

Friedrich Nietzsche's

THUS SPOKE ZARATHUSTRA

A video tape by
Ronald Gerard Smith

The first cinematic dramatization ever made of Nietzsche's work

« I found it fascinating and very impressive. »

Kathleen Higgins
Professor of Philosophy
The University of Texas at Austin

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) is famous for his critiques of Philosophy, rationality, Christianity, the state, historical determinism, and nihilism. He also is a psychologist who believes in self-creation – that the instability of reality and self provides opportunity. His work is central in understanding the roots of contemporary post-modernism. Thus Spoke Zarathustra is his most comprehensive and creative work.

About the video

The Original Players, in conjunction with the Goethe Institute, San Francisco and the College of San Mateo, CA, present this 94 minute video dramatization of Nietzsche's epic work (drawn from parts I – III of the Kaufmann translation). The video tape evolved out of a theater production in San Francisco in 1993.

The process of moving from text to theater production to tape resulted in a piece that finely focuses Nietzsche's story and keeps the integrity of the work, while building upon his project. For example, "life" in the text is turned into "Z²", Nietzsche's alter-ego, providing the voice necessary for Zarathustra's journey to find himself. Also, putting the vignettes of the text on tape creates an aphoristic form – anticipating Nietzsche's later style.

Original music ; expressionist camera work ; a visually flowing set ; strong, vivid acting ; and colorful costumes and masks are a few of the elements that bring Nietzsche to life for contemporary audiences.

The Story Line

Zarathustra, overflowing with enthusiasm after ten years in solitude, decides to come down from his mountain, leave his animals, and share with the world his realization that humans could be much more than they are, sketching out his vision of the Overman. But his words fall upon deaf ears as the crowd anticipates a tightrope walker -- Z^2 , who then falls from the rope. Thus begins Zarathustra's worldly odyssey. After being warned about the danger of his message, he encounters a teacher of virtue, a criminal, and the marketplace, while Z^2 confronts a woman. Toward the end of the first part, Zarathustra rebukes an adder, considers the right way to die, and finally realizes that people are not yet ready for his words. He returns to his cave.

The second part begins at home, with his fears realized : his teachings were finally embraced, but distorted. This makes it necessary for Zarathustra to go back down and set things right. He travels to the blessed isles where he learns how greatly people are suffering in their "lapsed" state. He encounters islanders, a priest, and a giant tarantula, who captures him. He witnesses lovely dancing but also experiences self criticism about his past, which breaks his bonds. Battling both a firehound and nihilistic soothsayer, he is almost overcome by self-doubts, finally falling into a dream that causes him to take up the real challenge : that of confronting himself.

The third part begins with an affirmation that his journey is really only about himself, and that changing others is an illusion. Again, he falls into a dream state, where the « eternal return » is first annunciated (the realization that reality is constructed from past experiences opening one to moments of choice, freedom, self creation). After waking up, Zarathustra accepts the uselessness of speaking where people are not ready for him. He finally returns home, resigned to his solitude and ready to peer into his own private abyss. After becoming overwhelmed for a time, he is finally restored by his animals. In the end, he overcomes any final negativity and embraces the timeless totality of life and nature.

SCENES FROM THE TEXT

(Kaufmann translation)

FIRST PART

Zarathustra's Prologue

- At his cave, before the sun...
- Encountering a " saint " in the forest...
- In town, seeing a tightrope walker...
- " Man is a rope... "
- To the crowd, " There they stand, ...laugh "
- The jester jumping over the tightrope walker
- Zarathustra speaking to the dead...
- A warning...
- Back at the cave, " These are my animals... ".

Zarathustra's Speeches

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 On the Teachers of Virtue | 13 On Chastity |
| 3 On the Afterworldly | 18 On Little Old & Young Women |
| 6 On the Pale Criminal | 14 On the Friend |
| 8 On the Tree on the Mountainside | 19 On the Adder's Bite |
| 11 On the New Idol | 21 On Free Death |
| 12 On the Flies of the Market Place | 22 On the Gift-Giving Virtue. |

SECOND PART

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 The Child with the Mirror | 11 The Tomb Song |
| 2 Upon the Blessed Isles | 15 On Immaculate Perception |
| 3 On the Pitying | 13 On Those Who Are Sublime |
| 5 On the Virtuous | 17 On Poets |
| 4 On the Priest | 18 On Great Events |
| 7 On the Tarantulas | 19 The Soothsayer |
| 9 The Night Song | 20 On Redemption |
| 10 The Dancing Song | 22 The stillest Hour |

THIRD PART

- 1 The Wanderer
- 2 On the Vision and the Riddle
- 5 On Virtue That Makes Small
- 7 On Passing By
- 9 The Return Home
- 13 The Convalescent
- 14 On the Great Longing
- 15 The Other Dancing Song
- 16 The Seven Seals (or : The Yes and Amen Song)

About the dramatist

Ronald Gerard Smith is Asst. Prof. of Philosophy at College of San Mateo, California.

His work demonstrates the intimate relationship between philosophy and art. He received his B. A. from the University of Michigan and M. A. from the University of Southern California.

He has written seven dramas, five produced, and two were turned into PBS TV productions. He also has directed Ibsen's Wild Duck and Sartre's No Exit. This is his first adaptation.

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