**Why Nietzsche Still? Reflections on Drama, Culture and Politics**  
ALAN D. SCHRIFT, ed.  

Every new anthology requires a justification. In this case, the apparent occasion for yet another suite of Nietzsche papers is the creeping sense—aroused by Ferry and Renaut’s *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans*, published in France nine years ago—that Nietzsche is no longer relevant in a “post-postmodern world” (3). Despite the paucity of evidence for such an international philosophical conspiracy, this collection seeks to (re)establish the centrality of Nietzsche’s multifaceted work in contemporary theoretical reflections upon our sprawling cultural and political landscapes. This means, however, that the focus of the contributors is not so much “getting Nietzsche ‘right’” (4) as it is establishing his continuing importance for these ongoing debates. When Daniel Conway writes that Nietzsche unwittingly “attracts treacherous followers who will betray him and distort his teachings to suit their own designs,” (38) we have good reason to apply this observation to his fellow contributors. Do not expect, therefore, to find a great deal of detailed, textual work on the sense of eternal recurrence, or the nature of will to power, or the implications of perspectivism. And do not expect any light shed on Nietzsche’s complex relationships with post-Kantian German philosophers, for the Nietzsche presented here is largely the forward-looking anticipator of recent French theory, *agonal* democracy, and American “culture wars.” Indeed, a quick scan of the index reveals that Rush Limbaugh receives about the same number of citations as Hegel. By design, then, the more conventional preoccupations of Nietzsche scholars get short shrift in a volume that is more Nietzschean in spirit than about Nietzsche’s thought per se.

The question then becomes the meaning of this Nietzschean spirit. If it means, as it does for someone like Stanley Rosen, a recovery of Nietzsche’s authorial intentions, then breathless claims of how “Nietzsche queers the phallus” (25) will seem scandalously inconsistent with that spirit. But if it means, as it does for Foucault, *unfaithfulness* to the letter of the text, then the groans and protests of Nietzsche’s words will seem but a minor irritation on the way to an ever-expanding range of theoretical and political uses. In other words, if Nietzsche-as-handmaiden can help us to get somewhere, then we shouldn’t worry too much about what Nietzsche himself would think of the destination. Certainly in this collection, it is Foucault’s meaning that prevails. In many of these invited articles, one senses that a perfunctory nod in Nietzsche’s direction merely secures the liberty to go on and discuss the real topic at hand—be it Foucault, Lacan, Arendt, modern literature or feminism—much like those wearisome, off-topic conference papers which
bend and twist and perform acrobatics in order to appear to address a conference theme. There is doubtless much to learn from Nietzsche's many contemporaries, but one wonders whether a volume on Nietzsche is the appropriate venue for much of this material.

Specifically, the papers themselves are as diverse in quality as they are in subject matter. With a few exceptions, however, they tend to feature either The Birth of Tragedy or On the Genealogy of Morals as their points of departure. One is left wondering, consequently, about the relevance of "middle" works like Human, All Too Human—a text which arguably offers more detailed remarks about art, culture and politics than the more renowned earlier and later books. The volume itself is divided into three sections: "Drama," "Cultural Dramatics," and "Culture and the Political." Since Alan Schrift also provides an introduction wherein these papers are all clearly summarized, I will limit my remarks to those papers which especially merit either critical praise or blame.

There are two interesting papers in part one, written by Daniel Conway and David Allison respectively. Conway and Allison are veterans of the Nietzsche scene, and although neither piece is especially substantive, each attempts to work through an important issue without feeling compelled to situate Nietzsche in 1960s Paris. Conway provocatively examines how Nietzsche's late work failed to give birth to future generations of appropriate disciples—"swashbuckling warrior-genealogists" (37)—because Nietzsche's self-understanding inadequately comprehended his own decadence and decay. This is a key issue, and strikingly relevant to Nietzsche's philosophical legacy, but Conway himself works in broad brush strokes, and his thesis is consequently weakened by a lack of careful, specific, textual support. Allison's thesis is more manageable, focusing on how Nietzsche's early discussion of our ecstatic responses to music have been largely confirmed by contemporary psychoacoustical research. Of interest is Allison's (continuing) attention to the 1871 work, "On Music and Words," wherein Nietzsche begins to break free of Schopenhauer and romanticism by arguing that our ego-suspending, ecstatic responses are triggered by "the subjective states of our experience of music," (69) such that the very opposition between subject and object is elided. The fact that we now have scientific evidence that the resolution of dissonance may stimulate the release of endorphins provides an interesting footnote to Nietzsche's theory, but it is hardly the stuff on which Nietzsche's continuing relevance ought to rest. Shedding new light on a little-noticed but significant work ought to be sufficiently meritorious. Does our estimation of Nietzsche really hang in the balance of linking Dionysus to neurochemistry?

Unfortunately, part one also contains some of the weaker essays in the volume. Debra Bergoffen's "Oedipal Dramas" and John Burt Foster's "Zarathustrian Millennialism before the Millennium: From Bely to Yeats to
Malraux" are perhaps the worst offenders of the disappointing trends mentioned above. Bergoffen's essay is often mired in Lacanian jargon; Foster's essay is not really about Zarathustra at all, and he does not manage to do justice to any one of these literary figures either. Duncan Large's essay, "Nietzsche's Shakespearean Figures," promises much, and is indeed a useful prolegomenon for further work, but ultimately devolves into an almost historical tour through Shakespeare's German reception and his changing status within Nietzsche's own biography without really getting to the heart of Nietzsche's philosophical interest in the great Bard's drama.

Five more articles fall under the "Cultural Dramatics" heading. Judith Butler's contribution on Nietzsche and Freud is the sole paper not written for the anthology, and since it is part of a recent book, I will not comment on it here. The best paper in the volume is co-authored by David Owen and Aaron Ridley. They conclude that Nietzsche's frequent invocation of human types should not be taken as evidence of biologism, since "only a cultural understanding of human types can make sense of Nietzsche's conception of philosophy and of his therapeutic ambitions" (137—my italics). This paper receives the highest grade since it provides an extended, systematic argument connecting Nietzsche's strategic employment of human typologies with his deeper philosophical criticism of modern culture. Linking surface and depth, establishing consistency across diverse texts, and challenging superficial interpretations: surely these critical practices exemplify the kind of effort and intelligence Nietzsche would want from his readers.

The most bizarre paper of the volume is Alphonso Lingis' "Satyrs and Centaurs: Miscegenation and the Master Race," which manages to trade in scholarly protocols for extended phenomenological ramblings on topics ranging from the nature of our moral perceptions to our erotic attractions. Lingis attempts to wax poetic, but at one point fails embarrassingly into the depths of what can only be called philosophical soft porn: "Whether we are straight or gay, we feel our penis pulsing when we look over some rocks in the summer beach and see a man writhing under a gleaming erection" (160). The essay lumbers on to critique several of Nietzsche's quasi-biological categories, and as such we must wait for the likes of Owen and Ridley to set things right.

Schrift's own essay considers Nietzsche's place within the context of recent cultural and academic squabbles. Schrift is a fine scholar, and has done more than anyone to track Nietzsche's reception in French thought; I have certainly learned much from his earlier books. But I wonder if the local anti-Nietzschean sentiments in some pockets of France and the hot air of American conservatives really merit such consideration. As in one or two other papers, Schrift's concern with the present state of cultural and academic affairs will, I am afraid, unwittingly erode the continuing relevance of his paper as the
issues, themes and proper names change. For now, however, it is an interesting glance at Nietzsche’s unique place in the current mix.

The final section contains three of the stronger (and longer) papers, but again their treatment of Nietzsche’s work as a means rather than an end may not be endearing to Nietzsche purists. In “Nietzsche for Politics,” Wendy Brown is surely on the right track when she suggests that Nietzsche’s enduring political contribution resides in his capacity to expose and challenge extant political. But this thesis, important on its own, is needlessly complicated by the unwelcome admixture of largely unsupported remarks about the nature of democracy which Brown extracts from Tocqueville and a particular reading of Spinoza. We learn, for example, of democracy’s “relatively automatic cathexis onto undemocratic principles” (208).

Dana Villa, a top Arendt scholar, discusses Arendt’s political appropriation of Nietzsche’s agonistic ideal in light of recent political theoretical complaints that procedural liberalism stifles difference and conflict in the name of a homogenizing stability. Villa’s contribution is very fine indeed, although again Nietzsche’s texts serve as a mere point of departure for a more wide-ranging look at democratic theory and public life. This use of Nietzsche continues in Jeffrey Nealon’s piece wherein the phenomenon of white male anger is examined through a Nietzschean lens. Unfortunately, the very effort to make Nietzsche seem topical and relevant is undermined by the fact that the phenomenon under consideration is already fading from the cultural radar screen. One wonders who will find this essay relevant in five or ten years.

Other Nietzsche anthologies such as Allison’s The New Nietzsche and Gillespie and Strong’s Nietzsche’s New Seas sustain our interest because the essays are uniformly strong—some classically important—and the focus of each volume is coherent. Schrift’s new collection also contains several fine papers, but it is difficult to see how it might shape our future understanding of Nietzsche or even be considered essential reading by philosophers who need no reminding of Nietzsche’s obvious, continuing importance.

JONATHAN SALEM-WISEMAN, Humber College