NIETZSCHE’S LAST LAUGH

Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* was published posthumously in 1908, eight years after his death, and has been variously described ever since as useless, mad, or merely inscrutable. Against this backdrop, Nicholas D. More provides the first complete and compelling analysis of the work, and argues that this so-called autobiography is instead a satire. This form enables Nietzsche to belittle bad philosophy by comic means, attempt reconciliation with his painful past, review and unify his disparate works, insulate himself with humor from the danger of “looking into abysses,” and establish wisdom as a special kind of “good taste.” After showing how to read this much-maligned book, More argues that *Ecce Homo* presents the best example of Nietzsche making sense of his own intellectual life, and that its unique and complex parody of traditional philosophy makes a powerful case for reading Nietzsche as a philosophical satirist across his corpus.

NICHOLAS D. MORE is Professor of Philosophy at Westminster College.
NIETZSCHE’S LAST LAUGH

Ecce Homo as Satire

NICHOLAS D. MORE
for Tico
We must rest from ourselves occasionally by contemplating and looking down upon ourselves, and by laughing or weeping over ourselves from an artistic remoteness.

Nietzsche (GS 107)

There’s nothing we philosophers like better than to be mistaken for artists.

Nietzsche to Georg Brandes, 4 May 1888 (KGB 3.5.1030)

That the deepest spirit must also be the most frivolous, this is almost the formula for my philosophy: it could be that I, above all other 'greats,' have indeed become cheerful in an unlikely manner.

Nietzsche to Ferdinand Avenarius, 10 December 1888 (KGB 3.5.1183)
Contents

Acknowledgements ix
Abbreviations, citations, sources x

Prologue 1

Introduction 2
Ecce Homo’s reception 3
Ways of reading Nietzsche 5
Secondary literature on Ecce Homo 8
Principles and structure of the present study 18

PART I WHAT IS ECCE HOMO? 21
1 Nietzsche deigns to read himself 23
2 A question of genre 27

PART II WHAT IS THE MEANING OF ECCE HOMO? 37
3 Ecce Homo as satire: analysis and commentary 39
   The title: Ecce Homo 39
   The subtitle: How One Becomes What One Is 44
   The Foreword 48
   “On this perfect day . . .” 57
   Why I Am So Wise 59
   Why I Am So Clever 87
   Why I Write Such Excellent Books 101
   The Birth of Tragedy 114
   The Untimely Ones 125
   Human, All Too Human 128
   Daybreak 147
   The Gay Science 165
viii  

Contents

Thus Spoke Zarathustra 168
Beyond Good and Evil 178
On the Genealogy of Morals 179
Twilight of the Idols 184
The Case of Wagner 188
Why I Am a Destiny 196

PART III  WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ECCE HOMO? 205

Conclusion 207

Bibliography 212
Index 222
Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Kathy Higgins, Bob Solomon, Louis Mackey, and to Louis’s student, Mark Jordan. Their guidance and kind words over a span of many years made this work possible in ways I am sure they do not realize. Thanks also to Mark Murray, Betty Kane, Jim Staley, Joe Sullivan, Kent Emery, Katherine Tillman, Stephen Rogers, Dan Smith, Bud Luepke, Ellen Bergen Ruggia, Christopher Middleton, Nina Sidhra, Karen Mottola, Damian Love, Kabilan Selvakumar, Michelle Birke Paustenbaugh, Mary Beth Mader, Margret Grebowicz, Thomas Kammel, Kelly Oliver, Richard Badenhausen, Mary Jane Chase, Michael Popich, Laura Landon, Friedrich Nietzsche, and my dear siblings and parents. I extend special thanks to Teresa Knight and Craig Waterman for discussing many of this book’s ideas with me and reading various complete drafts. Separate sabbatical leaves from Westminster College supported the principal writing and later revision of the work; I am grateful to this bastion’s support of teaching and scholarship, and to my many students and colleagues who encourage and renew my thinking every fall and spring. Thanks to my current readers – I encourage you to write to me after marking this book. Parts of the present work were first published as an article in Philosophy and Literature, 35/1 (2011), 1–15 (“Nietzsche’s Last Laugh: Ecce Homo as Satire,” copyright © 2011 The Johns Hopkins University Press), reprinted with permission by The Johns Hopkins University. My thanks to Garry Hagberg and Denis Dutton for their kind support. I offer additional thanks to Dee Mortensen and several anonymous readers, both at Cambridge University Press and elsewhere, whose comments and criticisms helped make this a better discussion all around. Thank you as well to Rob Lock at Hart McLeod for the arrestingly arch book cover design. Finally, special thanks to my editor Hilary Gaskin, and to Anna Lowe, Emma Collison, Fleur Jones, Joanna Breeze, and everyone at Cambridge for their timely good cheer and professional excellence; I owe them a great deal for bringing this book to fruition in its present form. And yet – all my gratitude and love to Tico, the best comic thinker I know, or could ever hope to know. I always write with you in mind.

ix
In quoting a passage from Nietzsche, I have abbreviated the fourteen works he intended and prepared for publication according to the English translation of the title, as follows:

AC The Antichrist
BGE Beyond Good and Evil
BT The Birth of Tragedy
CW The Case of Wagner
D Daybreak
DD Dithyrambs of Dionysus
EH Ecce Homo
GM On the Genealogy of Morals
GS The Gay Science
HH Human, All Too Human
NCW Nietzsche Contra Wagner
TI Twilight of the Idols
UM Untimely Meditations
Z Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Chapter and section or aphorism number, not page numbers, follow the book’s abbreviation. For example, “TI 10.2” refers to the tenth chapter in Twilight of the Idols (“What I Owe the Ancients”), to the second section or numbered part in that chapter. (Nietzsche’s book prefaces or epilogues are identified as such.)

Editions of Nietzsche’s collected works in German are abbreviated as follows, with numbers referring to volume and letter, section, or aphorism number.
Abbreviations, citations, sources


For Nietzsche’s books, I have used the translations of Judith Norman, Walter Kaufmann, Duncan Large, and R. J. Hollingdale (please see the Bibliography), in consultation and comparison with the corrected critical German edition of Nietzsche’s works in Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe – based on KGW and KGB, above. Translations of Nietzsche’s letters and notebook material are my own.

Aside from Nietzsche’s texts (or other texts where custom dictates section citation), numbers in citations refer to page numbers. Full reference information for abbreviated citations appears in the Bibliography.