

3

Nietzscheanism: “The Superman and the all-too-human”

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One day my name will be associated with the memory of something tremendous – a crisis without equal on earth . . . I am no man, I am dynamite. – Yet for all that, there is nothing in me of a founder of religion – . . . I want no “believers.”

Nietzsche, Ecce Homo

The iconoclastic German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), had an immense vogue in both the early and the latter decades of the twentieth century. In the Anglophone world, these two phases are divided by the mid-century impact above all of Walter Kaufmann, whose translations, editions, and commentaries created for Nietzsche a wide and informed readership. In some respects, the most recent phase enables a better understanding of the earlier one, and of the literary developments commonly grouped under the term “modernism,” with which Nietzsche’s thought was closely entwined.

The direct impact of Nietzsche in the modernist decades, however, is a complex question. He acquired notoriety as a name and reputation before making an informed impact on the most serious and creative minds of the time. In particular, his reception suffered from lurid misrepresentation in Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (translated into English in 1895), which was the first widespread source of information about him for many Anglophone readers. Although Nordau’s intemperate attack on almost the whole of contemporary avant-garde culture as a form of degeneration was widely

dismissed, Nietzsche was seen as his associate rather than one of his victims.

Nietzsche's *oeuvre* was substantively produced in an intensive period between 1872 and 1888, before his lapse into permanent insanity, and his most significant relation to modern Anglophone literature is not as an influence but as having articulated discursively and in advance the complex of themes and the composite worldview that can be deduced from a large part of modernist writing. His radical cultural critique with its inter-related conceptions of aesthetics, art, history, language, morals, myth, science, and the end of metaphysics, found a variety of literary parallels in the modernist generation without these simply depending on his example. Moreover, insofar as Nietzsche had become a vogue, and was associated, often reductively, with iconoclastic ideas and attitudes, it was precisely the most Nietzschean writers who needed to distance themselves from him. In some cases, it is clear that the distancing, whether knowingly or not, is really from the popular conception of Nietzsche rather than from Nietzschean thought itself.

Furthermore, the immediate reception of Nietzsche, which focused on key ideas such as the "overman," "the will to power," and "eternal recurrence," tended to treat these Nietzschean themes as doctrines. There is a useful parallel in the early reception of Dostoevsky, including Nietzsche's own reading of him. He was likewise thought of as offering doctrinal, even dogmatic, solutions and analyses. In fact, unknown to anyone in the West, and to virtually no one even in Russia at the time, Mikhail Bakhtin was already arguing in the early 1920s the directly opposite interpretation: that Dostoevsky's power as a novelist lay in subjecting such doctrinal material to constant and radical dramatic testing. Bakhtin's actual influence in the West came in the latter decades of the twentieth century contemporaneously with a comparable change in the perception of Nietzsche. The "new" Nietzsche is likewise no longer read for doctrinal guidance in individual living, and still less in politics. Few would wish to follow such practical advice as might be deduced from some of his views on education, Jews, women, or social authority, although with all these bracketed out he still remains a uniquely fertile and compelling analyst of modernity. He is rather read for his extraordinarily agile and subtle awareness of the metaphoricity of thought, of the relativity of truth, and the self-serving delusions of conviction. This is likewise his most significant affinity with modernism, which also attacked systematic and idealist thought partly by meditating on its own medium at the levels of both literary genre and language itself.

The recent shift in emphasis casts a further retrospective light on the nature of the early reception by suggesting how Nietzsche's writings reveal their readers. Apart from problematizing the very notion of doctrine, or of a systematic body of thought, his power now seems to lie much more in the diagnostic and deconstructive critique of cultural forms than in political or social solutions. The need for some critical bracketing arises with many important thinkers, but in Nietzsche's case it is peculiarly invited as part of the internal dynamic of reading him. He freely contradicted himself and expressed contempt for the desire to acquire disciples, imaging it, in *Twilight of the Idols*, as merely adding zeros to a cipher, so that the truly Nietzschean response would be to stand apart even from Nietzsche himself. This means that the very notion of Nietzscheanism, although a cultural fact, is oxymoronic, if not self-contradictory. A truly Nietzschean relation to Nietzsche might echo his own powerfully agonistic identifications with Christ and Socrates while the most apparent adoption of his thought in the period tends to reflect, even more than with most thinkers, the preoccupations and attitudes of his followers. The same revelatory value may apply equally to those who reject him, as Bertrand Russell effectively did in his *History of Western Philosophy* (1946). Just as Nietzsche showed how much the world exists to human beings as interpretation, so he exists to an unusual and proper degree in the interpretations of his readers. Whereas Swift spoke of satire as a glass in which the reader sees everyone's face but his own, in Nietzsche there is a legitimate sense in which readers define themselves by what they find in him. Above all, whether accepted or rejected, he became an epochal symbol so that many who saw radical change, and fateful opportunity, in the experience of modernity were inclined to find in him echoes of their own enthusiasms and fears; some of which are not very savory.

A final caveat around the question of reception is that, although the immediate disciples of Nietzsche mostly knew German, and were often engaged in translating him, the English versions of his work emerged slowly and not in what would now be thought the ideal order of significance. He was probably best known, for example, as the author of the highly prophetic *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, while *The Birth of Tragedy*, his most weighty and influential work in relation to literature and aesthetics, was not translated into English until 1909. Although virtually all the elements which made up his thought had precedent in previous thinkers and artists, he gave them a unique configuration, tone, and urgency. In effect, he rethought all human values in naturalistic, biological, and evolutionary (instead of transcendental) terms and focused these wide-ranging perceptions

in memorably summative formulae such as Zarathustra's pronouncement, both tragic and liberating, that "God is dead." He believed he had accomplished a "Copernican turn" in the realm of morals, and one might add in aesthetics too. For that reason it was difficult to assimilate single elements in isolation from the altered perspective of the whole, and a work like *Zarathustra*, without the more sustained argumentation of, say, *The Genealogy of Morals*, might seem merely rhapsodical. Furthermore, his preference for aphorism, a form which does not accommodate mediocrity, could nonetheless leave him peculiarly vulnerable to reductive reading. Sophisticated and vulgar implications lie in dangerous proximity.

This partly explains his minimal impact within the anglophone philosophical academy. His radical attack on metaphysics was closely tied to the German idealist tradition as developed through Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, and he was at first hardly perceived as a philosopher at all in the sense of contributing to the academic discipline. The Edinburgh Professor Seth Pringle-Pattison wrote two dismissive articles in 1897–8, which were reprinted in book form (1902). One of the few professional philosophers to take an interest was F. C. S. Schiller, who remained fairly dismissive of him until just before World War I, while George Santayana wrote a hostile study, *Egotism in German Philosophy* (1916), in which he was given a culminating and representative role. In an essay reviewing the newly completed multi-volume English translation, however, Schiller distinguishes Nietzsche's serious interest from his vulgar notoriety, such as the association of his thought with insanity, and suggests that it lay in the two spheres of morality and knowledge (1913: 148–67). Although he had made more of a stir in the realm of morals his most influential impact would prove to be epistemological. This was not only a shrewdly prescient, but coolheaded, assessment and the essay as a whole might be seen either as a British domestication of Nietzsche or as an index of how the world had moved on since his early writings. For with the impact the new turn-of-the-century physics, as mediated through books like Karl Pearson's *The Grammar of Science* (1892), it was no longer shocking to acknowledge that our "truth" is human. As the most influential modernist writers were about to produce their most significant work, Nietzsche had become assimilable to modern thought even while maintaining his iconoclastic notoriety. This helps to indicate how the Nietzsche of the propagandists may be distinguished from his presence in some central writers of the period.

An English translation of Nietzsche's works was begun under the editorship of a Glasgow professor, Alexander Tille, but the publisher was unable to continue beyond the first three volumes (1896–7), of which

Tille's own version of *Zarathustra* was the first. The project of a complete translation was taken over by Oscar Levy, who translated some volumes himself, between 1909 and 1913. Levy was a doctor with the financial means to devote himself to making Nietzsche known in the English-speaking world which, he argued, was the crucial audience to convince both because of the political and economic power of Britain at the time and because English culture, pragmatic to the point of anti-intellectualism, had naturally the least affinity with Nietzsche's thought. For the British to absorb Nietzsche would be a significant cultural turn. At the same time, he saw Britain as a possibly fruitful location of Nietzschean values because, despite superficial reforms, it had, in his view, successfully resisted democratization. Levy's promotion of Nietzsche, in other words, was politically tendentious and his polemical endorsement of Nietzsche's contempt for English intellectual culture may have further undermined his advocacy.

Levy is a striking example of Gertrud Petzgold's observation that Nietzsche was taken up in Britain by journalistic enthusiasts rather than scholars or professional philosophers (1929: 136–7) and, given the later uses to which Nietzsche would be put, it is ironical that many of his principal early sponsors should be Jews. Nietzsche's apparently antisemitic remarks, like his comments on women, are often about the cultural construction, and self-construction, of these categories and they sit uneasily between the open antisemitism of the period and a late twentieth-century cultural critique. Levy was equally ambivalent from the other side. As an assimilated Jew he adopted some of the common accounts of the Jewish character; perhaps with a measure of preemptive self-critique. His introduction to a 1913 translation of Arthur Gobineau's *The Renaissance*, for example, lauds, in a Nietzschean spirit, the premodern toughness of Renaissance character, and Levy devotes most of its space to applauding the racial theory for which Gobineau was most well known. Just as the great figures of the Renaissance represented a culture that had not yet suffered modern degeneration, so Levy distinguishes between the modern Jew and the heroic race of the Old Testament. He likewise endorses Gobineau's hostility to democracy and dismisses de Toqueville's criticisms of him in this regard. The questions of race and gender sit on the faultline of Nietzsche's thought between nineteenth-century biological causality and a modern deconstruction of these categories as cultural formations. While Levy picks up both aspects in a reductive spirit, the great clue both to Nietzsche's enduring impact and to his ambiguous reception in the shorter term, lies in the powerful tension in him between the biologism of his own period

and his anticipation of the radically deconstructive analysis which was to be fully developed only in the later twentieth century.

An early attempt to spread Nietzschean thought was a pamphlet-sized journal, *The Eagle and the Serpent* (*E & S*), which appeared from 1898 to 1903, edited by J. B. Burnhill (Erwin McCall). Its principal thrust was to argue the case for “egotism” against “altruism” as a social virtue. To some extent this recalls the scandal of Bernard Mandeville’s early eighteenth-century argument in *The Fable of the Bees* that “private vices” may be “public virtues.” One difference was that although literary and philosophical circles resisted Mandeville’s analysis the serious underlying point was gradually, if rather unconsciously, assimilated into mainstream economic thought in the form of Adam Smith’s “invisible hand.” The new arguments for egoism, by contrast, were taken up by literary writers against the principal drift of the culture and the precise meaning of these terms for those who espoused them needs to be understood in the historical context. The magazine’s writers appealed to a tradition of thought which they claimed was enunciated in Nietzsche, Emerson, Stirner, Thoreau, Goethe, Whitman, Humbolt, Spencer, and Ibsen, and the opening number placed side by side a series of strikingly similar aphorisms from Nietzsche and Emerson. As far back as George Meredith’s *The Egoist* (1877) in the British context, the pressure of the Victorian ethic of abnegation had been challenged by the legitimate demands of the ego. As Meredith’s novel also presaged, this was an especially urgent theme for women, as is reflected in the change of title of the important modernist journal the *The New Freewoman* in 1914 to the *Egoist*. But it was a more general theme central to several writers of the modernist decades and its significance for the magazine is suggested by the ironic title of Robert Tressell’s posthumous *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* (1914). Tressell’s novel about the hard lives of a group of house painters sees their economic exploitation as a form of philanthropy directed toward the rich. Likewise, for Burnhill and his collaborators, the general acceptance of an ethic of altruism helped sustain an unjust social order: “As a basis for social policy altruism is a lie whose utility is strictly limited to schemes of exploitation” (*E & S* No. 1: 3). Responding to the editor’s request for readers’ comments, Thomas Common pointed out that Nietzsche’s attitude to social progressivism would be incompatible with the magazine’s democratic purposes. The editor’s reply is instructive in showing how different streams of thought can be merged in surprising ways: those committed to the project of the magazine fully realized Nietzsche’s hostility to democracy but valued him as the great philosopher of egotism. And Alfred R. Wallace pointed out that Nietzschean elitism

would properly require a political and social equality from which truly outstanding ability and *virtu* could emerge. All these points were to be repeated by other commentators in the following decades. The quotation above could easily have come from another regular correspondent, George Bernard Shaw, who was drawn to clarify his own position on Nietzsche: Shaw rejected Nietzsche's views on specific topics such as music and socialism while respecting his iconoclastic wit and much of his underlying diagnostic insight. Indeed, in his Preface to *Man and Superman* (1901), he was to argue that the lamentable experience of "Proletarian Democracy" makes it important to evolve through selective breeding a new human type for a "Democracy of Supermen" (see Chapter 2 of this volume).

Starting two years before the Levy edition, the other principal locus of the dissemination of Nietzschean thought was the journal the *New Age*, which was taken over by Alfred R. Orage in 1907 to become an important forum for the generation of literary modernists. As the title suggests, the journal sought to alert readers to new developments and to understand modernity in a critical yet affirmative spirit. Orage's own introduction, *Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism*, also appeared in 1907. Along with some of the modernists, Orage had a mystical side to him and saw Nietzsche partly through his own desire to transcend the present conception of the human and it is important, once again, to understand how certain themes were perceived at the time. For later readers, one of the most disturbing aspects of the Nietzschean proselytizers is their hostility to democracy drawing on his "aristocratic" individualism as a primary support. The *New Age* of 1909 included a supplement magazine on the House of Lords whose powers were to be curtailed in 1911. From the antidemocratic standpoint, the Lords were argued to be more independent than the Commons because they were not obliged to satisfy voters. For these writers, as for Shaw in the passage just quoted, democracy meant not so much government by the people as something more like populist rule. The fearful suspicion of democracy, in other words, is a period concern that runs more widely than the Nietzscheans or the *New Age*, or even right-wing thought, and it should be remembered that universal male suffrage was still new in Britain, the Commons had a long-standing history of corruption, and in the light of later twentieth-century developments, such as the popular press, the effects of a commercially driven and politically motivated stultification were not unreasonably feared. Later history has also created an apparently sharp division between fascism as opposed to democracy, or to socialism, but without the benefit of hindsight these movements were much more ambiguous. Hitler's party was to be called National Socialist, while

Stalin's Russia enacted a grotesque parody of socialism. Once again, if one concentrates on the foundational exploitation by these regimes of populist *ressentiment*, rather than their theoretical ideology, the antidemocratic suspicion of the early part of the century may seem less simply objectionable to later readers and might even be seen as prophetic.

Nonetheless, the quality of antidemocratic analysis and rhetoric was often sweeping and reactionary, as in Levy's argument in *The Revival of Aristocracy* (1906) that the French Revolution resulted from a failure of nerve in the aristocracy; a failure which must now be recuperated. Again, although the historical generalization may be wild, the sense of imminent catastrophe, to be captured most memorably in Yeats's "The Second Coming," was widely felt even in the prewar years. The Futurists put the most positive inflection on the potential of modernity, while others feared it, but the sense of radical and imminent change was widespread. Apparently metaphysical conceptions of history are always likely to reflect immediate historical concerns. Britain now had serious economic rivals in Germany and the USA. The new German state had been founded in 1870, just about the time of Nietzsche's first major publications. The high Victorian respect for German thought, in Carlyle, George Eliot, and G. H. Lewes, had given way in journalistic and often academic circles to a nationalistic hostility which was decisively intensified, and apparently vindicated, by the outbreak of World War I. Lawrence, in dedicating *The Rainbow* (1915) to his German sister-in-law, had to drop his original intention of using Gothic script. Nietzsche was so associated with the German national spirit and the motif of power that the war was even referred to journalistically as the "Anglo-Nietzschean war." The Nietzscheans of the *New Age* were obliged to show that Nietzsche meant something quite different by his emphasis on power and was actually hostile to the modern Bismarckian state. Unfortunately, the very sophistication and shifting relativity of Nietzsche, which should have removed him from vulgar reductions, also prevented him being entirely free from such interpretation. Most importantly, as will be seen, Nietzsche anticipated a serious and central concern of a number of modern writers with the nature and meaning of power but the early proselytizers, with their one-sided antidemocratic zeal, were not in a good position to argue this even if they had grasped it.

Another translator for the Levy edition, for example, and a regular contributor to the *New Age*, was Anthony Ludovici, an aesthete at the University of London, who produced several proselytizing books based on lecture series. In *Nietzsche and Art* (1911) he emphasized Nietzsche's aesthetic thought but not so much for its central metaphysical claim that the

aesthetic is the fundamental activity of man. The full metaphysical force of the aesthetic for Nietzsche only gradually became evident and Ludovici rather picks up the modernist emphasis, as developed for example in Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), in which great art is often, and perhaps necessarily, incompatible with realism. These forms, however, were politically loaded for Ludovici. He saw realism not just as the inferior but as the democratic form. His admiration of ancient Egyptian art for its hieratic transcendence of realism would find echoes in Lawrence and Yeats, who were also hostile to aspects of modern democracy, and this raises a larger question about the impact of Nietzsche. In an embattled summary of the Nietzschean movement in Britain, which formed Levy's introduction to the final volume of his edition, he claimed that it was the artists, rather than philosophers, who had truly absorbed Nietzsche and, as we look back on the modernist period, this is perhaps even more true than Levy realized, for the major modernist writers had absorbed the Nietzschean spirit or recognitions independently before having their own thought focused by him. Indeed, Nietzsche's most radical claims for the metaphysical significance of the aesthetic might not be comprehensible without the examples of such writers as Joyce and Yeats. But this does not mean they got these insights or convictions from Nietzsche, or that an affinity with one aspect of his thought implies an acceptance of the whole, and even where they did take in Nietzschean thought it was often mediated through other sources.

The French critic, Remy de Gourmont, for example, was a possible mediator of Nietzschean thought for Eliot and Pound, who did not take to Nietzsche directly. The sexologist, Havelock Ellis, wrote several thoughtful and informed essays on Nietzsche. Thomas Common's *Nietzsche as Critic, Philosopher, Poet and Prophet* (1901) was a compilation of extracts in which Common's introduction stresses Nietzsche's honesty as crucial to his thought. This suggests a more literary than philosophical power in his thinking and is reminiscent of T. S. Eliot's comment on Blake's "naked" independence of vision as "terrifying," even while deprecating his lack of an appropriate tradition (1951: 319–20). Blake himself was something of a Nietzschean before his time and his increasing reputation by the end of the nineteenth century was part of the broad current in which Nietzsche could gain proper appreciation. From a variety of sources, including Nietzsche's own direct sources such as Schopenhauer, this generation of writers found many essential points of affinity with him which were not always recognized, or were distorted by the need to distance themselves from the popular Nietzscheanism of their day. For this reason one has to

consult their works rather than their explicit comments on him, and the works will often rehearse the ambivalences and anxieties of the Nietzschean legacy as much as its confident affirmations and rejections. Yeats, Joyce and Lawrence, for example, absorbed Nietzsche positively, although this would not readily be deduced from the explicit comments of the last two.

In 1902, Yeats received from the New York lawyer and artistic patron of the modernists, John Quinn, several Nietzsche texts, including Thomas Commons's volume, and read him absorbedly over the next few years, although Roy Foster believes he already had some inkling of Nietzsche's thought in the late 1890s (1999: 213, 584). Either way, the independent evolution of Yeats's thought is best articulated in Nietzschean terms: Nietzsche provides the philosophical fulcrum on which his *oeuvre* turns. If Yeats may be said to have had two careers, one as a nineteenth-century and one as a twentieth-century poet, there are underlying continuities by which the latter is a transposition rather than a rejection of the former. The early Yeats was strongly influenced by the aestheticism associated with Walter Pater, just as Nietzsche was by the different aestheticism of Arthur Schopenhauer. But between the early *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and the late *Twilight of the Idols* (1888), Nietzsche's view of Schopenhauer changed almost to the point of inversion, although this too was rather an assimilation and transposition of Schopenhauer's metaphysic than a rejection of it. The early Nietzsche was deeply impressed by Schopenhauer's melancholy metaphysic of the Will, whereby the only escape from the blind process of nature was through religious abnegation or aesthetic transcendence. On this model art stands in opposition to life. In his later account of the aesthetic, by contrast, he rejects Schopenhauer's quietism and abnegation for he now sees art as the paradigm of life's celebration of itself. Kant's formula of "purposiveness without purpose," which can be taken in a separatist sense, is now a reflection of man's place in a post-theological world: all human activity is the conscious affirmation of purposiveness without purpose. Whereas in *The Birth of Tragedy* man was imaged in the humiliating posture of the soldiers painted on a canvas depicting a battle, in *Twilight of the Idols* man seeks no metaphysical remove through the aesthetic but is enjoined to affirm his fate joyously as if enacting his role in history as a mythic drama.

The recognition that myth is not an alternative to historical consciousness but a deeper apprehension of it is consonant with the comments on myth in *The Birth of Tragedy* and is powerfully articulated in the early essay, one of the *Untimely Meditations* (1872), "On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life." Nietzsche proposes a *mythopoeic*, rather

than mythic, reading of history in that myth is not for him a static, timeless transcendence but a constant creation from within history. Myth focuses what history cannot of itself explain or encompass: while human values are historically conditioned they cannot be a mere arbitrary product of history. Such a *mythmaking* conception can be seen in Yeats's treatment of immediate historical violence and moral complexity in "Easter 1916." The title juxtaposes a mythic and an historical reference whose interactions are worked out with subtle precision in the structure of the poem as summed up in the refrain: "a terrible beauty is born." Not long after this Yeats began to work on the historico-mythic scheme of *A Vision*, which presented history as a series of vast cycles whereby successive civilizations rise and decline. How much Nietzsche may have influenced this, along with so much other material, is hard to say although almost contemporaneously, and without Yeats's apparent knowledge, Oswald Spengler, a frank disciple of Nietzsche, had produced his pessimistic post-war cyclic theory of history, *The Decline of the West* (1918). The most overtly Nietzschean of Yeats's poems is the very late "Lapis Lazuli," which contemplates the rise and fall of historical civilizations, including the contemporary one, with an aesthetically achieved affirmation of "tragic joy." Yeats was perhaps able to acknowledge Nietzsche more positively because of his frank use of his own personality as the mythopoeic center of his poetic *oeuvre*; and if his self-affirmation left no room for discipleship, this was deeply Nietzschean in itself.

Joyce's use of Nietzsche exemplifies most clearly the philosopher's relation of anticipation rather than influence to the major modern writers. Joseph Valente has argued the influence case by noting how for "Nietzsche and Joyce the road to *amor fati* led through the epistemological pass of perspectivism" (1987-8: 89). This neatly catches what they share but we may ask to what extent Joyce's ironic play with cultural forms is applied to Nietzsche himself. As Richard Ellmann notes, the young Joyce, in his iconoclastic mode, could draw on him to expound "a neo-paganism that glorified licentiousness, selfishness and pitilessness and denounced gratitude and other 'domestic virtues'," yet at heart "Joyce can scarcely have been a Nietzschean any more than he was socialist" (1982: 000). Indeed, Joyce's references to Nietzsche in *Ulysses* come most notably from the superficial joker, Mulligan, while the ultimately central figure, Leopold Bloom, is rather the epitome of the domestic. Such local and attitudinal differences do not gainsay Valente's fundamental metaphysical point, indeed they rather reinforce it, but his argument for influence only adduces analogy and, most importantly, he does not weigh the competing impact of

Flaubert, who is the nearest thing to being Joyce's acknowledged master. Nietzsche and Flaubert approached similar themes with opposite attitudes. Both meditated satirically on the condition of educated modern man as what Nietzsche, in "The Uses and Disadvantages of History," called a "wandering encyclopaedia." As moderns, we are stuffed with knowledge but, like an encyclopedia, we have no overall narrative or wisdom to impart. Although Joyce the novelist promoted a self-myth no less monumental than that of the poet Yeats, his Flaubertian concern for authorial impersonality signaled a fundamental metaphysical relativism in the book if not in the writer. Whereas Yeats was an agnostic fascinated by belief, Joyce was brought up in a culture of belief and he therefore privileged the multiplicity of perspectives; a position as far from simple rejection as it is from simple commitment. Joyce inflected Flaubert's satiric method into a comedic vision, and achieved a Nietzschean metaphysical posture by Flaubertian means. Flaubert's romantic nihilism and Nietzsche's tragic affirmation are the opposite attitudinal poles on which the Joycean universe turns, "macro- and microcosm, upon the void."

To express it in this way brings out Joyce's different inflection from Yeats's of a fundamental Nietzschean posture. Nietzsche's essay on history criticizes the nineteenth-century tendency to understand life questions historically and suggests that "historical" understanding has to be leavened with different modes of being in time. We need some tincture of "unhistorical" naivety in order to act decisively and effectively. We also need the rarer capacity for "superhistorical" detachment from the assumptions and urgencies of our contemporary world. Although the Chinese sages of "Lapis Lazuli" seem able almost regularly to enjoy this superhistorical vision, Yeats no more than Nietzsche sees it as a possible, or desirable, posture in which to exist permanently. As has been suggested, Yeats's emphasis is much more on *mythmaking* out of the complex of experience in time, and the aesthetic or visionary perfection of Byzantium is strictly an impossible ideal in his visionary/historical system. By contrast, Joyce's *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* privilege the transhistorical mythic dimension already existing in the archaic structures. This is not turning from history. It is rather that, precisely because it is fraught with history, a work like *Ulysses* affirms the need to see the experience simultaneously under a superhistorical sign. Joyce's use of myth gives a firm structure to his relativity. By the same token, however, the very fact that his elusiveness at the level of belief is so "Nietzschean" makes it difficult to attribute it in any direct or exclusive way to Nietzsche.

Although D. H. Lawrence, by contrast, was a writer of overt conviction,

his relation to Nietzsche is just as elusive in its own way. The moment of his encounter with Nietzsche's works in Croydon public library in 1909 is recorded by Jessie Chambers but, like Joyce and Yeats, he was already forming the relevant aspects of his own worldview. Furthermore, Lawrence had an agonistic relation to the writers who most deeply influenced him so that his references to them tend to be apparently the most hostile, and hostility itself can be a form of influence. The resulting complex can be seen most clearly in *Women in Love* (1920). Through the figure of Rupert Birkin, Lawrence criticizes the "will to power" associated with the industrial magnate, Gerald Crich, who has been educated in Germany and has brought technical modernization to the family mines. Gerald, even though he initially reminds Ursula Brangwen of "Dionysus," is gradually revealed to be a figure of inner emotional vacuity and nihilism whose exertion of social and economic power arises from a compensatory need. But despite Gerald's Nietzschean overtones, this critique is itself thoroughly Nietzschean and it is Birkin who is the truly Nietzschean character. In Gerald, Lawrence is critiquing only the popular conception of Nietzscheanism. It could be that this apparent confusion was quite conscious on Lawrence's part because the reductive popular conception was the significant cultural fact, but it is more likely that Lawrence had himself imbibed the common view and was now unaware of those aspects of Nietzschean thought which, because they were so consonant with his own thinking, he had simply assimilated as his own.

As for Yeats, too, the theme of power, with distinctly Nietzschean significances, was immensely important to Lawrence. All three saw the two millennia of Christian culture as having given rise to an embarrassment about power, and a cult of humility and abnegation, which was in fact a more cunning and damaging form of power whereby the externally weak are able, without risk to themselves, to dominate the naturally strong. The modern secular legacy of this is democracy. In Nietzsche, this analysis stays at a level of cultural generality, with a great power of suggestive insight which a reader may bring to bear on a wide range of experience without any immediately prescriptive consequences. Indeed, as with much Nietzschean thought, such as his "attacks" on logic and grammar, it is a Copernican shift in consciousness which may have no immediately visible impact on the world or behavior. Just as the sun still appears to rise and human life depends on the felt stability of the earth, so the recognition that the discourse of "truth" depends on "a mobile army of metaphors" does not mean that reason and language are not to be used. It has long been noticed that Nietzsche's thought does not engage closely with the

sphere of association, with the common or garden necessities of social and political activity. It is less clear what should be made of this observation. It can be seen as a radical critique of his thought or as simply stating one of its necessary conditions. Likewise, it is hard to say to what extent this was an instinctive and intelligent tact on his part, an aspect of the power of his thought, or whether it was an accident of biographical circumstances. Thomas Common suggested his thought was “esoteric,” not in Orage’s or Yeats’s sense of the “mystical,” but in the sense that it could not be understood without gross misapprehension at any broader level of dissemination. Yeats, however, whose longevity brought him to the fascist era, and who had by then become a public figure with political as well as literary cultural associations, did cash in such ruminations literalistically as in his sympathy for the Irish blueshirts. There was a dangerous mixture of the highly speculative and the immediately political. By contrast, Lawrence the novelist, while sharing the wide-ranging historico-cultural speculations of Nietzsche and Yeats, was thoroughly concerned with the sphere of association, with the internal dynamics of human relationships of all kinds. He first learned about the truths and falsities of power in his own family: the struggle between his parents was a microcosm of social class, gender, and religion, and his great work arises from his inward and critical understanding of these forces. At the same time, he retained something of the larger Nietzschean conception that the culture suffered from a failure to acknowledge the motif of power, in both the personal and political spheres, so that some of his later works, such as *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), imagine the Yeatsian/Spenglerian demise of white European culture being effected not just by an internal decline but by a voluntary act, the willed revival of a pre-Christian world. Yet even here, “imagine” is the operative word. Despite the absurdities and extremities of his Mexican novel, it was still a thought experiment, a deeply Nietzschean form, in which Lawrence retained, particularly through his heroine, Kate Leslie, something of his novelistic skepticism in testing, rather than simply expounding, this possibility. Afterwards, he explicitly rejected the political power motif and turned to *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) as a model of apolitical tenderness, and to the ancient Etruscans, in *Etruscan Places* (1932), as a model of early Italian culture whose subtle sense of touch was overrun by the Roman spirit of power even then undergoing a grotesquely parodic revival under Mussolini.

If Yeats, Joyce, and Lawrence were variously, if not always overtly, sympathetic to Nietzsche, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot seem more genuinely indifferent or hostile. Kathryn V. Lindberg, however, makes a strong case

for seeing Pound as Nietzschean in his affinities and possibly by indirect influence. She argues that Pound has been too much understood, partly through the influential account of Hugh Kenner, as assimilated to Eliot's organic notion of tradition, whereas she sees him as offering a more atomistic view of the past and a disruptive conception of the present. She claims, also, that his term *Paideuma*, borrowed from the anthropologist Leo Frobenius, is derived in turn from Nietzsche's disciple, Oswald Spengler. Pound is perhaps the most elusive case for determining influence because his mixture of eclectic information, wide-ranging speculation, and literalistic conviction is peculiarly elusive in itself. Perhaps the nub of the matter lies in his understanding of the nature of language.

Nietzsche's remarks on language were not immediately so influential since the initial emphasis in his reception fell on doctrine rather than medium, and some of the relevant writings were fragmentary materials not published in his lifetime and not well known until later, yet he had given memorable expression to what has come to be called the "linguistic turn." In an early piece, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," he spoke of "truth" as a "mobile army of metaphors" and showed language to be an autotelic system of significances before being a description of the world. The human world is largely a creation of language rather than the other way round. This awareness grew stronger over the twentieth century with several, sometimes reductive, and mutually uncomprehending, implications among which we may distinguish the "poetic" and the "ideological." Pound and Eliot, though close, straddle the watershed between these possibilities. The former conception has been most notably espoused by Martin Heidegger, for whom language was the creative matrix by which new forms of experience come into being. Poetry is the highest, or the archetypal, use of language and its function is not, in the first instance, referential. This view, in privileging the autotelic power and unpredictability of language, tends to be agnostic concerning the direct relation of language to the world. The other view, by contrast, assumes that if language forms the human world, then it has complete control over it, or is coterminous with it. If your language is sloppy and inaccurate, emotionally as well as intellectually, so is your reality. Pound and Eliot seemed to share such a hygienic view of language and culture at the time of their early association but their underlying conceptions, and practices, were really quite different. Pound was frequently closer to the view underlying late twentieth-century ideological critique. For him, the relation between reality and cultural form had a literalistic immediacy often justifying dogmatic prescriptiveness. Eliot, although as a critic concerned with correctness of be-

lief, tended when writing about his own poetry to stress the mystery of the creative process as coming from unknown sources. *Four Quartets* is a consummate example of the creative function of language as articulated by the later Heidegger, and Eliot's turn to religious belief took him well away from Nietzsche as well as from Pound. Between them, Pound and Eliot suggest the incipient fracturing of the Nietzschean recognition into its separate possibilities.

The anglophone writer who has been commonly credited with the most direct Nietzschean influence and sponsorship is George Bernard Shaw. But he came to Nietzsche through Ibsen and Wagner, and he perhaps illustrates in reverse the principle that the truest influence is likely to be the most thoroughly assimilated and therefore the least apparent. Although his play *Man and Superman* (1901) certainly had a verbal influence in changing the common translation of (*Übermensch* from "overman" to "superman," there seems no reason to doubt his claim that he had formed his own convictions before encountering some of them in Nietzsche. More importantly, his overt use of Nietzschean ideas is in a Shavian spirit. Whatever his personal convictions, Shaw's artistic relation to ideas was as motifs for rhetorical development in an operatic spirit, and sometimes on a near-Wagnerian scale. He is an inverted image of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, who despised profundity, and warned against moralism, was always weighty and serious even in his jests, whereas Shaw, who engaged great social and moral questions, communicated relatively little weight of experience. It is hard to believe he could be significantly imbued with Nietzschean spirit.

The point can be extended to modern theatre more generally. For while Shaw's rhetoric was part of a broader modern movement in theatre which recovered specifically theatrical values, much of the most innovative modern theatre, while sharing Nietzsche's turn from naturalism as argued in *The Birth of Tragedy*, sought a highly conscious effect on the audience serving a moral or social critique. Only at this thematic level did Ibsen's radical critique of the bourgeois social order provide a point of commonality with both Nietzsche and Shaw; just as Strindberg warmed to Nietzsche's misogynistic interpretation of modern decadence. But if *The Birth of Tragedy* was not a primary model for a modern non-operatic theatre, Nietzsche was part of the cultural matrix from which Yeats produced his hieratic and mythopoeic theatre in conscious opposition to realism and immediate social critique. And his more general sense of tragedy as breaking down the dykes between individuals to reach a primordial and universal level of the psyche is consonant with Nietzsche's conception.

This points to the larger theme of the “hero” in the period. Despite their immense mutual difference, both Shaw and Yeats were drawn to see salvation in the hero, and recognized a modern, or future, ideal in the Nietzschean superman. Eric Bentley has traced the political aftermath of such attitudes in *The Cult of the Superman* (1957). Yet the superman in Nietzsche is already a complex figure who exerts a spontaneous and personal, rather than a desired or institutionalized, authority; and he would not wish for followers. In this respect he points to a larger ambivalence about heroism in the period. Although the superman was frequently associated with the assertion of elite power, and with political leadership, Nietzsche’s conception was so internalized as potentially to reverse such implications. Hence it is Birkin, the least conventionally heroic character, who is the most Nietzschean figure in *Women in Love*. *Ulysses*, largely composed during World War I, reversed the traditional meaning of the literary “mock heroic,” above all in the “Cyclops” episode, to mock the anachronistic stupidities of heroism itself.

This brief survey of the British context concludes by noting the reception of Nietzsche in America, France, and Germany. Following Nietzsche’s polemical praise of French culture in criticizing the Germans, the British Nietzscheans appealed to the French awareness of Nietzsche as a supposedly humiliating contrast to British indifference although, as Douglas Smith argues, the first really substantial French study was Charles Andler’s multi-volume *Nietzsche: Sa vie et sa pensée* (1920–31). The French first assimilated Nietzsche partly through the Symbolist movement and the Wagner vogue, but tended to read him initially as a biographical case and then increasingly, after the turn of the century, as representative of the German spirit. The principal American exponent was H. L. Mencken who, like Shaw, assimilated him to his own persona of iconoclastic gadfly. In Germany, by contrast, most serious philosophers and cultural commentators felt the need to come to terms with Nietzsche, Heidegger being the most notable philosophical example.

Perhaps the most striking literary instance in Germany is Thomas Mann, who was initially imbued with the romantic pessimism of Schopenhauer mediated through a Nietzschean interpretation of the internal contradictions of culture. As a scion of this German tradition, he was not initially sympathetic to the progressive and democratic values associated with the French and Anglo-American worlds and even as, over the course of his long writing life, he became more politically progressive he did not abandon his Nietzschean formation but differentiated its elements internally so as to set Nietzsche contra Nietzsche. Two works which especially depend

on this internal Nietzschean agon are the tetralogy *Joseph and his Brothers* (1933–43) and *Doctor Faustus* (1947). With the Joseph sequence Mann, like other modernists before him, turned consciously to myth in a Nietzschean spirit not as a flight from civilized reason but as its proper culmination. As he put it in a related lecture on Freud, with the Joseph theme in mind: “the mythic is indeed, in the life of humanity, an early and primitive step, but in the life of the individual a late and mature one” (1947: 63). His Old Testament characters live out their existences as consciously created or discovered destinies, repeating and modifying the experience of their ancestors, and leading the human to its highest potential. Their *amor fati* is far from abandonment to fate, and the psychological expansion of the biblical narrative transposes it into a modern key. In a related piece, “Voyage with *Don Quixote*,” ostensibly written on a journey away from Nazi Europe in 1934, Mann ends with a highly ambivalent dream vision of Don Quixote with Nietzsche’s features. At one level, this gives the mad Nietzsche an iconically inaugural position in the twentieth century’s phase of modernity comparable to Don Quixote in an earlier foundational epoch. More subtly, though, it points to the way Mann, in the Joseph sequence, actually accommodates Nietzsche’s mythopoetic relativism to the humane purposes he sees in Don Quixote’s creator, Cervantes. Likewise, in his final major treatment of these themes, Mann’s German artist, Leverkuhn, clearly based on Nietzsche among others, is presented in tragic contrast to Goethe’s optimistic inflections of the Faust legend. Yet once again, the dangers of Nietzschean extremity are contained homeopathically by the responsibility of a post-theological, Nietzschean relativism. Mann’s agonistic struggle with Nietzsche is self-conscious and exemplary for reasons to do with his specifically German tradition and history, yet it brings to the fore, as does the late twentieth-century resurgence of interest in Nietzsche, the way his mode of thought, rather than any particular doctrines or attitudes, mapped out for habitation some of the inescapable conditions of modernity.

References and Further Reading

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