

Introduction: Nietzsche on Style

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*F*rom the earliest commentaries on Nietzsche's philosophy, one of the most-discussed aspects of his work has been its style. During the early part of the twentieth century, if many refused to acknowledge Nietzsche as a philosopher "in the proper sense," it was due to the peculiar style of philosophical writing that he cultivated. The form that he adopted for his works was quite different from that typically employed in philosophical treatises, consisting as it did in pithy maxims and collages of aphorisms on the most various themes and topics, and poems and songs, right up to the extended "prose poem" that is *Zarathustra*. But this is not all. Even in those works whose form corresponds more or less to the traditional form of the essay—such as the four *Untimely Meditations* or the three texts making up the book *On the Genealogy of Morality*—Nietzsche's style is far from being neutral or merely descriptive. On the contrary: here too Nietzsche utilizes all the resources of rhetoric and poetry: images, metaphors, hyperbole, and irony. Besides engaging in investigation—the typical task of the philosopher—Nietzsche also in these works provokes, attacks, and stirs the reader's emotions. Sometimes, like his own character Zarathustra, he seems to feel the need to accord himself some rest and to be, for a brief time, "only a poet"—that is to say, he gives expression to emotions of a purely personal nature. "I [...] have a lot of stylistic possibilities—the most multifarious art of style that anyone has ever had at his disposal" (EH III, 4), declares Nietzsche in that extremely bizarre philosophical work that is *Ecce Homo*.

From the 1960s onward it has emerged with ever greater force that the style of Nietzsche's writing is not extrinsic to his thought: it is only through accounting for his choices with regard to his style that one can ever hope to get to the bottom of his thought. This remains the case, despite Nehamas's observation in his *Nietzsche* (1985) that post-structuralism in its day took the declared pluralism of Nietzsche's style as a basis for its claims about the ultimate undecidability of meaning and the infinite polysemy of the text. The present volume adopts a directly contrary approach. It offers new interpretations of Nietzsche's strategic use of style as a device to reveal a meaning that could not otherwise be communicated. Such is the line taken by Paolo D'Iorio's essay, which explores the most discussed of Nietzsche's works, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. D'Iorio throws light on the essentially parodical nature of this work and on the effects that Nietzsche hoped to achieve through his parody. He shows also, and above all, the *absolute necessity* of having recourse to such a style if one wants to achieve such effects. Without it, Nietzsche would not have been able to bring about the transvaluation of all values that he had already declared to be supremely urgent in his earlier works. Furthermore, D'Iorio focuses especially on one of Zarathustra's "songs" to reveal the highly specific aim of this particular literary form. Far from being a digression or a "frill," *The Other Dance Song*—or, by its original title, *Vita Femina*—conveys the deepest meaning of the eternal recurrence, which could not have been expounded either in a scientific treatise or in a philosophical dissertation.

Benedetta Zavatta's contribution on Nietzsche and Mark Twain is also devoted to this question of Nietzsche's style. Specifically, she explores the aims and purposes behind Nietzsche's adoption, at many points in his writing, of a satirical tone and style. Zavatta argues that Nietzsche applied a lesson learned from Twain, a satirical writer whom he loved and admired—namely, that the sole truly effective weapon against *ressentiment* is laughter, which unlike invective is born not out of hatred but rather from "the taking of a distance," which leaves the soul unperturbed. Viewed from this perspective, Nietzsche's supposed "humor" appears, like Twain's, as the most pitiless critique that might be

mounted against the age that both men lived in, and at the same time as the best way to exhort a radical transformation of that age.

But style in Nietzsche "is expressed in many ways": he deploys not only extraordinary styles of writing but also a revolutionary method of inquiry: genealogy. Gherardo Ugolini's essay sheds light on this method, which is the only appropriate approach after the destruction of the traditional idea of truth as an eternal and self-same "given" that philosophers are always busy discovering or unveiling. If truth is convention, i.e., a human construction, the philosophers of the future must devote themselves to investigating its origin—that is, the circumstances under which it was affirmed as such. Ugolini, then, explores the origins of Nietzsche's peculiar style of investigation: namely, genealogy. This latter arose out of philology, a discipline in whose bosom Nietzsche had received the most rigorous education and to which he devoted many years of hard work. "It is not for nothing that one was a philologist, perhaps one is a philologist still" (*Daybreak*, Preface 5, KSA, 3, 17), Nietzsche reminds us in one of his late prefaces. The philological practice of reconstructing a text based solely on the data that the text makes available, without letting oneself be misled by any imaginative or imaginary hypotheses, became for Nietzsche the model for a philosophical inquiry freed from all metaphysical speculation.

If genealogy is the style of investigation whereby Nietzsche demolishes the philosophy of the past, skepticism is the style which characterizes the *pars construens* of his philosophy, a thousand miles removed from the dogmatism and fanaticism of traditional philosophy. Lorenzo Serini's essay analyzes the various textual strategies—first the aphorism—whereby Nietzsche enacts this peculiar style of argument. Above all, he demonstrates that Nietzsche's skeptical style, though displaying affinities with Pyrrhonian skepticism, differs from it in actually advancing hypotheses.

The present volume explores not only Nietzsche's style—of writing, of inquiry, of interpretation, and of philosophical construction—but also his thoughts about style. Such is the case of Christian Benne's essay,

which focuses on the link that Nietzsche establishes between the style and the culture of a people. Contrary to what one might be misled into believing by a superficial reading of the texts, Benne shows that for Nietzsche the decadence of Greek culture began when philology became a discipline. Prior to this point it had been a constituent part of the culture itself, representing simply the critical capacity through which the Greeks gave a unitary style to the culture. The decadence of Nietzsche's own era—perfectly represented by the music of Wagner—was ascribed by Nietzsche to the total lack of such a unitary style—i.e., to the inability to master multiplicity. Nietzsche traced this inability back to a way of interpreting the world that neglected philology and the *Redlichkeit* that distinguishes it.

Stefano Busellato's essay is devoted to that cornerstone of Nietzsche's philosophy, the concept of "grand style," which emerged out of that *querelle* between Nietzsche and Wagner that, as Richard Klein (2004) has critically observed, "is usually handled under the rubric of personal relations" (45). Such an approach implies ceding the substance of this dispute—namely, reflections on music—to "the experts" in this discipline. But to do so means closing oneself off from understanding an important part of Nietzsche's philosophy since he did not look on Wagner's music as something that concerned the theory of the arts alone but rather as the principal cultural event of his epoch. Joining philological skills with those acquired in his parallel career as a musician, Busellato explores the concept of "grand style" in all its facets and implications.

Nietzsche's reflections on style unfold also, indeed above all, in a moral context. João Constâncio's essay takes us to the heart of this question of "giving style to one's character" and reminds us that in Nietzsche's philosophy, to live according to a style of one's own is the very highest good. In this moral context "style" becomes a synonym for independence, autonomy, or more simply, individuality. But this theme of "giving style to one's character," certainly one of the most central to Nietzsche's thought, is at the same time one of the most problematical. Opposing the Schopenhauerian doctrine of the immutability of the

character, Nietzsche urges the individual to "compose," after the manner of an artist, his or her own drives, developing some while suppressing others, so as to attain ultimately satisfaction with the self. This urging toward self-creation, indeed, seems infinitely problematical when set side by side with Nietzsche's professed determinism, i.e., his rejection of the freedom of the will. How is the "composition of a self" conceivable if the will is not free? Constâncio masterfully disentangles the conceptual knots that confuse this question as he guides us through an exploration of the complexity of "the life of the drives."

This special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Prose* concludes with a contribution by Mark Alfano that masterfully traces all the occurrences of the three main German words that Nietzsche uses to talk about style [*Stil*, *Stils*, *Stile*] and the relevance of their various meanings to Nietzsche's philosophy as a whole. Alfano's project brings to light that in Nietzsche's philosophy, style can be broadly defined as "the distinctive way in which something—often an aesthetic production such as writing, art, or craft—is expressed." This definition finds application in a multiplicity of fields, from literature to ethics. As a result, Alfano's essay can be seen as a map to navigate through the essays composing the volume.

The final result that emerges when one puts together all eight essays on Nietzsche is a well-founded study of style that, although it makes no claim to be exhaustive, nonetheless points up the extraordinary complexity and richness of implication in this crucially important topic on Nietzsche.

Works Cited

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