who think they might want to kill someone else and want to do it efficiently. Survival, to judge from the racks of guns, knives, gougers, stabbers and garroters on display, tends to involve homicide.

Nietzsche himself might have approved of this violent approach to survival. ‘[My way of thinking](#) calls for a warlike soul’, he wrote in *The Gay Science*, ‘a desire to hurt, a joy in denial, a hard hide.’ The man in the survival shop had Nietzsche down to a tee. ‘It’s a jungle out there’, he said, probably not for the first time that day. ‘What factor would you like?’ I bought a large tub of something which he promised would stop anything from coming near my hide: water, insects and burrowing worms as well as ultraviolet light. It smelled faintly of silage.

The Euston survivalist thought it might well rain a fair bit, so I bought a rather dashing panama hat, a jacket which promised to keep the rain out while allowing my pores to breathe (the few that would still be breathing after applying my suncream) and half a dozen waterproof notebooks. I later practised with one of them in the bath.

In between the literature on potholing, unarmed combat and bodybuilding was a slim pamphlet entitled *Jungle Survival*, a military guide to sub-tropical conditions and how to stay alive in them. It stated: ‘[Whatever the type](#) of country in which you are unfortunate enough to crash-land ... your chances of survival and eventual rescue depend on a few definite factors. By far the most important of these is the first, “determination to live”.’ And it carried on:

The greatest dangers lie in the demoralizing and cumulative effect of sometimes rather insignificant factors which may be summarized under the following headings:

- a) panic
- b) sun and heat, and sickness therefrom
- c) sickness and fever
- d) demoralizing effect and danger from all forms of animal life
- e) poisoning.

The book was peculiarly depressing, although it did explain which sea anemones are

edible and how to make essential clothing out of your parachute. I bought a copy anyway. If I ran out of food and there weren't any sea anemones about, I could always eat it.

'What colour are they in Panama then? Black?' asked the survivalist.

'It's Paraguay, and they're sort of brownish mostly.'

He looked doubtful.

'But the ones I'm going to find are white, I think.'

He looked relieved. 'That's all right then.'

According to *The Present State of All Nations*, written in 1739, 'It must be acknowledged that *Paragua Proper* is a perfect *terra incognita*. I meet with no author or traveller that pretends to give any description of it, or know the extent of it; and our map-makers are so ingenious as not to incumber their maps with the name of one town in all the country.' The situation has only marginally improved.

Elisabeth and Bernhard Förster had called their colony New Germany, Nueva Germania in Spanish. A journalist had visited the area some years earlier, but Nueva Germania didn't appear on my atlas, nor in the only guidebook I could find which covered Paraguay, nor in any novel by any South American author, living or dead. There was New Italy, New Australia and New Bordeaux, but New Germany seemed to have vanished. The staff at the Paraguayan Embassy politely but firmly insisted that no such place existed, at least not in Paraguay. They suggested trying the Brazilian Embassy instead. 'Actually the only one of us who has been to Paraguay in the last thirty years is the Ambassador', said the receptionist, 'and he's in Wales at the moment.' The only map I could find which actually pinpointed Nueva Germania was Elisabeth Nietzsche's own. In 1891 she had published a book called *Bernhard Förster's Colony New Germany in Paraguay*. It was an exercise in self-justification, the first of many, printed in Germany and intended to recruit more colonists. It contained a map, an updated version of one drawn up by Bernhard Förster himself based on a military chart made by the Hungarian expatriate, Colonel Heinrich von Morgenstern de Wisner. The name Colonel Heinrich von Morgenstern de Wisner looms large in Paraguayan history; he was also partly responsible for the creation of New Germany. Once a noted wag at the imperial court of Vienna, a Hungarian aristocrat, suspected pederast, military adviser, amateur historian and cartographer, Morgenstern ended up as Immigration Minister for the Republic of Paraguay at the time that Bernhard Förster was deciding where to start his colony. It was partly Morgenstern's propaganda talents that persuaded him, and Morgenstern's maps that guided him.

Morgenstern was highly suited to the job of Immigration Minister since it involved, among other things, a talent for extreme mendacity; his main role in the years after the War of the Triple Alliance was to lure Europeans to depopulated Paraguay with apparently generous land deals and an extensive tissue of misinformation about the country's natural advantages. The Colonel's '[Report on the State of Paraguay](#)' had been printed in European newspapers, including *The Times*, inviting European colonists to apply for land. One who did was Bernhard Förster. The German colonist

and the Hungarian émigré must have met on several occasions, and as a foreigner who had survived for forty-six years the vicissitudes of life in Paraguay, the aged Colonel may have provided Förster with a remarkable, if rather bizarre role model. What Förster cannot have known, however, was that Morgenstern's real name was in fact Morgenstein and that he was probably Jewish.

As a young man Morgenstern had used his aristocratic connections to gain a place at the Viennese court, which he was then obliged to leave in a hurry after an unseemly scandal. But Europe had proved too small for this professional, courtly *flaneur*, and he turned up in Paraguay in 1845 as part of a Brazilian military delegation to the Paraguayan dictator Carlos Antonio Lopez. Though the climate was foul, the opportunities were boundless for a man with a little refinement and a lot of ambition. Morgenstern quickly became the toast of Asunción's undemanding high society. As a foreigner there was a simple recipe for success in the upper reaches of Paraguayan society of the mid-nineteenth century: you grossly flattered the dictator of the time, or ran the risk of being executed by him. This became particularly essential when Carlos Antonio was succeeded by his son, a portly young sadist with poor teeth by the name of Francisco Solano Lopez, who butchered his way to the presidency in 1865. Morgenstern went one better than the avid sycophants who buzzed around the new dictator: he captured the attractive ear of the only person who had influence over the President-for-life – his mistress, a talented Irish courtesan called Eliza Lynch, whom everyone knew as La Madama.

Morgenstern, with his snobbish manners and urbanity, was exactly what Eliza Lynch needed to put the noses of the Asunción ladies firmly out of joint; they persisted in calling her *La Concubina Irlandesa* behind their fans and snubbing her at parties. Morgenstern treated her with extravagant Viennese courtliness; in return she persuaded Lopez to make him Lord High Chancellor. When Eliza threw one of her masked balls, Morgenstern chose the wine and pruned the guest list and advised her on which silks were *à la mode* in London. President Lopez, his megalomania reaching imperial proportions, announced that he was another Napoleon and that he intended to rule the whole of South America. Morgenstern was promptly made his chief military adviser. He soon became one of the largest, and certainly the fattest landowners in Paraguay. The high point of Colonel Morgenstern's career came at the grand opening of the National Theatre in Asunción, an exact replica in miniature of La Scala in Milan. The President and his mistress both attended. Behind them in the presidential box sat the beaming figure of Colonel Morgenstern de Wisner, wearing the uniform of a Hungarian Hussar, a doublet embroidered with silk frogs and an Astrakhan collar; and what is even more extraordinary, no one dared to laugh at him.

Together the dictator, his beautiful Irish mistress and the Hungarian adventurer plotted the conquest of South America. The result was the War of the Triple Alliance, waged simultaneously against Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. Morgenstern had been one of the few foreigners to survive; he had been found cowering in a wood with eleven of his Paraguayan 'slaves' by a troop of Brazilian cavalry, who for reasons unknown decided not to stick a lance through him. He was soon back in government and spent his last years drawing maps of the country and, as Immigration Minister, encouraging other Europeans to colonise it.

Bernhard Förster had used Morgenstern's map as a basis for his own, tracing the routes he had followed through Paraguay between 1883 and 1885, while a smaller inset map showed the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg, to give it a sense of scale and importance. Elisabeth had taken a pen to Förster's map and inked in the relevant bits. 'Col. Nueva Germania' appeared as a triangular strip of land, between two glottal rivers, the Aguarya-umí and the Aguarya-guazu, about one hundred and fifty miles north of the capital Asunción. The route she sketched followed the wriggling Rio Paraguay to a point just above where the Rio Jejui flows into it; from there she had drawn a line east by north-east, clearly the largest and straightest road in Paraguay. Unnervingly, the road stopped dead after Nueva Germania, which, according to the scale on the map, seemed to cover an area about the size of London.

I knew enough already about Elisabeth's cavalier approach to accuracy to view the map with some distrust; her description of the journey from Asunción, intended to entice settlers to the colony, made it sound impossibly easy: 'Several small boats travel up the Rio Paraguay but there is only one ship that goes regularly, the *Posadas*, which leaves Asunción on Wednesdays.' The river journey, she claimed, would take a couple of days, counting stops, then 'you change to the ship *Hermann* which flies under a German flag' as far as San Pedro on the Jejui, and continue the last part of the journey by horse and oxcart along a forest track. This final stretch, wrote Elisabeth, was 'hard going' and would take several days. Even taking into account Elisabeth's tendency to play down the obstacles, and the fact that her description was a century out of date, I estimated it would still take a week or more to get to the colony from Asunción by following her route; if, that is, anything like a colony still existed.

Elisabeth Nietzsche's bizarre experiment in the name of racial purity had envisaged thousands of settlers, a New Germany covering, initially, a territory the size of a dukedom and later spreading throughout South America. The hordes of willing converts never materialised, and Elisabeth's new Germany was, by all accounts, a failure. But what had become of the fourteen German families she had taken out there in 1887, and what of their descendants? Had they survived? And, if so, what sort of people were they now? More importantly, what would they make of me?

What is left of my hair is fair, my eyes are blue and I speak an Indo-European language. That is about as Aryan as I get. But it struck me that after a century of isolation, the people of New Germany might not be too choosy any more about who did or didn't pass the Caucasian test. The more I thought about it, the more likely it seemed that I would be captured by this lost tribe of Aryans and kept chained up for the rest of my days to be used for breeding, a captive pump for the genetic pool. At dusk, jungle Brunhilds, perfect Teutons in every way with bright-blue eyes, would emerge from the forest to the clearing where I lay strapped naked to a trestle table; one by one they would line up ... It was too horrible to think about. I packed some sleeping pills.

The Försters had gone into minute detail about what the prospective colonist should bring in the way of equipment. On Elisabeth's advice I packed a poncho, boots, linen trousers, a straw hat, medicine, needles, cooking equipment and a blanket. Bernhard Förster recommended 'the odd luxury ... as presents to establish friendly relations with the neighbouring family, souvenirs of the Fatherland'. Quite what would remind a

nineteenth-century peasant in the middle of a South American jungle of the Fatherland, I wasn't sure; I packed some postcards of Berlin nightlife and a three-cassette pack of Wagner's music for the Walkman.

After some reflection I decided against carbolic to keep off the vampire bats and in favour of the multi-purpose silage-flavoured goo from the survival shop. Förster was graphic about the various carnivorous insects I would get to know, and one in particular:

The next worst bug [after mosquitos and bloodsuckers] is called a 'sandfly' by the Germans. A fairly small insect, it bores into the epidermis of the foot on people and animals and gradually lays eggs. The boring is barely perceptible, and it is only when the insect grows during the egg-laying period that it becomes noticeable. Then every sensible person will have it removed by an operation which can be learned, with a little practice and the aid of a pointed knife ... anyone who allows these small parasites to multiply, which usually attack newcomers, can pay for his lack of hygiene with extreme pain.

I scanned the medical dictionaries for the sandfly, and found the *Phlebotomus* (Greek: *Phleps* = vein; *tomos* = a cutting), sole carrier of *Leishmania*, and where I was going, *Leishmania braziliensis*: 'the initial cutaneous sore [is] followed after a relatively long interval by ulceration of the mouth and palate extending through to the nose'. It is also called the oriental sore, Baghdad boil, Aleppo boil, Sart sore, Delhi boil or *bolsa de Biskra*, depending on where you are when it bites you. On the other hand, Förster could have been talking about bilharzia, which, according to a medical friend, enters the body through the skin after spending a while in a snail and then reappears as a worm out of your eye. (A German doctor born in 1825 called Theodor Bilharz discovered bilharzia in Egypt around 1850. Poor Theodor; the praise heaped on him for his 'excellent diagrams of a pair of copulating flat-worms', which helped to identify the disease, meant little to him; he always thought his work on the electrical organ of the thunderfish was much more interesting. He died in Ethiopia at the age of thirty-seven, bitter, disillusioned and looking for thunderfish.)

I went back to the survival shop and bought a knife which looked like a knuckleduster with a small scythe stuck on it, just in case self-surgery should become necessary; it was confiscated by the airline authorities before I left Heathrow.

Reading matter was clearly going to be important, since there is a strict limit to how long anyone can exist on an unrelieved diet of *Jungle Survival*. I decided to take a combination of Friedrich Nietzsche, R. B. Cunningham Graham and the Försters.

Both Bernhard and Elisabeth had written books about Paraguay, he with the intention of founding a new Fatherland in South America, she with the purpose of maintaining it. For two years before he settled on a site for his colony, he travelled a country left almost deserted after the War of the Triple Alliance; he noted everything that might have been of interest (and rather a lot that probably wasn't) for prospective German colonists: flora, fauna, the river routes and how to get the best out of your mandioca plantation. He had a talent for snappy titles, and the resulting tome was called *German Colonisation in the Upper La Plata District with Particular Reference*

to Paraguay: *The Results of Detailed Practical Experience, Work and Travel 1883–1885*. It was an advertising tract, intended to persuade good German workers of the advantages of his colonial vision. The long, strangling German sentences are interlaced with anti-Semitic asides, encomia on vegetarianism, Lutheranism and Wagner, rotund with grandiloquent rhetoric about the future of the German race. But it is thoroughly engrossing, and slyly revealing about the author: fastidious and pedantic, driven equally by pride and prejudice. The frontispiece is an etching of Bernhard Förster himself, with his square beard and fanatic's eyes, and scrawled beneath it is the Goethean motto, written in Förster's elaborate hand: 'Over all obstacles, stand your ground.'

At that time Förster had unwittingly toured on horseback the precise area where the colony would later be founded. Had he known that, he would surely have painted a less daunting picture of his promised land:

My first worry was to find the most direct route to San Pedro. Until now I had only heard that it was impossible. The whole way was supposed to be one great swamp, almost impassable for a single person and full of dangers. My own experience confirmed these reports ... the horses had to cross deep swamps of mud. Only occasionally was there high land, firm underfoot. Moreover the area was completely uninhabited, and there are great numbers of deer, foxes, tigers, monkeys, ostriches etc ... To emigrate here would surely be a Herculean task, though the ground appears fertile. Along the way, a few tiled houses, now collapsed, bore witness to the fact that there must have been a cattle-raising livelihood here before the war ... Part of the population are negroes, former slaves. The chief one of these was an old blackamoor who understood neither Spanish nor anything else. He couldn't be bothered to help me, so I was forced to sleep in the open ... the dangers here are said to be tigers, Indians and snakes. I saw numerous tiger tracks and several snakes, but was never attacked. The only Indians I saw were in a very miserable, domesticated state ... the Indians are scarcely dangerous, and would make good servants. But the Lengua are more dangerous, and occasionally cross the Gran' Chaco on raiding parties. The real difficulties faced by a traveller unacquainted with the country are losing your way, bad weather on lonely paths, and the feeling of solitude brought about by the complete beauty and horror of the place, and, last but not least, hunger ... If you are simultaneously suffering from hunger, the beating rays of the sun on your head, the wetness of the marshes and streams, and the effect of the tough, high grasses on your feet, the illness may affect you for days. A weak constitution may easily collapse with the fever, to which I remained immune.

Förster was motivated by what Nietzsche would have called *Ressentiment*, a combination of envy, jealousy and revenge. A morality defined by contrast to other moralities, which it labelled evil, Nietzsche called a slave morality. Christianity was, for him, the ultimate slave morality, but nationalism and racism were others. Bernhard

and Elisabeth Förster were slave moralists *par excellence*.

In his *Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche wrote, 'While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says No to what is "outside", what is "different", what is not "itself": and *this* No is its creative act ... The man of *Ressentiment* is neither upright nor naive, nor honest nor straightforward with himself. His soul *squints*, his spirit loves hiding places, secret paths and hiding places ...'

Nietzsche is like no other writer, in German or any other language. He is rude, violent, a rebel and an iconoclast. To read him is to enter a world shorn of all moral certainties; he urged his readers to live dangerously, to embrace the conflict which he saw as the motive force in human affairs. Humanity was motivated by a will to power, he said; whatever increased power it accounted good; even the slave morality was a form of this will. It was the brave, the strong, the self-possessed who would inherit the real world, the only world there is, while the meek, the pious and the kind would inherit, and deserved to inherit, nothing. He scorned and feared the mediocre, the mass, and beliefs that acquired the status of morality through sheer weight of numbers. Nietzsche's philosophy took a hammer to ideologues, dogmatists whose 'truth is supposed to be a truth for everyman', Christians, politicians, preachers and populists of any sort. He believed above all in the individual, the strong, purposeful, independent-minded free spirit who rode roughshod over morality, the 'herd instinct in the individual', and who, if he could overcome his own *Ressentiment*, might attain the status of a Superman, or more exactly Overman.

It is refreshing but dangerous stuff. His imagery is often violent and his style prone to some of the worst myth-making tendencies that found their apogee in Nazi rhetoric, the ultimate in *Ressentiment*. But cant and hypocrisy were his sworn enemies, and if he tended to use a claymore where he might have used a scalpel, that was only because of the originality of what he had to say and the urgency with which he needed to say it.

Despite his opposition to codified systems of belief, Nietzsche's name has been associated with practically every 'movement', intellectual or otherwise, in this century: feminism and structuralism, Marxism and anarchism and behaviourism, as well as fascism. If you put into one room everyone who considered themselves a Nietzschean, there would be a bloodbath. Nietzsche saw it coming: 'Whoever believed he had understood something of me', he wrote in his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, 'had dressed up something out of me after his own image – not uncommonly an antithesis of me, for instance an "idealist"; whoever had understood nothing of me denied that I came into consideration at all.' And he admitted that it pertained to his nature as a philosopher 'to want to remain a riddle in some respects'.

He saw his contemporaries, the Europeans of his day, being emasculated by their own piety, 'a shrunken, almost ludicrous species, a herd animal, something full of goodwill, sickly and mediocre ...' He urged freedom above all, and self-realisation, and spurned 'the contemptible sort of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen and other democrats'. As so often with him, the tendency to lash out, the very violence of his language, offends and angers – which was exactly what he wanted, to jolt his readers out of their torpor and force them to scale, as individuals, the heights he thought they were capable of. For in spite of his