ZARATHUSTRA'S LAST SUPPER

Nietzsche's Eight Higher Men

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Abbreviations

All references to Nietzsche’s texts refer to section numbers unless page numbers are specified. I have relied on Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale’s English translations. See bibliography for full reference information.

AC  The Antichrist(ian)
AO  Assorted Opinions and Maxims (Human, All Too Human, vol. II, part 1).
BGE Beyond Good and Evil
BT  The Birth of Tragedy
CW  The Case of Wagner
D  Daybreak
EH  Ecce Homo
GM  On the Genealogy of Morals
GS  The Gay Science
HU  Human, All Too Human
TW  Twilight of the Idols
UM  Untimely Meditations
WP  The Will to Power
WS  The Wanderer and his Shadow (Human, All Too Human, vol. II, part 2).
Z  Thus Spoke Zarathustra
For the memory of P.R.

Go in peace.

Conscious of the past, committed to live in the present, for the sake of the future.

—JDR
Introduction

Perhaps the whole of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* culminates in the assimilation of the book’s fourth part, written in 1885. Here, Zarathustra invites to his cave eight individual characters—or the “higher men”—who will share with him a celebratory Last Supper. The dignified guest list consists of the soothsayer, the two kings, the bleeding man (or, the conscientious man), the old magician, the last pope, the ugliest man, the voluntary beggar, the shadow, and of course, an ass who simply resides as a potential idol of worship. Although Zarathustra ultimately concludes that these characters are not higher men and that he awaits those children worthier than they, he does afford them a prominent place for they are the chosen ones who join him in his hitherto solitary cave for elegant celebration, dining, water, wine, and dancing. The opening lines of *Zarathustra* tell the tale of a solitary wanderer who left his home for the mountains and who lived in a cave for ten years with only an eagle and a serpent. Therefore, the invitation of human guests to his abode—long after Zarathustra had gone down to “men”, only to be rejected—is the crowning bestowal of honor to those invited to join Zarathustra at the conclusion of his journey.

This book will explore these eight guests as they appear in *Zarathustra before* the culminating Last Supper, tracing their lives and fates to the festival itself. Through an analysis of these dignitaries, I will highlight the idiosyncrasies of the Last Supper, sketching the personalities of guests who attend at night and how they appear after encountering the prophet Zarathustra during the morning. When appropriate, an attempt to discern who these guests are—or represent—historically will be offered through glimpsing the characteristics specific to each representative guest (as portrayed by Nietzsche), careful textual analysis, comparison with Nietzsche’s other works, historical evidence, and previous scholarly research. Because *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, subtitled, “A Book for All and None,” is full of spirit, parables, imagery, myth, and symbolism, my exposition will try to retain much of Nietzsche’s humorous and dramatic imagery in its narrative form. If succeeding in nothing else, I at least hope to preserve much of Nietzsche’s integrity and imagination that is all too easily lost in analytical, scholarly, interpretive efforts.

Currently, only a few works on *Zarathustra* exist in the English-speaking world. The following titles immediately come to the forefront:


My manuscript radically differs from all the works above. Succinctly put, Lampert’s scholastic focus is on parts I–III of *Zarathustra*, and he only provides a brief, undetailed appendix to part IV (which is my prime focus). Jung’s approach is purely psychological and somewhat disjointed; the book is based on Jung’s seminars and notes of 1937. Further, as Nietzsche scholars interested in psychology have noted, Jung had a very shallow understanding of Nietzsche. 3 Higgins’ work, like mine, does address part IV of *Zarathustra* in detail; however, her focus is not on the higher men, but on the similarities between Apuleius’ story of the *Golden Ass* with *Zarathustra* IV. Rosen’s work addresses the whole of *Zarathustra* section by section; yet, the limited portion on part IV is only partially concerned with the higher men. Hollinrake bases his study on imagistic similarities between Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and Wagner’s work and operas. He too, does not concern himself with the guests as distinct individuals. Finally, Francesca Cauchi’s study focuses on *Zarathustra* IV, but not specifically on the higher men. Her general conclusion, unlike mine, is that the main significance of each higher man is that as a “group” they all demonstrate the impossible ideal of self-overcoming.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is the powerful impression individual characters make throughout the work. For instance, at the outset of the book, Zarathustra encounters an old saint in the forest to whom he first announces that God is dead; 4 a jester who trips up the infamous tightrope walker in the marketplace, the latter of whom becomes the corpse Zarathustra hoists on his back and buries. 5 Zarathustra also encounters a hermit at an old house (who offers Zarathustra and the corpse bread and wine), 6 a hunchback, 7 a dwarf (traditionally associated with the eternal return), 8 a “foaming fool” at the city gate (who represents the antisemite, Eugen Dühring), 9 a pale criminal (representing Nietzsche’s disdain for punishment and judgment), 10 and a young shepherd (who bites off the snake’s head hanging from his throat), 11 among others. Yet, only eight figures, several of whom are mentioned above, constitute Nietzsche’s guest list to the festival at the conclusion of his book. 12 And the elitist guest list appears to indicate that the invitees, though imperfect, constitute a typology of the higher men Nietzsche envisaged. Uninvited figures are perhaps not personal allies, friends, former loved ones, world historical figures, or those who have potential to be anything other than that which they already are.
The Last Supper and festival occur in the fourth part of *Zarathustra* which was written in 1885 and was published separately from the first three parts. Even so, the characters presented in *Zarathustra* IV often refer to names, places, and incidents recorded in previous sections; in several instances, the characters return for the festival. Nietzsche, an obscure author, only printed a handful of copies of the fourth part and distributed them to personal friends privately and secretly, informing them “not even to whisper of its existence.” At one point, he even wanted the copies of part IV returned to him. In a letter to Peter Gast on December 9, 1888, he wrote:

> Now a serious matter. Dear friend, I want to recover all copies of the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, in order to secure this unpublished work against all the chances of life and death... If I publish it later, after a few decades of world crises—wars!—then that will be the proper time. Please try as hard as you can to remember who has copies. I can think of: Lanzky, Widemann, Fuchs, Brandes, probably Overbeck. Do you have Widemann’s address? How many copies were printed? How many have we still got? There may be a couple in Naumburg.\(^{13}\)

Even so, Nietzsche does casually refer to *Zarathustra* IV in *Ecce Homo*.\(^{14}\)

Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, after her brother’s breakdown in 1889, also sought to suppress *Zarathustra* IV. It was finally printed publicly in 1892 due to the efforts of Nietzsche’s friends.\(^{15}\) Elisabeth also succeeded in suppressing the publication of *Ecce Homo* for eight years.

The fourth part is of special interest to me not only because I am curious why Elisabeth, a Christian antisemite, wanted the fourth part suppressed, but also because her brother was uneasy circulating it to even his intimate circle. In addition, it is also of interest because I, like many Nietzsche readers, have viewed the fourth part as perhaps the worst of Nietzsche’s writings. I have therefore returned to part IV in an effort to gain more appreciation. And I have.

The fourth part, though extreme and at times stylistically unbearable, is nonetheless insightful, witty, and often controversial. Because Nietzsche often rambles on between his encounter with guests during the day and the evening’s festival, he often loses much irony—and the reader—in the process. Further, all too often modern commentators lump the higher men together as a single body, devoid of all their individual characteristics. By tracing the lives and fates of individual characters—and closing the gap between their initial encounter with Zarathustra and their appearance at the festival—I hope to regain some of these vital elements. This is by no means to suggest that this work attempts to “improve” upon Nietzsche’s narrative—but I have personally found that providing continuity among the characters to their appearance at the festival illuminates their distinct personalities and their significance for me. It is my hope that this work does the same for readers.
Notes

1 I regard Zarathustra’s encounter with the “two kings” as “one” higher man—as does Nietzsche, who says they beat their breasts as one.
2 Z4.11.
4 Zp.2.
5 Zpp.6–8.
6 Zp.8.
7 Z2.20.
8 Z3.2:2.
9 Z3.7. See especially ch. 5 of my Nietzsche, God, and the Jews (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) for more on Dühring as the foaming fool and particularly pp. 51, 89, 112, 146.
10 Z1.6.
11 The young shepherd (“Who is the shepherd into whose throat the snake crawled thus?,” Z3.2:2), turns out to be Zarathustra (Z3.13:2): “How well you know what had to be fulfilled in seven days, and how that monster crawled down my throat and suffocated me. But I bit off its head and spewed it out.”
12 The dwarf is connected to the “riddle” of the ugliest man’s identity and is likely the ugliest man in different form; the jester also has a connection to the magician (Wagner). The last pope has a connection to the old saint in the forest inasmuch as he reports in part IV that the saint is dead.
References


