PROJECT MUSE®

Nietzsche and the German Tradition (review)

Paul Bishop

Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies, Volume 42, Number 1,
February 2006, pp. 83-84 (Review)

Published by University of Toronto Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/smr.2006.0002>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/198780>

Though not altogether even in quality, *The Literature of German Romanticism* provides a broad and informative exploration of the movement, solid and reliable research, and a useful bibliographical resource. It has something to offer to both students and specialists.

PAOLA MAYER *University of Guelph*

Nicholas Martin, ed. *Nietzsche and the German Tradition*. Oxford: Lang, 2003. 314 pp.
US\$ 53.95 (Paperback). ISBN 3-03910-060-2.

In *Götzen-Dämmerung* Nietzsche lamented the absence in modernity of “den Willen zur Tradition, zur Autorität, zur Verantwortlichkeit auf Jahrhunderte hinaus.” But what does it mean to speak of *Nietzsche and the German Tradition*, as the volume under review does? This collection of papers, arising from the Seventh Annual Conference of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society held at the University of St Andrews in September 1997, performs three tasks. First, it examines Nietzsche’s engagement with various German traditions, scholarly, aesthetic, religious, and philosophical; second, it discusses his attitude to the Germany of his day; and third, it debates key aspects of his subsequent reception in German literature and thought. Thus Christa Davis Acampora analyzes Nietzsche’s approach to the “Homeric question” in his inaugural lecture (1869) and in “Homers Wettkampf” (1872); Hans-Gerd von Seggern relates *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872) to the classical aesthetics of Goethe and Schiller; Duncan Large traces the vicissitudes of Nietzsche’s view(s) of Luther; Thomas H. Brobjer documents Nietzsche’s reading of Schopenhauer, Leibniz, Herder, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Herbart, Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, and Marx; and Christopher Janaway offers a detailed account of Nietzsche’s reaction and response to Schopenhauer. For Daniel W. Conway, Nietzsche’s relationship to his fellow Germans was “famously vexed” (1), and his contribution surveys the main contours of Nietzsche’s conception of what is “German,” engaging in particular Laurence Lampert’s work in this area; while Ben Morgan uses Lesley Chamberlain’s *Nietzsche in Turin* (1996) as a starting point for his psycho-portrait of Nietzsche in terms of a “frightened pursuit of mastery” (146). Finally, Jim Urpeth examines the notion of “aesthetic disinterestedness” in Heidegger’s response to Nietzsche, noting the positive view of Schiller expressed in Heidegger’s lectures; in two separate papers, Paul J. M. van Tongeren and Gerd Schank investigate the implications of Nietzsche’s biological discourse, his talk of “breeding” a new “race”; in terms of the Left’s perspective on Nietzsche, Malcolm Humble considers the reception of his writings in the work of Heinrich Mann and Arnold Zweig; and the concluding essay, by Nicholas Martin, looks at how Nietzsche was attacked, or more often deliberately ignored, in the GDR.

Overall, what emerges from this impressively strong collection of papers is the importance, when reading Nietzsche, of attention to context. Janaway points to the multi-functionality of the figure of Schopenhauer (as “consolation,” “master,” “exemplar,” “authority,” “philosophical opponent,” “antipode,” “case-study,” and “Nietzsche’s educator”); then again, in *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche makes use of the structures of Schiller’s aesthetic theory, as Acampora and von Seggern suggest, but this did not prevent him, elsewhere, from attacking the widespread misunderstanding and misrepresentation

of Weimar classicism in the nineteenth century. Above all, his early admiration for Schopenhauer, Wagner, Goethe, Schiller, Luther, and Beethoven (KSA 7, 8[94], 260; cf. 119) left him saturated with the great works of German culture; his training in theology and philology equipped him with a powerful set of intellectual tools; and his sense of his own historical position was doubtless sharpened by reading such works as F. A. Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*, Kuno Fischer's *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie*, and Friedrich Überweg's *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie von Thales bis auf die Gegenwart*. It is because Nietzsche was so embedded in the aesthetic, intellectual, and historical traditions of German culture that he was able to advance so devastating a critique of it and, in a work comparatively little discussed in this volume (with the exception of Acampora and to a certain extent Lange), *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1882–1884), to project so positive a vision for German, or European, or indeed global culture. (In this sense we could see Nietzsche as completing the project of universal *Bildung* designated by Fichte to the Germans.) To appreciate Nietzsche's philosophical agenda for the future, we need to understand him in his historico-intellectual relatedness to the various strands of German culture that constitute, in the convenient short-hand phrase, the "German tradition"; we need to develop (as Nietzsche put it) "den Willen [...] zur *Solidarität* von Geschlechter-Ketten vorwärts und rückwärts in *infinitum*." We are considerably helped in that task by this volume of twelve fascinating papers, to which the editor has added a bibliography and a useful index.

PAUL BISHOP *University of Glasgow*

Carsten Strathausen. *The Look of Things: Poetry and Vision around 1900*. University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures 126. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003. 325 pp. US\$ 49.95 (Hardcover). ISBN 0-8078-8126-0.

The book aims to place the poetic works of Rilke, George, and Hofmannsthal squarely in the context of visual aesthetics. Drawing on the theoretical works of Benjamin and Adorno, and to a lesser extent on Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's epistemology, Strathausen argues that the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of two opposing (and competing) paradigms of seeing: on the one hand the technological visual mode of photography and cinema, which creates a "reality effect" by recombining fragmented and disconnected images into a new whole, and on the other hand the subjective vision of literary language, which, in conscious reaction to this new technology, reverted to a deeper, more corporeal mode of perception that lays claim to a more authentic representation of its object. For Strathausen, the essential nature of this dichotomy is to be found in aesthetic mediation and the privileged, but highly problematic, role of language as both an expression of specific historical circumstances as well as an instrument for transforming and purifying reality into a utopian ideal.

Part I first examines various technological developments in the fields of photography and cinema predating the twentieth century, from the camera obscura to phantasmagoria to the arrival of cinema, which together gave rise to a "scopic regime" (a term Strathausen borrows from Martin Jay) modelled after the cold and detached gaze of Descartes's