

Baubo: Laughter, Eroticism and Science to Come

Baubo, a figure from the Demeter-story in the *Homeric Hymns*, has a prominent role in the second preface to Nietzsche's *Gay Science*.¹ Laughter and jokes are at the heart of the story of Baubo. The joking and the laughter it evokes are obvious and enigmatic at the same time. This laughter echoes for one Nietzsche's own subversive laughing at foundationalist morals and theories of truth, but interpreters of Baubo's 'performance' have underlined this function of her as a symbolic figure in the preface.² This woman illustrates furthermore the gay or joyous science Nietzsche hopes and calls for, a science that is aware of the interpretative character of scientific 'truths', and a science that creates truths that affirm life and elevate culture in some way. Baubo has also been brought into relation with Nietzsche's philosophy of women, and for the most part her figure has rather been seen as representing ideas about the feminine that are positive for women in contrast to more misogynistic aspects of Nietzsche's reflections on women.³ One thing that has not been given adequate attention in interpretations of Baubo is the laughter. It is a laughter that is both subversive and liberating, and such a laughter has been an important topic for feminist readings of literary and philosophical texts.⁴ This is a laughter that opposes ruling powers that repress the feminine and women. The following reading contributes to showing how Nietzsche's philosophy offers material that is and has been of importance for feminist thought. At the same time it also shows Nietzsche's ambivalent relation with the feminine as represented in his notion of Baubo. He takes the womanly seriously in so far as it represents for him attributes that he deems invigorating for culture and creative, philosophical thinking. He does not take women as political subjects with rights as seri-

¹ Nietzsche also incorporates this passage about Baubo in the final part of *Nietzsche contra Wagner*.

² Sarah Kofman, *Baubo: Theological Perversion and Fetishism*, in: K. Oliver, M. Pearsall (Eds.), *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, University Park, 21–49.; Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir, *Vis creativa: Kunst und Wahrheit in der Philosophie Nietzsches*, Würzburg 1996, 171–198; Winfried Menninghaus, *Disgust: The Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, New York 2003, 179–182.

³ Sigridur Thorgeirsdottir, *Nietzsche's Feminization of Metaphysics and its Significance for Theories of Gender Difference*, in: Lilli Alanen, Charlotte Witt (eds.), *Feminist Reflections on the History of Philosophy*, Dordrecht, Boston 2004, 51–68; Frances Nesbitt Opperl, *Nietzsche on Gender: Beyond Man and Woman*, Charlottesville 2005, 54–44, 188ff.

⁴ Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen*, Detroit 1998.