

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE
ECCE HOMO

A new translation by Duncan Large



ECCE HOMO

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900) was born in Röcken, Saxony, and educated at the universities of Bonn and Leipzig. At the age of only 24 he was appointed Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Basle, but prolonged bouts of ill health forced him to resign from his post in 1879. Over the next decade he shuttled between the Swiss Alps and the Mediterranean coast, devoting himself entirely to thinking and writing. His early books and pamphlets (*The Birth of Tragedy*, *Untimely Meditations*) were heavily influenced by Wagner and Schopenhauer, but from *Human, All Too Human* (1878) on, his thought began to develop more independently, and he published a series of ground-breaking philosophical works (*The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*) which culminated in a frenzy of production in the closing months of 1888. In January 1889 Nietzsche suffered a mental breakdown from which he was never to recover, and he died in Weimar eleven years later. *Ecce Homo* (1888) is a mischievously provocative autobiography, a blasphemous exercise in self-styling in which he reviews his life and work from a 'divine' perspective of absolute affirmation.

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FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Ecce Homo

How To Become What You Are



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by

DUNCAN LARGE

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TO THE MEMORY OF
SARAH KOFMAN

1934-1994

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ABBREVIATIONS

Cross-references within *Ecce Homo* are by chapter and paragraph number, with the chapters referred to in abbreviated form as follows:

- F: Foreword
- I: Why I Am So Wise
- II: Why I Am So Clever
- III: Why I Write Such Good Books
- IV: Why I Am a Destiny

References to Nietzsche's other works are also by paragraph number, except for the correspondence and the unpublished notes not collected in *The Will to Power*, where volume and page references to the German editions are given. The following are the abbreviations used and the editions from which illustrative quotations have been taken:

- AC *The Antichrist* (1888), in *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)
- BAW *Friedrich Nietzsche: Frühe Schriften*, ed. Hans Joachim Mette, Karl Schlechta, and Carl Koch, 2nd edn., 5 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1994)
- BGE *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), trans. Marion Faber (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- BT *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- D *Daybreak* (1881), trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)
- GM *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887), trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)
- GS *The Gay Science* (1882–7), trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974)
- HA *Human, All Too Human* (1878–80), trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)

- KSA *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, 2nd edn., ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Munich: dtv; Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1988)
- KSB *Friedrich Nietzsche: Sämtliche Briefe. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 8 vols. (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter; Munich: dtv, 1986)
- TI *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- UM *Untimely Meditations* (1873–6), trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)
- WC *The Wagner Case* (1888), in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967)
- WP *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968)
- Z *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–5), trans. Graham Parkes (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)

INTRODUCTION

‘And so I tell myself my life’

Nietzsche wrote *Ecce Homo* at the very end of his intellectual career, in the late autumn of 1888, just a few weeks before his catastrophic collapse into insanity at the beginning of January 1889. It was his last original work,¹ and the last of his philosophical works to be published when it eventually appeared in 1908, under the general editorship of his sister. It is customary to describe *Ecce Homo* as ‘Nietzsche’s autobiography’—indeed this was the spurious subtitle used for the first English translation²—and it is a typical autobiography in that it presents the reader with what its author considers to be the most salient features of his life so far, explaining their significance, but it is an atypical autobiography in most other respects. If, as a reader, you come to the book in the expectation of finding anything like a balanced, comprehensive, and objective account of the philosopher’s life, usable for reference purposes, then you will be sorely disappointed. It gives readers a few milestone dates from which to take their bearings, but these are relatively few and unevenly dispersed: there are major chronological gaps in the narrative, and a great deal of basic information which one might legitimately expect to be provided in a biographical account is missing. To take one noteworthy example, Nietzsche never even tells us directly when he was born, and instead leaves it to us to reconstruct the date (15 October 1844) from partial information.

¹ The two texts on which he worked even after *Ecce Homo* had been started, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* and the *Dithyrambs of Dionysus*, were lightly revised compilations of earlier material.

² *Ecce Homo (Nietzsche’s Autobiography)*, trans. Anthony M. Ludovici, in Oscar Levy (ed.), *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, 18 vols. (Edinburgh, London, and New York: Foulis, 1909–11), vol. 17 (1911). In all there have been six previous English versions of the complete text, by Ludovici (reprinted Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), Clifton P. Fadiman (New York: The Modern Library, 1927), Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1979; 2nd edn. 1992), Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora, 2004), and Judith Norman (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

We are able to fill in such gaps, thankfully, because the facts of Nietzsche's life are by now very well established—through his own accounts elsewhere, such as in his correspondence, through first-hand accounts by those who knew him, and through the accounts of later biographers, by whom he has been very well served.³ These allow us to determine that *Ecce Homo* not only lacks the sort of documentary scaffolding one expects from a biographical account, but that it is positively misleading and inaccurate in many places (it is partial in both senses of the word). So we can only conclude that Nietzsche does not consider factual historical details to be at all important aspects of his life, that he is not going to play the autobiographical game in the way we have come to expect, and prefers instead to subvert the genre. In the spring of 1888 he had been asked by an important early admirer, the Danish scholar and critic Georg Brandes, for a basic factual account of his life to underpin the lecture series Brandes was giving on Nietzsche's philosophy at the University of Copenhagen. This request met with a positive response—Nietzsche was delighted at such a rare expression of interest in his philosophy—and the result was a 'curriculum vitae' he sent Brandes in a letter of 10 April 1888.⁴ Even there he embellishes the facts and exaggerates a good deal for rhetorical effect, though—claiming, for example, to have been born 'on the battlefield of Lützen' when in fact he was born close by, in the Saxon village of Röcken. Objectivity was never Nietzsche's strong suit, never even a value he recognized as worth pursuing (witness the critique of scientific objectivity in the Third Essay of *On the*

³ In the first instance, the reader of this volume is of course referred to the outline 'Chronology of Friedrich Nietzsche', below. The standard biography in German, by Curt Paul Janz, runs to almost 2,000 pages in three volumes (*Friedrich Nietzsche: Biographie* (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1978–9)); it is complemented by an exhaustive, 800-page chronology of his life: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Chronik in Bildern und Texten*, ed. Raymond J. Benders and Stephan Oettermann (Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 2000). The best biographical accounts available in English are listed in the 'Select Bibliography', below; Sander Gilman's (rather misleadingly titled) *Conversations with Nietzsche: A Life in the Words of His Contemporaries*, trans. David J. Parent (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) is a useful collection of portraits by Nietzsche's friends and relations.

⁴ KSB 8: 288–90, reproduced in Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large (eds.), *The Nietzsche Reader* (Malden, Mass., and Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 517–19.

Genealogy of Morals), so it is not as though he is just being absent-minded in *Ecce Homo* and would have benefited from being nudged into providing more information by an editor, had the book gone to press in his mentally active lifetime. Instead, the text's whimsicality is a deliberate strategy. If it is not intended as a factual account, though, what is *Ecce Homo*, and what prompted Nietzsche to write it? He does give us a number of positive indications as to what the book is and how he wishes us to read it. Let us consider, first, the circumstances of its composition.

Even for a relatively short book, *Ecce Homo* was completed very quickly: the majority of the text was written over a period of just three weeks, between 15 October and 4 November 1888 (while Nietzsche was also correcting proofs and continuing his various correspondences). Such rapid productivity was in fact quite typical of this *annus mirabilis*, for whereas on average Nietzsche had produced one new book per year since the start of his academic career,⁵ *Ecce Homo* was already the fourth he had produced in 1888, preceded by *The Wagner Case*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Antichrist*. The latter two were indeed still pending when he began *Ecce Homo* on his forty-fourth birthday as a birthday present to himself, a thank-offering to his life for the 'succulent fruits' of the recent months and a celebration of the restoration of his health after an extended bout of illness. Nietzsche's interest in autobiography, and biography in general, was very long-standing. His juvenilia include a number of autobiographical sketches describing his childhood and youth;⁶ he was always very interested in reading others' journals, memoirs, and correspondence (such as those by the abbé Galiani,⁷ the Brothers Goncourt, Charles Baudelaire, and George Sand), and he had included many autobiographical passages in his own mature writings. He had

⁵ A total of sixteen books in sixteen years—not counting the reprints of the mid-1880s, occasional pieces, his musical composition *Hymn to Life*, etc. For an exhaustive listing of all Nietzsche's works, see William H. Schaberg, *The Nietzsche Canon: A Publication History and Bibliography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁶ As an example, see 'My Life' (1863), in Ansell Pearson and Large, *Nietzsche Reader*, 18–20.

⁷ A draft version of the title page of *Ecce Homo* uses a quotation from Galiani's correspondence as an epigraph (KSA 14: 470).

never attempted anything on this scale before, though, which is why he explains at the beginning of the Foreword what has prompted him to turn to writing *Ecce Homo* precisely at this juncture: 'In view of the fact that I will shortly have to confront humanity with the heaviest demand ever made of it, it seems to me essential to say *who I am*' (F 1).

The most important context for the composition of *Ecce Homo*, then, is not the work he had already completed, but rather a work that was yet to come. The opening reference is to the project on which he had been working in the background since the time of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in 1884, amassing a great many preparatory notes towards what he generally referred to as *The Will to Power*, intended as his *magnum opus*. Over the course of 1888 his plans for this work changed markedly—it was retitled and reconceived as *Revaluation of All Values* (*Umwertung aller Werthe*) before being definitively abandoned shortly before Nietzsche's mental collapse.⁸ While he was working on *Ecce Homo*, though, he still had it very much in prospect, and it is important to bear this in mind, since although *Ecce Homo* would turn out to be Nietzsche's final original work, it is quite the opposite of a valediction and has instead the character of an annunciation: like *Beyond Good and Evil* before it, it deserves the subtitle 'Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future'. Nietzsche wrote *Ecce Homo*, and the works of 1888 in general, buoyed by a fond fantasy, in high-spirited anticipation of the momentous impact he was shortly to have on the world by publishing a great summation of his philosophical ideas. As he implies in the dedication, though, he is Janus-faced and also looks back on the past, all too aware of what *little* impact his works have had thus far, how much of a task it has been for him to find public recognition. The point of writing *Ecce Homo* is ostensibly to win himself new readers who will understand him aright, but for the moment his only reliable readership is himself, 'And so I tell myself my life'.

⁸ See Mazzino Montinari, 'Nietzsche's Unpublished Writings from 1885 to 1888; or, Textual Criticism and the Will to Power', in *Reading Nietzsche*, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 80–102.

'How To Become What You Are': Education and Exemplarity

Ecce Homo effectively begins by announcing, modestly (and this will be the book's only modesty), 'There cometh one mightier than I after me': it is given the ancillary role of serving the book which is to come, and conceived as a kind of stock-taking exercise. Its task is not to break new philosophical ground, but—like the works which immediately preceded it, *Twilight of the Idols* and *The Antichrist*—to survey the ground already covered over the course of Nietzsche's career thus far. He frequently claims that in order to understand his works a reader needs to have shared his experiences (III 1), so to aid the reader of the *Revaluation* he aims to narrate the formative experiences which made him what he is (the author of the *Revaluation*). *Ecce Homo* is in this sense a work of self-explanation and self-justification, which is why its four chapters are all headed 'Why I . . .': its main aim is to ensure that the author of the *Revaluation* is not misunderstood (F 1).

The book also has its own agenda, though, and fulfils an educative function which is signalled by its subtitle: 'How To Become What You Are' ('Wie man wird, was man ist'). Like *Twilight of the Idols; or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, the subtitle to *Ecce Homo* conjures up a kind of instruction manual—but this is an instruction manual like no other, since it reflects Nietzsche's paradigm of how instruction ought to be given. His understanding of the educational relationship is a very specific one which stands in marked contrast to the Gradgrindian norms of his day, with their emphasis on rote learning of factual knowledge.⁹ As far as Nietzsche is concerned it is pointless trying to educate by presenting a blueprint for someone else to follow, since human individuality—defined as the particular configuration of each person's drives—dictates that what is optimal for me cannot be optimal for you, in fact is more or less guaranteed not even to be good for you. Just as he poured scorn in *Twilight* (TI VI 1–2) on Luigi Cornaro's best-selling *Discourses on a Life of Temperance* for

⁹ For his critique of this kind of education (especially what passes for German education), see I 7; II 1; II 3; and III 'UM' 1; see also the chapter of *Twilight of the Idols* on 'What the Germans Lack' (TI VIII).

its effrontery in passing off a specific dietary regime as good for everyone's health, so here he himself refrains from presenting his own life as a recipe to be followed slavishly in every detail. As he puts it in the Foreword: 'The last thing *I* would promise would be to "improve" humanity. I do not set up any new idols' (F 2)—including himself as idol. He does occasionally stoop to giving explicit advice, especially in Chapter 2, but his aim here is much more that of describing himself and his tastes in more general terms so as to serve as a model.

Nietzsche's standard view of the educator, indeed, is that he should be a model ('Vorbild') who stands out ahead of his pupils and, to use the memorable line from the end of Goethe's *Faust II* which Nietzsche never tires of parodying, 'draws us onward and upward' ('zieht uns hinan').¹⁰ This conception of education can be traced back to some of his earliest work—the 1872 lectures 'On the Future of our Educational Institutions',¹¹ and especially the 1874 *Untimely Meditation on Schopenhauer as Educator*, which Nietzsche now admits was actually just a self-portrait (III 'UM' 3). In its Nietzschean inflection, education consists in showing rather than telling; it involves inducing, *educing* the pupil into a self-overcoming, standing above so that those below can learn how to reach one's heights, learn that there are such heights to reach.¹² The greatest instantiation of this doctrine in Nietzsche's philosophy, Nietzsche's greatest teacher figure, is of course his fictional creation Zarathustra,¹³ and he closes the Foreword to *Ecce Homo* by quoting extensively from the end of the First Part of his earlier

¹⁰ The analogy is ironic to the extent that the Goethe quotation applies to 'the eternal feminine', while Nietzsche's educators are exclusively masculine.

¹¹ These have recently become available in a new English translation by Michael W. Grenke (South Bend, Ind.: St Augustine's Press, 2004).

¹² On Nietzsche and education, see: David E. Cooper, *Authenticity and Learning: Nietzsche's Educational Philosophy* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983); Jacques Derrida, 'Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name', trans. Avital Ronell, in Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie McDonald (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 1–38; and Michael Peters, James Marshall, and Paul Smeyers (eds.), *Nietzsche's Legacy for Education: Past and Present Values* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 2001).

¹³ See Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

work (using Zarathustra as his proxy, as so often in this text), where Zarathustra takes his leave of his disciples and exhorts them not to blindly follow him (as disciples, ‘believers’), but to go their own way: ‘Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves’ (F 4).

For *Ecce Homo* to be an educational book, then, it needs to pull off the awkward feat of presenting Nietzsche as an aid to *self-help*, *self-education* in others, the goal being to help others achieve (‘become’) a self in the first place. Rather than urging its readers to ‘be themselves’—the mantra of self-help gurus since time immemorial—*Ecce Homo* instead promotes the process of self-becoming as an ethical ideal. What does it mean to become oneself? That is what Nietzsche seeks to demonstrate here, by presenting himself as an inspirational example of successfully achieved selfhood. Although the book is not subtitled ‘How I Became What I Am’, this is effectively what it explains, and in accordance with Nietzsche’s particularizing educational theory (which is antithetical to any kind of universal) this is all it can explain. By these means he will demonstrate what it means to become *a* self, at all. For a self (on this understanding) is not something you just are—you have to achieve it, and keep achieving it over and over again. The ethic of self-becoming in Nietzsche is intimately connected to the strenuous ethic of self-overcoming, that is, overcoming the parts of yourself that are not, ultimately, of yourself or do not, as Nietzsche puts it, belong to your task, your destiny. You must not turn your back on such extraneous, alien elements, though—you must have no regrets, must not disown any part of yourself (‘I would not want to abandon an action *after the event*’: II 1); rather, you must aim for absolutely inclusive self-ownership. The dynamic of self-overcoming ultimately involves a kind of incorporation, then: you incorporate what was alien into your task by affirming it and deeming it retrospectively to have been a necessary stage in your personal development (‘redeeming’ it—the only kind of redemption Zarathustra considers worthy of the name (III ‘Z’ 8)). This is what constitutes Nietzsche’s key concept of *amor fati*, or ‘love of fate’, his ‘formula for human greatness’: ‘not wanting anything to be different, not forwards, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just

enduring what is necessary, still less concealing it [. . .] but *loving* it' (II 10).¹⁴

As an example of what it means in practice to view one's past in this way we can take Nietzsche's attitude towards his academic career, for although he recognizes it now as a 'mistake', an 'instinctual aberration [. . .] deviating from the *task* of my life' (II 2), nevertheless he can also concede that his time in academia was a *necessary* detour: 'I *had* to be a scholar, too, for a while' (III 'UM' 3). Similarly, although he makes it abundantly clear in *The Wagner Case*, earlier in the year, how much he now despises Wagner, in *Ecce Homo* he can still call Wagner 'the greatest benefactor of my life' (II 6), because in looking back over their relationship he can acknowledge the extent to which Wagner helped him to come to a realization of his own potential. As Zarathustra puts it, the redemption of the past that is *amor fati* means 'to re-create all "It was" into a "Thus I willed it!"' (III 'Z' 8): it requires an artist and involves the creative recrafting of the past to suit the narrative of today, but this retrospective reinterpretation, the retroactive assertion of the will inevitably also involves bending the historical truth to some extent. In the case of Nietzsche's relationship to Wagner, he plays up for effect the 'miraculously meaningful coincidence' which led to Wagner's copy of *Human, All Too Human* crossing in the post with the libretto of *Parsifal* (III 'HA' 5), or the similarly remarkable coincidence that he should have completed Part One of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in February 1883 'at precisely the sacred hour when Richard Wagner died in Venice' (III 'Z' 1). More straightforward biographical accounts reveal that in both these cases Nietzsche's version is at variance with the historical truth, and the same can be said for many of the other claims he puts forward here—that he has no personal experience of religious difficulties, for example (II 1), that he never felt better than when writing *Daybreak* (III 'D' 1), or that he has not had a book in his hand for the last six months (II 3), and so on. *Ecce Homo*

¹⁴ The evidently paradoxical task of 'becoming what you (already) are' lends itself to interpretation in existentialist terms: the 'natural state' of man is 'bad faith'; the purpose of your life should be to engineer the coincidence of your existence with your essence (fate) by leading your life as a voyage of self-discovery, towards authentic self-realization.

virtues and achievements, and this is doubtless the first aspect of the book to strike the reader who just sees the chapter titles on the contents page. The most conspicuous characteristic of the text is its boastfulness, its immense immodesty, its euphoric, self-adulatory tone, and we are simply not used to such heights of self-affirmation from an author, such a display of monumental egoism.¹⁷ Nietzsche makes plain his love of hyperbole in a note from the autumn of 1887: ‘The spell that fights on our behalf, the eye of Venus that charms and blinds even our opponents, is the *magic of the extreme*, the seduction that everything extreme exercises: we immoralists—we are *the most extreme . . .*’ (WP 749/KSA 12: 510). In *Ecce Homo* he certainly shows himself to have been seduced, but this creates a real problem for his readers, who may find it rather easier to resist the lure of Venus’ divine charms. *Ecce Homo* undoubtedly polarizes the reactions of its readers, for there are various possible responses to this onslaught of hyperbolic claims. If we are not willing to grant Nietzsche the benefit of the doubt and concede that he does write good books, that he is clever, and so on, then we will doubtless find this book off-putting and object to its grating tone. In any case we will inevitably want to know whether Nietzsche is being serious about all this, or whether he is not, rather, playing a game with us. Is this perhaps not so much an exemplary autobiography as a spoof, a parody? Might there not, after all, be an ironic, self-deprecating sense of humour at work (or play) here, as there is when, a decade later, that most Nietzschean of composers Richard Strauss, tongue firmly in cheek, casts himself as the subject of the tone poem ‘A Hero’s Life’ (*Ein Heldenleben*)? At various points in the course of the text Nietzsche does, after all, invite us not to take him seriously: ‘I know of no other way of dealing with great tasks than by *playing*’ (II 10), he remarks, or again: ‘I don’t want to be a saint, and would rather be a buffoon . . . Perhaps I am a buffoon’ (IV 1). In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche mused whether Wagner’s *Parsifal* might not have been intended as the satyr play to round off the composer’s tragic

¹⁷ Notwithstanding the forty-six instances of the word ‘perhaps’ (*vielleicht*) in the text, which Nietzsche frequently uses to qualify his statements.

abounds in such gross exaggerations and barefaced lies—what we would nowadays call ‘spin-doctoring’—which bring home to the reader the fact that what is being described here is what psychoanalysis would later call a projection, an ‘ego ideal’. ‘Some day I wish to be only a Yes-sayer’, Nietzsche remarked in *The Gay Science* when he first introduced the term ‘*amor fati*’ as his personal goal (GS 276), and *Ecce Homo* is the (fantasmatic) realization of that goal, intended as a testament to Nietzsche’s ability to affirm everything about himself in this way, by hook or by crook.

‘The Magic of the Extreme’

Nietzsche presents the text, then, as an object lesson, and argues that he himself is in all ways best qualified to write this exemplary autobiography, for not only is he the exemplary self-achiever (self-becomer), but he has become an exemplary self which is capable of being absolutely affirmed. In order to appreciate what he has become, moreover, Nietzsche points out that he has had to become the most insightful psychologist there has ever been (III 5)—and Sigmund Freud, for one, lent the claim credence, agreeing that Nietzsche had achieved a ‘degree of introspection [that] had never been achieved by anyone’¹⁵—while the exorbitant claims he makes for his art of style as a writer in Chapter 3 (III 4) ensure that in this respect, too, he has achieved exemplary status. All in all, Nietzsche presents himself here as an exemplary human being (and one of the senses of the phrase ‘*ecce homo*’, indeed, is simply ‘behold man’); more than that, he presents himself as ‘the type that has turned out best’, which he defines with the word ‘overman’ (III 1).¹⁶

In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche makes a series of extraordinarily hyperbolic claims for the self that he has apparently become, its

¹⁵ Freud’s words to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in October 1908 after a reading of *Ecce Homo*. See Herman Nunberg and Ernst Federn (eds.), *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society*, trans. Margarete Nunberg, 4 vols. (New York: International Universities Press, 1962–75), 2: 31–2.

¹⁶ I have used this translation for *Übermensch* throughout, although ‘Superman’ and ‘Overhuman’ are also possible.

career (GM III 3), and the same could be said of *Ecce Homo*. After all, Nietzsche also concedes: 'I would prefer to be a satyr rather than a saint' (F 2).

Given the momentousness of the task that he claims to lie ahead of him, though, we must assume that *Ecce Homo*, too, is intended seriously—in the Nietzschean fashion, at least, with its (relentless) cheerfulness and good humour. Another way of contextualizing the book's outrageous claims is to assimilate it into the tradition of self-justifying, self-aggrandizing autobiographies by other nineteenth-century figures who understood themselves, in Romantic fashion, to be geniuses,¹⁸ whether Stendhal's *The Life of Henry Brulard* (1835), Berlioz's *Memoirs* (1870), or most pertinently of all Wagner's *My Life* (1880), which Nietzsche knew intimately since he had supervised its proofing and printing in 1869/70.¹⁹ In this context, in this company, it is a moot point whether Nietzsche's self-advertising text is actually all that outlandish after all—at any rate it is clear that it is not *sui generis*, he is not redefining the genre, but rather just taking the generic immodesty of the autobiography to its extreme (the difference is a question of degree rather than of kind).

A further point to bear in mind in seeking to understand Nietzsche's hyperbolic approach is what one might call the ontological status of the self for whom such extraordinary capacities and achievements are being claimed. Before we become outraged at the book and provoked beyond measure by its impostures, we need to bring to bear a literary-critical awareness of the work as a crafted fiction, as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, indeed, with its leading protagonist, 'Nietzsche', as effectively a literary construct, a fictional character, like the thinly veiled self-representation that is Stendhal's 'Henry Brulard'. As we have seen, *Ecce Homo* is not so much self-serving as self-creating, and the Nietzsche who emerges from this work (the ego ideal) bears as much relation to the historical figure as does, for example, Zarathustra to the historical Zoroaster.

¹⁸ Cf. IV 1: 'Revaluation of all values: that is my formula for the highest act of self-reflection on the part of humanity, which has become flesh and genius in me.'

¹⁹ See Schaberg, *Nietzsche Canon*, 15.

As he himself says at the beginning of Chapter 3, 'I am one thing, my writings are another' (III 1), and this apotropaic statement needs to be taken self-reflexively to refer to the 'I' who is the product of this writing, too. Alexander Nehamas points out: 'Nietzsche himself . . . is a creature of his own texts'; he makes an 'effort to create an artwork out of himself, a literary character who is a philosopher',²⁰ and nowhere is this effort more in evidence than in *Ecce Homo*, although in this respect, once again, the book merely brings to a culmination what is a feature of Nietzsche's other, earlier works, too, where 'giving style to one's character' (GS 290), or 'fashioning oneself into a whole', as in the presentation of Goethe in *Twilight* (TI IX 49), is presented as the highest desideratum, the 'one thing needful'.

A final explanation for the hyperbolic excesses of the book has been to accuse its author of having already passed beyond the edge of reason and to see it as a document of insanity—a testament not so much to the heights of self-knowledge as to the depths of self-delusion. With hindsight, for example, one can readily interpret the overly affirmative tone of the book as indicative of the state of euphoria which often precedes the onset of tertiary syphilis, but it would be going too far to dismiss the book on that account. Undeniably some of Nietzsche's late interpolations—for example, the controversial paragraph which he substituted as the third section in Chapter 1, and which talks in apparently megalomaniacal fashion of his 'divinity'²¹—show signs of incipient insanity, but such passages do not necessarily disqualify the work as philosophy. When Nietzsche's 'dynamite' does explode at the beginning of January 1889, he identifies himself with 'every name in history' (KSB 8: 578) and begins signing his letters with multiple signatures; in *Ecce Homo*, though, a centripetal force is still at work as Nietzsche 'harvests' all the multiple identities he has been obliged to adopt so far (Schopenhauer and Wagner, Zarathustra, Paul Rée, etc.), fashioning them into a single (albeit fictionalized)

²⁰ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1985), 8.

²¹ For full details, see Mazzino Montinari, 'A New Section in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*', in *Reading Nietzsche*, 103–40.

self which is 'schizophrenic' only to the extent that it has to split itself in order to narrate (itself to itself) at all.²²

Ecce Homo as Philosophy: Major Themes

Just as *Ecce Homo* takes an existing literary genre (the Romantic autobiography of the genius-hero) and pushes it to the limit, so too it merely takes to rhetorical extremes the assertion of Nietzsche's earlier philosophical positions. As we have seen, he promises no radical departures in the text—this is not the work with which he plans to rock the world to its foundations—and as a result it is, philosophically speaking, relatively low-key. The philosophical arguments put forward here are perfectly coherent in their own right and can coexist with his earlier works. The major late themes—*amor fati*, eternal recurrence, the overman, will to power—are all in evidence here to some extent, but they are not made the focus of the argument. Similarly, what new themes are introduced—'Russian fatalism' (I 6) or the 'rancune of the great' (III 'Z' 5)—are limited in their scope.

Nevertheless, in addition to its being an exemplary autobiography, Nietzsche aims for *Ecce Homo* to be an exemplary work of philosophy, and the co-occurrence of the two is no coincidence, for he is presenting (this kind of) autobiography *as* exemplary philosophy. Philosophy to Nietzsche means living a certain kind of life: the two are inextricably intertwined, so that life writing also makes for the best philosophy. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he

²² On the motif of the harvest, see not only the dedication (the paragraph intercalated between the Foreword and the main text) but also Nietzsche's letter of 18 October to his friend Overbeck: 'I am now the most grateful man in the world—autumnally minded in every good sense of the word; it is my great *harvest time*' (*Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1969; repr. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 315). On the fissures in Nietzsche's autobiographical subject, see: Sarah Kofman, 'Explosion I: Of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*', trans. Duncan Large, *Diacritics*, 24/4 (1994), 51–70, repr. in Daniel W. Conway with Peter S. Groff (eds.), *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 1: 218–41; and Daniel W. Conway, 'Nietzsche's *Doppelgänger*: Affirmation and Resentment in *Ecce Homo*', in Keith Ansell-Pearson and Howard Caygill (eds.), *The Fate of the New Nietzsche* (Aldershot and Brookfield, Vt.: Avebury, 1993), 55–78.

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