



New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism

Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal

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The Nazis' use and misuse of Nietzsche is well known. The Superman, the "will to power," Nietzsche's equation of bourgeois democracy and decadence, and his denigration of reason were staples of Nazi propaganda. Communists also used and misused Nietzsche, but that fact is largely unknown because Soviet propagandists invoked reason and labeled Nietzsche the "philosopher of fascism," even while covertly appropriating his ideas. In this pioneering book, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal excavates the trail of long-obscured Nietzschean ideas that took root in late Imperial Russia, intertwining with other elements in the culture to become a vital ingredient of Bolshevism and Stalinism.

Nietzsche made a difference. He furnished intellectual ammunition for a prolonged conflict about culture, society, and politics that began around the turn of the century. His first Russian admirers were poets, philosophers, and political activists. They responded to the changes transforming their society by espousing new values and seeking a new faith by which to live and work. This response resulted in new aesthetic and political amalgams, such as Symbolism, Futurism, Nietzschean Christianity, and Nietzschean Marxism. The ensuing debates between and among their partisans reverberated throughout the wider culture and therefore also into Bolshevism, becoming the subject of an uninterrupted polemic between Bolsheviks and non-Bolsheviks, and among Bolsheviks, that continued into the 1930s.

In Stalin's time, unacknowledged Nietzschean ideas were used to mobilize the masses for the great tasks of the first Five-Year Plan and the Cultural Revolution, which was intended to eradicate "bourgeois" values and attitudes from Soviet life and to construct a distinctly Socialist culture. Nietzsche's belief that people need illusions to shield them from reality underlay Socialist Realism, the official Soviet aesthetic from 1934 on. In the aftermath of de-Stalinization, the government cast Nietzsche as the personification of "bourgeois" nihilism and "bourgeois" individualism. Soviet intellectuals wishing to reappropriate their lost cultural heritage discovered the Nietzsche-influenced intellectuals of late Imperial Russia and reopened discussion on the issues they had posed.

More than an exercise in historical rediscovery, *New Myth, New World* offers a new interpretation of modern Russian history. By uncovering the buried influence of Nietzschean ideas on Soviet culture and politics, Rosenthal opens new avenues for understanding Soviet ideology and its influence on the twentieth century.

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