

Nietzsche Circle Press Release

Transfigurations: Nietzsche's Poetry & Music

Since Plato, the role and significance of art has been rigorously questioned, and the place of art and poetry in society has continued to raise crucial questions, questions posited by philosophers, artists, and statesmen. To Plato, phantasm, or the work of the imagination was dangerous, a threat to the very order of the city, and while others such as Hegel and Kant also made radical critiques of aesthetics, it wasn't until the mid-19th century that the role of aesthetics would be questioned with as much if not more rigor and circumspection by none other than Nietzsche. Far from the blind acolyte of art and artists as he is often deemed to be, Nietzsche might very well side with King Lear, who in the midst of his madness and while wandering through a storm shouted into the wind, *Nature's above art*. For the iconoclastic philosopher of values, even art could become metaphysical and as much a threat to existence as religion and for him, the question of art was crucial - in the age of the "death of God" (what he calls the "higher history"), art is in danger of replacing religion as a kind of secular form of metaphysics which could remove man from the very earth the philosopher so extolled; when that occurs, Nietzsche is ready to abandon art in favor of existence. But are there artists who are pursuing these questions and living with the crises that Nietzsche wrestled with so vigorously, crises that were to him wrought with peril?

In October of 2004, Yunus Tuncel, Rainer J. Hanshe, Corbin J. Morris, and Cem Aydogan founded the Nietzsche Circle to respond to those very questions and on April 23, 2005, staged their inaugural event, "Transfigurations: Nietzsche's Poetry and Music," announcing the organization and its mission to the public. "Transfigurations" was held at NYU's Deutsches Haus in tandem with the American release of *The Peacock and the Buffalo*,

the first complete edition of Nietzsche's poetry, a work translated by Dr. James Luchte of Lampeter University in Wales and published by a small press in England, Fire & Ice. Dr. Luchte was not present, but his translation of Nietzsche's poems infused the lively evening with his spirit. While Nietzsche may not be as accomplished and developed a poet as Heine or Rilke, it is more appropriate, or rather, insightful, to approach his poetic work in relation to his philosophical vision: poetry was for him not only a means of artistic expression wherein he explored creative impulses, but also a vital form of experimentation, as well as a ground for further questions, if not humor, playfulness, or outright mockery – Nietzsche as the buffoon who casts off rationality and seriousness and leavens the burden of being a creator of values. Luchte's translation does not attempt to mimic or recreate the original German, but render the basic poetic qualities of Nietzsche's poetry, and while he does not tend to the rhyme schemes, he ably transmits what is most vital in Nietzsche's poetry, that is the experience which Nietzsche wishes to impart. While some may take umbrage with Luchte's disavowal of Nietzsche's rhyme scheme, it seems more beneficial that he sacrificed what would perhaps be quite forced rhymes in English to give the savor of Nietzsche's tone and essence instead, though the book would have benefited from including the poems in German, which would have served a justice not only to Nietzsche, but Luchte as well. The handsome edition of the philosopher's poems features an exuberant and luminescent cover (a peacock and a buffalo crashing together in the ocean) which joyously evades the prototypical stereotype of the lugubrious thinker, expressing more the sense of *gaya scienza* which is as much part of Nietzsche's philosophy and the character which the Nietzsche Circle brought to its event.

Dr. Friedrich Ulfers, professor of German Literature Dept. at NYU (Dr. Ulfers is one of many prestigious members of the NC's advisory board, which includes numerous

noted Nietzsche scholars, as well as artists), noted in his opening statement the timeliness and necessity of such an organization and announced some of its goals, including lectures, symposiums, conferences, workshops, and festivals; in particular and of great interest is their plan to stage a festival to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Zarathustra which would pursue the question, “What would Zarathustra have to say to us today?” Appropriately enough, the evening began with a question, explored in a brief talk by Dr. Yunus Tuncel, “Why Poets Lie Too Much?” and followed with the performance of Nietzsche’s own musical compositions by Thomas Coote (featured on discs produced by the Nietzsche Music Project), interspersed with recitations of his poetry in German and English by Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, David Kilpatrick, and Friedrich Ulfers. In his talk, Dr. Tuncel highlighted three points: Zarathustra’s debate with old poets, Zarathustra as a poet himself, and the question of spectacle. Nietzsche’s vision of art and creativity is revealed and explored within the context of art (art within itself and art within culture), and what he is asking is a fundamental question which the Greeks implicitly posed, seeing the poet not merely as one who composed verses, but who also created values and not only guided, but aided the formation of society. Nietzsche was not a only a philosopher in the strict sense, but a poet, a composer, and some might even say novelist (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is often thought of as a novel), while the dramatic conceits of many of Nietzsche’s aphorisms reveal a great theatrical sensibility as well. For Dr. Tuncel, *Zarathustra* approximates the Greek norm of practicing philosophical poetry and the importance of style; what is primarily less a philosophic and more an artistic concern is an imperative concern for Nietzsche, who made of philosophy a kind of theater of multitudinous voices and viewpoints where style was as significant as content. In his work there is a variety of expression that reveals his way of viewing life as experimentation, of pursuing various perspectives and ways of investigating morality,

religion, myth, history, et cetera. Through a vision of art and creativity, Nietzsche practices this notion of experimentation and through the performance of his music and poetry, the Nietzsche Circle sought to present the artistic aspects of Nietzsche's work, which have not received as much concentration as other aspects of his work, highlighting dimensions of his creativity often ignored or discounted.

Although Nietzsche was not recognized as a great composer, what is more important is that music became for him another form of experimentation, and his compositions contain the same kind of dynamism, perspective, and questions which his writings do; one could think of them as thought experiments expressed in sound wherein Nietzsche wrestled with and altered accepted musical concepts, creating, if not the most 'beautiful' music, music which challenged and questioned the tenor of the times. Mr. Coote's performance of Nietzsche's untimely compositions was rich, subtle, and galvanizing and the rare pleasure of hearing Nietzsche's music performed live was an unexpected delight; it seems necessary that there be a reassessment of Nietzsche's music, which would benefit from further interpretation. But Nietzsche's musicality is also revealed in his writing, which has the breadth and scope of great musical works, is full of different movements, tempos, and themes, and, clearly, reveal various points of intersection between the different forms of expression which Nietzsche employed to express the multitudinous aspect of his vision of the world. The further one investigates Nietzsche, the further one sees the work of a ceaseless experimenter.

At the head of the evening, Mr. Hanshe, the Executive Director of the Nietzsche Circle, quoted in his introduction from one of Nietzsche's letters, which stated that "people will be allowed to read [my work] in about the year 2000." Now, in the two thousands, perhaps we are on the verge of a time when Nietzsche's works will find new expressions and

be free of the many ill associations which have often encumbered it, embracing instead its Dionysian spirit. It is such work that the Nietzsche Circle wishes to explore and instigate through living with Nietzsche's ideas on art not only within his own works, but through examining his influence on all the arts, artistic movements, and specific artists since his death. In this manner, the Nietzsche Circle envisions bringing forth the *living forms* of Nietzsche's works, embodying the multi-dimensionality of an existence that was as artistic as it was philosophical, giving flesh to the model of "the artistic Socrates" Nietzsche found so vital – were his final words before the long silence of madness not the *Dionysian Dithyrambs*? That soul, it did sing!