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Nietzsche nella Rivoluzione conservatrice ed. by Francesco
Cattaneo, Carlo Gentili, and Stefano Marino (review)

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Francesco Cattaneo, Carlo Gentili, and Stefano Marino, eds.,
Nietzsche nella Rivoluzione conservatrice.

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Analyzing the reception of Nietzsche's work in the years following World War I is a delicate and important task, one that *Nietzsche nella Rivoluzione conservatrice* seeks to accomplish by focusing on the so-called Conservative Revolutionary movement and the prominent intellectuals who orbited it. The book is a rich summary of the eponymous congress held in Bologna (May 10–13, 2013), promoted by the University of Bologna and the Fondazione Gramsci Emilia-Romagna, and it contains fifteen essays from both young and established scholars, including the editors of the volume, preceded by a short yet informative introduction.

“Conservative Revolutionary” is an almost paradoxical expression, chosen by Armin Mohler in 1950 to define major philosophical, political, and cultural currents in Germany between the end of World War I and the rise of the Nazi regime. Like every definition, Mohler's has clear limits, but it succeeds in identifying the core of this movement: Nourished by the crisis of the early part of the century, the movement aimed to create a revolutionary alternative to the French Revolution and the more recent Soviet Revolution, by preserving German culture from the threat of modernity. The movement had an ambiguous and intense relationship both with Nietzsche, toward whom it acknowledged its debt, and with National Socialism, which tried to claim intellectual support from the movement, sometimes with collusion from the movement itself. The main merit of this volume is its ability to preserve the uniqueness of every figure involved, at different levels, with the Conservative Revolution, so that the reader is pushed to avoid generalizations, which are useless, if not dangerous, when dealing with such an obscure period of human history and the *vexata quaestio* of the contribution of Nietzsche's intellectual legacy to National Socialism. The consequent depth of analysis demands a certain degree of expertise from the reader—who may have to find his own way in the tangle of names, facts, works, and arguments that fill the volume—and may provide an impetus to further study.

The first four contributions present Nietzsche's reception during the Third Reich from different points of view. In “Nichilismi a

confronto: Nietzsche e Schmitt,” Carlo Galli traces in the nihilism of their “negative thought” a deep connection between the apolitical attitude of Nietzsche and the “hyper-political” attitude of Schmitt. Although the latter considered Nietzsche’s reflections on morality to be the “ground zero” of a passive nihilism that is unable to address the problem of politics, it is the theoretical path opened by Nietzsche, according to Galli, that Schmitt takes against (and, indeed, beyond) Nietzsche himself. Galli thus points out the ambiguity of this relationship, referring in particular to Schmitt’s estimation of the *Übermensch* as an unsuccessful answer to the challenge of modernity and his assimilation of Nietzsche’s conceptions of history and space to his own.

In the next essay, “Alfred Baumler e la produzione di un Nietzsche compatibile con il nazismo,” Gilbert Merlio treats the question of Nietzsche’s Nazification more directly through the interpretation of Alfred Baumler. This rich analysis covers all phases of Baumler’s thought and shows the development of his approach to Nietzsche: from a limited critique of his philosophy in the first part of the twenties to a positive evaluation of his agonal morality in the later part of the same decade, and from the “popular” interpretation of him as “philosopher and politician” in 1932 to the more radical presentation as Hitler’s prophet in 1934, until the late conception of an apolitical Nietzsche after World War II. Merlio succeeds in revealing the depth of Baumler’s relationship to Nietzsche, providing tools for understanding the genesis and content of one element of Nietzsche’s Nazification, and thus offering one of the best defenses against it: “Nietzschean man is defined by his destination, not his origin—and that should be enough to exonerate Nietzsche from any responsibility for fascist or racist exploitations of his thought” (66, translation my own).

A similar richness of approach can be found in “Individualità, massa, articolazione sociale: Arthur Moeller Van der Bruck lettore di Nietzsche,” in which Stefano G. Azzarà explains how the author of *Das dritte Reich* undergoes a progressive nationalization in his understanding of Nietzsche, until he finally becomes the source of a non-Marxist redefinition of socialism that was at the heart of the Conservative Revolution.

On this movement, Carlo Gentili’s chapter, “Il terzo regno: utopia regressiva e profezia rivoluzionaria,” offers a clear presentation that can serve as a useful introduction to the reader who needs one. Highlighting the analogies and associations with Nietzsche’s works, Gentili focuses on

the development of the idea of the Third Reign, developed by Gioacchino da Fiore and then absorbed by German culture and thought, long before Hitler chose the expression to identify his political program. The idea of a Third Reign made a deep connection between the aesthetic and the political, which was then abandoned in the Nazi conception of a Third Reich, but which is a complex, problematical, and yet important kernel that animated the best contributions of the Conservative Revolution.

In “L’evento del secolo’: Friedrich Nietzsche e Thomas Mann,” Elena Alessiato provides an insightful glimpse into the difficult and profound relationship between Mann and Nietzsche by comparing it to the relationship between Nietzsche and Wagner. Unlike Nietzsche’s relationship to Wagner, Mann’s to Nietzsche is more positive, since he was aware of Nietzsche’s importance for the century and found in him a paradoxical and fecund synthesis that could represent a point of reference for the project of a Conservative Revolution.

The next four contributions are dedicated to the Jünger brothers’ interpretation of Nietzsche. In his “‘Politica,’ ‘lavoro,’ ‘metafisica’ e ‘modernità’: un’analisi comparativa tra ‘Der Arbeiter’ di Ernst Jünger e ‘Lenin, der Machiavell des Ostens’ di Hugo Fischer alla luce del nietzscheano ‘Wille zur Macht,’” Andrea Benedetti uses Nietzsche’s “will to power” and perspectivism as reference points to compare Ernst Jünger and Hugo Fischer. As friends and active contributors to the Conservative Revolution, they fought against modernity and, Benedetti argues, used Nietzsche’s perspectivism to create a metaphysical construction that could explain both the stable order of the world and its game of dominion and politics, as exemplified by Jünger’s fictional character of the laborer and Fisher’s interpretation of Lenin. In “Anarca, ribelle, désinvolture. Sulla questione della libertà del singolo in Ernst Jünger,” Dietmar Koch’s analysis focuses on *The Forest Passage*. This chapter provides a clear introduction to the differences between anarchist and the rebel, questioning the ambiguous union of fate and freedom and underlining the echoes of Zarathustra in Jünger’s work. Julia Pfefferkorn’s brilliant essay, “Danzare l’incerto. La ripresa della metafora nietzschiana della danza nelle opere della Prima Guerra Mondiale di Ernst Jünger,” gives a clear account of the role of corporality in the symbolic universe of both thinkers. According to Pfefferkorn, the metaphor of dance, central to Nietzsche’s thought, becomes a narrative principle for Jünger’s attempts to make the war an immediate experience for the reader, who

has to bear it, just as the soldier and dancer have to survive the Dionysian exaltation, dismembering, and loss of existential meaning. Finally, Giuliana Gregorio analyzes the thought of Friedrich Georg Jünger. Her “Fare i conti con Nietzsche: Friedrich Georg Jünger dal primo al secondo Dopoguerra” presents Jünger’s reception of Nietzsche as a long development from an early affirmation of Nietzsche’s more radical statements to a later evaluation of the idea of the “eternal recurrence” that goes beyond, and even contrasts with, Nietzsche’s own.

Maurizio Guerri, Mario Bosincu, and Stefano Marino focus on Oswald Spengler’s reception of Nietzsche. In “Genealogia e morfologia storica. Su Nietzsche e Spengler,” Guerri traces a common theoretical direction in the two thinkers. He first shows how Spengler’s reflections upon the city recall Nietzsche’s definition of the “age of comparison,” and then makes clear that the morphology of history in *The Decline of the West* shares some fundamental features with Nietzsche’s genealogical method, insofar as both aim to underline fractures and discontinuities in history without searching for its origin or foundation. In “Dove sono i barbari del XX secolo? Dal superuomo all’uomo nuovo totalitario in Oswald Spengler,” Bosincu highlights the affinities and differences between Nietzsche’s criticisms of his contemporaries and Spengler’s desire for a new humanity. The main point of contact is found in Nietzsche’s critical approach to Germany and socialism, one that nourishes not only Spengler’s reception of him but also the central aim of the Conservative Revolution, namely, to find a new path for socialism, far from its Soviet version and faithful to German culture. Theodor Adorno’s reflections on these two thinkers are the focus of Marino’s “Il contenuto di verità del non vero: Theodor W. Adorno interprete di Nietzsche e Spengler.” Adorno finds in both an impulse to a lucid and critical analysis of reality, although he sees neither of them as accomplishing the second dialectical movement that would provide a theoretical background for improving the human situation.

The next two essays are devoted to one of the most influential German interpreters of Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and his ambivalent attitude toward National Socialism. In “La storia dell’esserci e la politica. Trattati conservativo-rivoluzionari del pensiero heideggeriano degli anni Trenta,” Rosa Maria Marfioti offers a balanced and rich evaluation of Heidegger’s initial enthusiasm for the Nazi Party and his gradual detachment from it, in which his interpretation of Nietzsche plays a central role. An analysis of

Heidegger's relationship with Conservative Revolution members is also provided by Francesco Cattaneo in "Sul concetto di rivoluzione nella filosofia di Martin Heidegger. Alcune note storico-ontologiche." Although clearly stating that Heidegger cannot be considered a thinker of the movement, Cattaneo proposes an original reading of his abandonment of political engagement as a transformation that brings his philosophy closer to Nietzsche's sense of "thoughts that come with doves' feet" (*Z II* "The stillest Hour").

The last contribution, by Manlio Iofrida, "La ricezione di Nietzsche in Francia fra le due guerre: Thierry Maulnier fra Maurras e Foucault," provides a glimpse of the French reception of Nietzsche at the time of the Conservative Revolution movement. Giving an account of the interpretations of Charles Maurras and Thierry Maulnier, Iofrida traces a line that leads from them, passing through the early Nietzsche *renaissance*, to Michel Foucault's reading.

Overall, *Nietzsche nella Rivoluzione conservatrice* is a clear and rich volume. It will be an important resource especially for scholars interested in this ambiguous and tragic period of the last century, a period that the volume analyzes with great lucidity and sense for nuances.

Paolo Stellino, *Nietzsche and Dostoevsky: On the Verge of Nihilism*.

Bern: Peter Lang, 2015. 247 pp. ISBN: 978-3-0343-1670-5. Paper, €62.50/€50.00/US\$81.95.

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In his late work Nietzsche professed profound admiration for Dostoevsky, calling him "the only psychologist [...] from whom I had something to learn" (*TI* "Skirmishes" 45). He also said, characteristically complicating matters, "I am grateful to him in a remarkable way, however much he goes against my deepest instincts" (*KGB* III/5, letter 1151). There is, however, another well-established way of connecting the two authors, due to the Symbolist writer and critic Dmitri Merezhkovsky, which regards Dostoevsky as preemptively refuting Nietzsche's teachings through his portrayal of the nihilistic protagonists of his great novels.