

quell'immagine dorata su sfondo scuro, ripetuta tantissime volte. Anzi, meglio: è in grado di leggere correttamente la rappresentazione chiunque abbia un po' di erudizione nella storia delle religioni, conosca la tradizionale iconografia cristiana e, magari, conosca i lavori dei grandi maestri che si sono fatti cantori di quella tradizione. Ove questo non fosse il caso, la raffigurazione seriale di Cristo potrebbe benissimo essere scambiata per il ritratto di un tizio hippy, con barba e lunghi capelli, la cui immagine è stata sottratta da Warhol allo scorrere del tempo. Dunque, chi non fosse in grado di risalire al significato incorporato nell'opera, a ciò che l'opera ci dice, compirebbe un marcato errore di interpretazione.

D'altro canto, seguendo i suggerimenti di Nietzsche e di Danto, ho anche un'altra impressione: se osservando *The Last Supper (Christ 112 Times)* già non sapessimo che l'uomo dalla lunga barba e dai capelli folti è Cristo, piuttosto che un hippy qualunque, faremmo di quell'opera una esperienza diversa, per quanto, forse, in qualche senso essa continuerebbe a sembrarci bella. Detto diversamente, mi pare che la bellezza, così come le altre proprietà estetiche e forse più delle altre, sia semplicemente una proprietà che veicola i significati che le opere incorporano, la cui funzione è di essere al servizio dell'espressione di quei significati.

[Tiziana Andina]

[Ripubblichiamo la recensione seguente, già apparsa nel numero 63 (3/2016), a causa di modifiche sostanziali nella traduzione dal tedesco all'inglese. *NdR*]

Maurizio Ferraris, *Nietzsches Gespenster – Ein menschliches und intellektuelles Abenteuer*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 2016, 252 pp., € 21,90

[This is the translation of an Amazon. de customer's review with a maximum 5 point rating.]

Since the following review is quite long, let me start by saying that I'm extremely enthusiastic about this book, and on a scale of 1 to 10 would have given it a 10. It is a wonderful book about Nietzsche, it is also a wonderfully written philosophy book. Not only because of its linguistic style – which is itself a delight (an excellent translation, despite a glaring mistake I shan't identify) – but also because Ferraris can and does something that very few can when dealing both with a philosophy and its creator. Ferraris seeks to be “objective”, but not by disappearing, so to speak, behind his words. On the contrary, he is “visible” in everything he writes, and does not shy away from the first person. But at the same time he never forces himself into the spotlight, which would mean finding out more about what Ferraris thinks than about what Nietzsche thought, suffered and inflicted. Part of what I think makes this such an exceptionally good book is this: First of all, Ferraris lets Nietzsche speak for himself, quoting aptly chosen passages from his letters and lesser known texts. Secondly, Ferraris lets historical facts speak for themselves, and they too

are well chosen. “Well chosen” actually isn’t strong enough: what he is trying to do is to place Nietzsche’s thought in a wider context (which, perhaps to put it somewhat pompously, is the context of the history of western thought from antiquity to post-postmodernity). It is precisely this that puts the book in a class of its own.

Looking at the Table of Contents I feared the worst. No chapters as such, just eleven sections with titles like *Kaputt, Femmes!*, *Nihilism without anti-depressants*, or *New Cinema Zarathustra*. Good Lord! These sections are divided into motley subsections which have headings that name a place and a date to which a few words are appended, like for example: «Jerusalem, 33AD – *It becomes female*, it becomes Christian», or «Basel, 16th April 1943 – The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test». My first impression was one of «Oh my, here we go again – he’s just going to serve up a potpourri of anecdotes and factoids». Clearly here is one of those amazingly well-read Italians (Calasso springs to mind). And I instinctively felt that someone was at work here determined to vent his associative anger on poor Nietzsche. My first thought was: Here is a smug intellectual who, whatever the cost, is anxious to appear original, erudite and witty.

I almost put the book down for good – better to read the originals for the n<sup>th</sup> time, I thought, (happily I happened to have a couple of them with me on holiday). But as I started flipping through it, reading bits and pieces, I stuck with it in a few places, and after 15 minutes something happened: I became fascinated – I realized

that the book did in fact have some sort of thought-structure’. So I decided to knuckle down and started reading it properly from the beginning.

My initial impression wasn’t *entirely* wrong – the book *is* indeed original, erudite and intellectually stimulating. It’s not just a collection of anecdotes, but has been put together – “architect-ed” – into an elegant factual montage, perhaps freely associated, but not *arbitrarily* so. The author’s erudition is evident, but is not displayed for its own sake. I learned a lot about Nietzsche that I hadn’t known, and I was able to see his philosophical ambitions under a new light. For example, the fact that from his mid-20’s he hugely regretted not having studied maths or natural science in his humanistic school. (In *Ecce Homo* he writes: «realities were absolutely lacking in my knowledge, and the devil only knows what the “idealities” were worth!»). As a solitary autodidact he seriously tried to keep up to date over a long period; evidently he wasn’t satisfied with popular “accessible” writings. It is known for example that he engaged with the writings of Cantor, Helmholtz and Mach. He never gave up the hope of giving his views a serious scientific foundation rather than only publishing them in the form of dogmatic aphorisms which must have struck educated readers as the choleric outpourings of a scientific incompetent.

And indeed, Ferraris’ book is intellectually stimulating, but pleasantly and not at all narcissistically so, as I had feared. Ferraris evidently thinks for himself – sometimes with, sometimes against Nietzsche. He neither places him on a pedestal to be revered

from afar, nor, when he disagrees with him (which he does in a number of places), does he write as a know-it-all professional philosopher who wants to denigrate the classical philologist for being just another amateur philosopher who, for example, has never read Kant properly. When Ferraris disagrees with Nietzsche (for instance on the doctrine of eternal return, of the *Übermensch*, of the substitution of truth by interpretation, or on his “moral philosophy” as a whole), he does so simply as someone who has his own thoughts about such issues, without making an academic song and dance about it. Ferraris clearly and concisely explains to the reader how he understands Nietzsche’s position on any given issue, and asks questions that may sound surprisingly indelicate (if not outright anti-philosophical) to Nietzsche’s disciples: is it true? is it convincing? does it at least have even the slightest degree of plausibility?

Sometimes Ferraris answers with a decisive “no”. But, *nota bene*, any such disagreement exclusively concerns the issue at hand, and it is sometimes attended by at most a brief, if often only implied justification. There is never any a trace of that contempt for Nietzsche imputed to Ferraris by a reviewer in the “Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung” (13<sup>th</sup> September 2016). The reviewer might be unaware that among philosophers to raise an objection, even stridently, to another’s argument or point of view is most often a sign of respect. Ferraris is writing as a philosopher, not as a “Nietzsche expert” (not at all the same thing!). In the same review it is said that Ferraris’ “main intention” was to make Nietzsche’s thought appear “as

absurd as possible”. Bravo! This betrays the reviewer’s exalted hermeneutic art. Great imagination is needed to reach such a conclusion – which is wholly erroneous. At every turn, the reader can sense just how deeply Nietzsche has touched the heart of the author who is both perceptive and anxious to keep his distance. This book in no way damns Nietzsche’s thought as absurd.

I suppose someone could hold that Ferraris has misunderstood Nietzsche simply by taking his words at face value (another reproach of the FAZ reviewer). But is it really naive to hold that Nietzsche actually meant what he wrote? And that he thought it the way he wrote it? After all, it’s Nietzsche we’re talking about. We admire him, among other things, for at least two reasons: having the brains and the guts to think what he thought, and having the rare gift to be able to write as he did. Not like some murmuring philosophical shaman, but as an artist whose sentences are clear and beautiful, and which go dead straight to the heart of the thought he wants to convey – whatever our attitude to it might be. Nietzsche’s sentences are trenchant, they not only carry their meaning but also “sharpen” the thought they reveal. Which they wouldn’t, if their sense could only be excavated by specialist exegetes who emerge every ten years from their archives.

If Nietzsche’s words cause us to reflect, it is never (or only very rarely) on what they might conceivably mean, but often on whether what we have read is too monstrous, or even just too terrifyingly monstrous (some of the thoughts being themselves those ‘spectres’ referred to in the title). Of



course, there are Nietzsche's daring (often foolhardy) thoughts expressed in spell-binding language for one thing; but if we want more than to be intoxicated by his works, we have at some point to raise the question of truth. Even when thinking becomes audacious and highfaluting, when it aims to get "off the beaten track", as long as it is purports to be *philosophical* thinking, it is never *just* a matter of "having the guts" to fire off a volley of fanciful and captivating ideas.

The more you read Nietzsche the clearer it becomes that he wanted to be read in the way he read others: with a vigilant intellect and a refusal to just slavishly consent to everything, retaining a mental resistance – indeed, a stubbornness – even against the supposed philosophical All-time Greats (Plato, Kant, etc.). Ferraris is the type of reader that Nietzsche would have wished for himself, although presumably he would have hoped for more agreement.

Once again: is it naive, or wrong, to take Nietzsche at his word? Perhaps. But it is surely a sign of respect that any philosopher owes to another. Maybe we would do better not to take Nietzsche's philosophical announcements at face value (and perhaps his philosophy would even turn out to be "better" if we didn't); and perhaps people still brighter than Nietzsche could tell us how to understand his thinking "better" than it is revealed by his own words. After all, this is the good time-honoured German hermeneutic tradition: aiming at nothing less than understanding an author better than he understands himself. Ferraris is not trying to do this, and some readers

(including myself) – who don't think they know the meaning of Nietzsche's words better than the man who chose them – will be grateful.

Ferraris does not write for "Nietzsche experts", but for people who don't stop thinking for themselves while they are reading. This isn't an introduction, or a textbook or a biography (actually I'm not at all sure what it is). In the German translation the subtitle has been added "A human and intellectual adventure". The Italian edition explicitly relates the adventure to the "catastrophes of the twentieth century". The German translation lacks this hint, and therefore "the adventure" might also apply to the book itself.

Indeed, it is somewhat adventurous, in particular with regard to the selection of the historical events Ferraris chooses to indicate the path of his intellectual journey. The stops are short, there is no fussiness or verbosity. And although I sometimes felt that I'd missed the point of this or that episode, there never were two in a row which I would have wanted left out. The book is divertingly entertaining and Ferraris retains a lightness of touch, even when writing about very sad – even tragic – things. Yet, his tone is never inappropriate – no small achievement.

Despite the lightness of style and the clarity of expression, Ferraris's work is no easy read. The author is very learned and is happy to show it off. I had to look up a few things, which also turned out to be enjoyable. For example on page 159 I discovered Ermanarich, about whom the 17 year-old Nietzsche wanted to compose a symphony. The Google search helped, I think, to get

an idea of what young Nietzsche might have found fascinating. On the same page there is a reference to Jim Morrison's "lysergic resurrection"; thanks to a related research I now know what the L stands for in LSD. This fills me with pride and I now plan on using the word with the same nonchalance as Ferraris. Perhaps in surprising combinations such as: «what you wrote sounds like lysergic twaddle». Yet even after my research I'm not completely certain what would happen if Jim Morrison were to be resurrected lysergically. But I do hope with all my heart that after his resurrection, lysergic or otherwise, he wouldn't record anything new, not even a symphony about Ermanarich. Discos in the late 1970s would have been infinitely better had they not usually ended with *Riders on the Storm*. Those with a soft spot for Nietzsche would rather wander off into the night with Iggy Pop's *The Passenger* in their ears. But this came later. Perhaps Ferraris doesn't know Iggy, but it's hard to imagine his admitting to such a cultural lacuna. Anyway, what on earth do people see in Jim Morrison? Unless of course they are of an age to read Camus stoned by candlelight (which would be to do him an injustice). Ferraris is after all Italian. And Italians are notoriously musical, but maybe too much so to distinguish rock authenticity from fake. Hooking up Nietzsche with Morrison strikes me as the worst associative<sup>^</sup> of the book. Other than that, I have no major criticisms to make.

I want to turn to something else that makes the book a grand one. Ferraris gives us a hint of the many facets and nuances of the spiritual attitude he

labels "nihilism". He doesn't simply refer to some aspects of Nietzsche's thought or philosophically inspired work (e.g. in poetry and music). Many of the events Ferraris mentions, and the thoughts he develops in relation to them, rather shed light on how nihilism can affect one's feeling, thinking, and writing, which are then transformed into desire and action. These are the "spectres" Ferraris writes about, and they have not disappeared with the "catastrophes of the twentieth century". Nietzsche didn't bring them into the world: he was rather their victim – he was himself subjected to them. He didn't willingly promote them. Not willingly at any rate. These are spectres in the most fearful sense of the word, not those funfair *Gespenster* designed to give children the creeps. Thank goodness Ferraris doesn't try to reduce them to a couple of abstract philosophical concepts or try to act as a philosophical Ghostbuster. He does not come up with a simplistic diagnosis like the following: «First and pre-eminently, we had Darwinism, and that was a hard blow to the self-image of Western Man; we also had Idealism, a philosophy worshipped by every would-be educated German (a philosophy according to which a proudly autonomous 'Subject' constitutes himself or herself as a creator of his or her world); then came along the industrial revolution with all its attendant miseries; then we had...; and after all of this, came the concentration camps». Ferraris is too intelligent to do something like this, and he shows his readers some respect by shunning such a diagnosis.



In this book, Ferraris reveals the horror, “the spectres”, bit by bit, somewhat like a pointillist painter, arranging tiny, dot-like depictions of historical events. As he appropriately remarks in an Afterword, he has written a history book, not just a book on Nietzsche.

I would have been extremely happy to have had Ferraris’s book fifty years ago when I started reading Nietzsche (forgetting for the moment the abominable *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which I still can’t bring myself to read). After my initial enthusiasm, I completely stopped reading Nietzsche (“it’s not philosophy”). At the time I considered him a most gifted writer of lithe and elegant aphorisms with trenchant *esprit*, somewhat in the same vein as Karl Kraus, another “that’s-not-philosophy” author I liked very much at the time. Nietzsche could never unsettle me then because I simply didn’t take him seriously as a thinker. Those of his thoughts which I deeply disagreed with, I dismissed as the exaggerated patter of someone who makes a living by producing material to be included in the treasury of quotations of the would-be intelligentsia. So for me then, not having had the benefit of a work like Ferraris’, Nietzsche was never a philosopher. I regarded him highly as an exceptionally gifted wordsmith whose condescending *Kulturkritik* appealed to me, except when he from time to time ventured into philosophy – and then often seemed to lose control. Blasé as I was (a young philosopher), I nevertheless read him occasionally – mostly on vacation, as a kind of hammock-lit-

erature. I couldn’t even read Kafka’s *Zurau Aphorisms* like that. For those I have to sit down and focus. As regards “genuine” philosophy, all the more I need to sit at a desk with an eraser ready to hand to remove previously made annotations. In re-reading Nietzsche I never needed an eraser, having only previously underlined particularly beautiful passages. And I just kept finding new ones, never having to mb anything out.

Ferraris instead reads Nietzsche like a philosopher reading another philosopher, and what is more, he takes him seriously as a philosopher (not merely as a ‘man of letters’). And he writes in a way that makes some of Nietzsche’s thinking understandable, at the same time providing the reader much food for his own thought. “Whatever the reader can do, leave to the reader,” Wittgenstein once said. Ferraris leaves a lot to the reader. And in leaving it to the reader he helps him to take even more pleasure in reading and re-reading Nietzsche – and then to read him once more: with an alert eye, taking him at his word and taking him as seriously as he meant it. And then start to do some independent thinking and try to relate Nietzsche’s ideas to the world as it is. Or rather: relate them to what we irrefutably know about certain events that took place in our world.

In a word, this is a unique, peculiar, splendid, personal book – a marvellous book indeed. For all those who ‘somehow’ love Nietzsche, but do not want to become mentally derailed when reading him.

[Andreas Kemmerling]