THOMAS MANN'S USE OF MYTH

APPROVED:

[Signatures of Major Professor, Minor Professor, Director of the Department of English, and Dean of the Graduate School]
THOMAS MANN'S USE OF MYTH

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Rea Moody Bell, B. A.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1936 Thomas Mann wrote, "the myth is the foundation of life."¹ This conclusion came after years of search for answers to questions concerning modern man's doubts and desires and reflects a very modern interest in the myth—one shared by artists such as Lawrence, Eliot, and Joyce, as well as psychoanalytical mythologists such as Freud and Jung. That the myth is valid as a compendium of individual and social experiences is now widely accepted. Each culture has its own mythology, and the recurrence of similar myths in different cultures, as evidenced in Frazer's Golden Bough, makes necessary the agreement among many scholars of the concept of a universal culture.

Because of the recent cult of fascism, it appears that possibly in no country has myth played a more blatant part than in the history of Germany, and perhaps no writer has defended the use and importance of myth more than the very German Thomas Mann. Defense of myth was a precarious task indeed for a German in a time of Hitler, Himmler, Goering, and Goebbels, leaders of the Dionysiac cult of fascism, but

the cultural heritage which produced these leaders also made Thomas Mann, and Mann contended until the end that the Germans' fate along the barbarous road of Nazism resulted not so much from the choice of "bad" Germans as of "good" Germans gone wrong.

Mann's fiction reflects both the emotional responses resulting from the war-torn twentieth century and from the intellectual and psychological conflicts which the rise of evolutionary theories of the preceding century had imposed on modern man. Although he had fame, fortune, and a happy home life with his wife and six children, the event of two World Wars, the demolition of the old order of German aristocracy, and the rise of Nazism were unsettling, the latter adding doubly to his feeling of isolation by causing his exile to Switzerland and the United States. The need to find roots, as old traditions, beliefs, and institutions toppled, resulted in the "turning inward" of the writers of the European scene. It was not in Mann's case a "patterning of emotional recurrences"\(^2\) as is found in Proust, but a more German approach—the plumbing of the depths of the individual through the social plane—the myth.

It is not unusual for Mann, who cut his literary teeth on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales and whose forebears took comfort in the nature myths, to turn to myth. Nor is

it unusual that he chose to return to primal roots and begin again, to make a new start and add a new dimension—ethics. Through Mann we now view the results of the nineteenth century Nordic Renaissance with its idolized mythic hero, the blond and blue-eyed Siegfried, glorified in Wagner's musical drama, filtered and projected through Nietzsche's aesthetic intoxication to become the "blond beast" and superman, and made fundamental by Hitler to include the sum total of the Aryans, the "master race."

The morality of knowledge is an old German concept, most typically portrayed in the account of Doctor Faustus, published by Spies in 1587 in Germany, only forty-one years after the death of Martin Luther. The necromancer moved to England as the tragic hero of Marlow's Tragicall History of Doctor Faustus and later returned to the continent with English touring companies. In Germany Faustus became a puppet show and remained popular well into the nineteenth century. Eric Heller has pointed out that the theme was considerably rejuvenated with the atom bomb.3

Mann attributes the predilection of his people for myth, continuing from early into modern times, to a pervasive atmosphere existing in his country. Nowhere are the old and new more nearly combined than in Germany, whose geographical location divides it between the East and the West, the mystic

and the progressive. He describes his native city, Lübeck, as a modern city whose atmosphere held something of the Gothic Middle Ages, a place where a St. Vitus Dance might at any time break out. In describing visions of eccentrics and harmless lunatics on a modern street where "an anciently neurotic substratum was perceptible," Mann suggests a secret union of the German spirit with the demonic, a thesis which he carries throughout his work.

The hero who stands at the dividing line between the old and the new, between the Middle Ages and Humanism, Mann considers to be Faust—Goethe's Faust, who out of presumptuous urge for knowledge, surrenders to magic and the Devil.5 Faust I and Faust II appear to serve as the pattern for the whole of Mann's work.

The subject of Mann's early fiction is a very modern one, dealing almost exclusively with the problems of the artist in bourgeois society. This serves, however, as a point of departure for exploring the dilemma of modern man on many levels, from life and spirit to creativity and the function of art. His work can be divided generally into two parts: the early writings, which examine the different aspects of the dilemma of the artist and the search for a unifying myth,

5Ibid., p. 51.
and the later works, which explore the "lived myth" as a way to life and art.

This study does not encompass all of Mann's fiction, only those works that mark a major step forward in his conception of myth. It includes three short pieces, "Tristan," "Tonio Kröger," and Death in Venice, and three novels, The Magic Mountain, Joseph and His Brothers (a tetralogy), and Doctor Faustus. References will be made to essays and addresses to clarify and enrich the mythic significance of the fiction.

The works will be taken chronologically to reveal Mann's personal search for truth and the extent to which he thought the descent into the "well of the past" would benefit man, to show the repetitive nature of myths extending from personal to racial history, to follow and explore the growth of Mann's mythic thinking and the uses to which he puts myth, and to disclose the unity of his life, his art, and his Germanness in a mythic context.

6 Mann, "Freud and the Future," p. 422.

CHAPTER II

THE SHORTER FICTION: "TRISTAN," "TONIO KRÖGER," DEATH IN VENICE

In 1913 D. H. Lawrence wrote of Mann:

He has never found any outlet for himself, save his art. He has never given himself to anything but his art. This is all well and good, if his art absorbs and satisfies him, as it has done some great men, like Corot. But then there are the other artists, the more human, like Shakespeare and Goethe, who must give themselves to life as well as to art. And if these were afraid, or despised life, then with their surplus they would ferment and become rotten. Which is what ails Thomas Mann. He is physically ailing no doubt. But his complaint is deeper: it is of the soul.

In describing the man Lawrence also states the highly autobiographical theme of "Tristan" (1903), "Tonio Kröger" (1903), and Death in Venice (1911). The soul-sickness of which Lawrence speaks, Mann first presents as the tension of the artist in bourgeois society, of the aesthetic claims of the individual in conflict with the moral, anti-intellectual values of the community. Bearing heavily the stamp of its time, the conflict nonetheless serves as an inroad to myth and the timeless drama of spirit versus life or nature.

From the time of his first novel, Buddenbrooks, with the creation of the over-sensitive, over-refined artist-type,

Mann impinged on mythic ground, later explaining that "the typical is actually the mythical."\(^2\) His interest in myth continued to grow until it reached the proportions of a myth-philosophy in the Joseph novels and *Doctor Faustus*. Whereas the later works are more mythical in both theme and technique, they do not reflect a decided change in Mann's thinking; his mythic slant can be detected in "Tristan"; it can be seen expanding in "Tonio Kröger"; and finally, *Death in Venice*, with its intricate uses of myth, both as spiritual and technical aids, subtly predicts the great span and nature of Mann's creativity. The three works studied together present Mann's personal quest for answers concerning the balance of life and spirit and the relationship of art to life.

To better understand the depth to which Mann's problematic artist searches and how the nature of the search leads inevitably from the individual to the mythical, we first must necessarily examine Mann's cultural heritage and view his background. Mann attributed the dualism of his own nature and his habit of viewing life in terms of antitheses to his racial mixture. His father was a well-to-do North German merchant and his mother a musical, artistic Brazilian Creole of Germanic descent. Protestant inwardness, which had begun as a concern for personal salvation, had produced a personality trait and a society which were inhospitable to the

\(^2\)Mann, "Freud and the Future," p. 422.
exotic artist. A reticence and a "demoniac incommunicado," later portrayed in Doctor Faustus, characterize the North German temperament that had created the materialistic Hanseatic society highly dependent on competitive individualism. From his earliest years a very sensitive individual, Mann felt deeply his inadequacy to fulfill his social role: he could neither break with the conservatism of his father nor give himself unreservedly to bohemianism and the cult of art, which was the current vogue of the decadent writers of the fin-de-siècle movement. In the camp of his father he placed nature, health, "life," instinct, the North German, and the classic; in that of his mother, spirit, disease, death, consciousness, the South German, the Latin, and the romantic.

It has been suggested that the whole gigantic task of post-Kantian philosophy was the systematic attempt to close the breach between nature and spirit. In the drama of his own life and work Mann reenacts the intellectual struggle of a century. Although he is considered more in the current of psychological realism, Mann had a deep foothold in German Romanticism. Especially did he consider Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, those philosophers most closely associated with

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3Fritz Kaufmann, Thomas Mann: The World as Will and Representation (Boston, 1957), p. 5.
5Kaufmann, Will and Representation, p. 44.
romanticism, his mentors. Mann's discovery of Schopenhauer's philosophy was a "spiritual experience of absolutely first rank," and his admiration for the philosopher was both personal and intellectual. Mann saw through Schopenhauer's asceticism a passionate nature not unlike his own (Schopenhauer was also of mixed lineage) and behind the highly objective title, *The World as Will and Idea*, a philosophy of instincts and sinister passions. The work professed to anticipate the deepest insight Mann could ever grasp and serves as the structure for both his personal struggle and his art.

Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will derives from Kant's *Ding an sich* (thing in itself). The will Schopenhauer describes as the "primeval principle of being, the source of all phenomena, the begetter present and active in every single one of them, the impelling force producing the whole visible world and all life— _for it was the will to live._" This generative, evil force, with its insatiable craving, is the dominant force in the psyche, engendering the intellect, which functions merely as the servant of the will, a point

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well taken in Mann's theory of art and myth, developed later in *Death in Venice* with Aschenbach's apotheosis of Tadzio. Schopenhauer saw it as man's noble mission to inactivate the will or to strive for Nirvana, both accomplished, strangely enough, through intellect: through aesthetic gratification—a state where "subject ceases to be merely individual and becomes the pure, will-less subject of knowledge"—and through conversion of will, effected through asceticism. Mann accepted implicitly Schopenhauer's mysticism of life as objectification of will and art as objectification of spirit. Yet Mann went beyond Schopenhauer, just as Schopenhauer had gone beyond Kant's cool intellectualism, relating the "thing in itself" more closely to human life. Schopenhauer designated sex as the focal point of will and brain as the focal point of idea. But his romantic and emotional dualism of will and idea, "a world-conception of the contrast between sensuality and asceticism with all the terror and daemonic tortures of one side and all the satisfactions of the other," Mann rejected with the fervor of his youth. Mann, on the other hand, questioned and made a theme in *Tristan*, *Tonio Kröger,* and *Death in Venice* the relationship of sensuality to the artistic impulse, which is in effect the impulse to mythopoetic thought.

11 Ibid., p. 405.
The life-negating doctrine which Mann rejected, Nietzsche had also rejected. Admittedly Mann's greatest artistic and intellectual influence, Nietzsche took Schopenhauer's will and idea, cast them in the aesthetic realm, and renamed them after the gods Dionysus and Apollo. He presented them as the contending creative energies in man, showing them to be interdependent, beyond good and evil, and totally acceptable. The Dionysian element, "brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication," in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* corresponds to Schopenhauer's will. It represents the dark, disordered, generative side of life and the principle that life is tragic, as opposed to the Apollonian world of light and illusion, which Nietzsche saw represented by the dream state and the plastic arts, painting and sculpture. It was the psychological principle involved in Nietzsche's dichotomy of art that intrigued Mann rather than the philosopher’s exaltation of instinct, resulting in superman and the blond beast. Whereas the latter are echoed in Mann's work, the blond comes to represent simply a "lack of mind," nature as German bourgeois.

The interdependency of will and idea, nature and spirit, so vital to the philosophies of both Schopenhauer and

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12Mann, Sketch, pp. 21, 24.


14Mann, Sketch, p. 23.
Nietzsche, is the dominant motif in Mann's work and in the early writings becomes intricately linked with sensuality and morality. In "Tristan" Mann examines the relationship in regard to both life and art as he parodies the myth for the first time. His young artist, Detlev Spinell, has chosen to separate himself from the world out of a "feeling for style." The beauty he seeks he finds in the Empire furnishings of a sanatorium. Spinell is a beardless, feckless man who has written one very dull novel with "scenes . . . laid in fashionable salons, in luxurious boudoirs full of choice objets d'art." While he is here he meets Gabriele Klöterjahn, the beautiful, artistic, young wife of a businessman, who, since the birth of her robust baby, has been consumptive. Out of his disgust for the bourgeois, Spinell turns his Isolde away from her husband. "Mordant parody is replaced by eloquent restatement of the myth" when the glib writer encourages her to play music from Wagner's Tristan und Isolde, and through the music, the two young people are transported to relive the erotic love-death yearning of the Liebestod. Gabriele, who can only "divine" what the music says, asks Spinell to explain the mysticism of the death wish. When he complies,

16 Ibid., p. 327.

she innocently asks him, "'How is it you can understand it all so well yet cannot play it?'" Totally unprepared for her inquiry Spinell hesitates and finally answers the question which asks far more than she had meant: "'The two things seldom happen together,'" he replies. "'No, I cannot play. But go on.'" Gabriele, exhausted by the emotional strain and drawn through divination to become one with the Absolute, dies two days later with a little song on her lips, while the intellectually-informed artist quickly resumes his attack on the bourgeois. The impotent Spinell is unprepared once again and beats a hasty retreat when he comes face to face with Gabriele's ruddy-faced, boisterous child, an infant Dionysus, and is forced to recognize the triumph of life over spirit in the flesh-and-blood product of her creativity.

The caustic and ambiguous conflict in "Tristan" resounds lyrically in "Tonio Kröger," as Mann voices the different aspects of the isolation of the artist. Mann's own favorite, Tonio is the portrait of the artist as a young man. He is Mann lamenting his bohemian nature which sets him apart from the blond and blue-eyed. Tonio, whose name betrays his mixed lineage, can neither be like his German friends, Hans Hansen and Ingeborg Holm, nor his artist friend, Lisabeta

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19 Ibid., p. 345.
Ivanovna. Like Hamlet he is "called to knowledge without being born to it." At fourteen Tonio feels that his alienation is due to his different appearance—his dark and melancholy eyes—and a difference of interests. A few years later the parental heritage becomes symbols for the dualism he recognizes as a part of his own nature, "icy intellect and scorching sense," being unable to descend to the "depths of lust and searing sin" without panting after "purity." At thirty the cleft between nature and spirit leaves him standing "between two worlds" and at home in neither, "sick to death of depicting humanity without having any part or lot in it," comparing himself to the "unsexed papal singers."

The sufferings of the young artist offer a possible study in neurosis and involve more than simply the problem of a "bad conscience." The curse of his calling results from the ambiguity of the position of the artist in relation to life and revolves around Mann's interpretation of art, stemming from that of Schopenhauer:

Suppose he had understood that genius does not at all consist in sensuality put out of action and will unhinged, that art is not mere objectivation of spirit, but the fruitful union and interpenetration

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21 Ibid., p. 93.
22 Ibid., p. 133.
23 Ibid., p. 99.
24 Ibid., p. 133.
of both spheres . . . that the essence of the creative artist is nothing else . . . than sensuality spiritualized . . . .

Mann replaces Schopenhauer's asceticism by a heroic acceptance of life—not a despising of life nor a withdrawal from it. Yet "sensuality spiritualized" is what Tonio describes as "putting your emotions on ice and serving them up chilled"—the aloofness necessary for aesthetic distance. This withdrawal from normal feelings, the sense of being "set apart," which makes the artist an outsider, a confidence man, and something of a god, also causes the body to sicken—giving rise to the myth of the sick artist, a motif in both Buddenbrooks and "Tristan" and a favorite subject among the romantics.

That Mann was from these early years a mythic-minded artist is evidenced not only by the myth of the sick artist, but also in Tonio's development as an artist. E. M. Wilkinson has pointed out four stages which Tonio goes through in his love for Hans, stages which mark his growth toward artistic maturity and which heighten his "watching" and "shaping" powers. These steps arrive at what Tonio refers to as the "ironic sensibility" and what Schopenhauer speaks of as "will-less" knowledge. They also designate steps in

26Mann, "Tonio Kröger," p. 103.
the development toward the mythically orientated writer, whose gaze Mann describes in his Freud essay. The aesthetic experience Wilkinson explains:

First he [Tonio] loved Hans and suffered much on his account. That is a purely personal experience expressed in particular terms. Then he was so organized that he received such experiences consciously and recognized the hard fact that he who loves more must suffer more. That is a general human experience expressed in universal terms. But now—and this is the transition from "watching" to "shaping"—"he wrote them down inwardly," that is, the experience became formed, a kind of blueprint of a poem. Finally we get the hallmark of the artist, the pleasure in the experience, with all its bitter knowledge, for its own sake, without any thought of its practical value for his living: "to a certain extent he took pleasure in these experiences, without indeed adjusting his personal life to them nor gaining practical advantage from them."29

Thirty years later Mann essays the steps:

Certainly when a writer has acquired the habit of regarding life as mythical and typical there comes a curious heightening of his artist temper, a new refreshment to his perceiving and shaping powers . . . What is gained is an insight into the higher truth depicted in the actual; a smiling knowledge of the eternal, the ever-being and authentic; a knowledge of the schema in which and according to which the supposed individual lives, unaware, in his naive belief in himself as unique in space and time, of the extent to which his life is but a formula and repetition and his path marked out for him by those who trod it before him.30

With "the clearest feeling of transcendence"31 Mann turned again to parody in the classic and sinister Death in


31Mann, Sketch, p. 46.
Venice. It is a parody revealing the latent tragic elements in the 'artist nature.' Mann's use of myth, combined with the realistic—almost naturalistic—rendition presented in a gentle irony which peers at both sides, takes a modern story based on Mann's own experiences at the Lido to levels not reached in the earlier stories.

In the aesthetic realm, Mann adds more than flavor to his artistic fare by using the mythical method, employing Nietzsche's poles of creativity, the Dionysian and Apollonian. The same urge that Nietzsche feels "calls art into being, as the complement and consummation of existence" (italics mine) and which created the Greek gods and the Olympian world as a "transfiguring mirror" \(^{32}\) serves Mann in presenting the psychological analysis of the artistic impulse. The Apollonian tendency to impose form and order on the world has been in ascendency in the creative life of the strong-willed Gustave Aschenbach. A projection of Mann's own life, this autumnal hero is pure and virginal like the Sebastian-type hero he was so fond of creating. However, the balance is upset on a much needed vacation to Venice when the author meets Tadzio, a young Polish boy, with whom he falls in love. The wild Dionysian urges, the "precious pangs of his youth," \(^{33}\) so long repressed are unleashed when the overworked

\(^{32}\) Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, p. 43.

Aschenbach has a dream whose "theatre seemed to be his own soul."\(^3^4\) Closely resembling a satyr play in honor of the stranger god, Dionysus, the dream "left the whole cultural structure of a lifetime trampled on, ravaged, and destroyed."\(^3^5\) Unable to return to Germany because of the plague that had begun in India, home of Dionysus, Aschenbach, with increasing urgency and without shame, gives reign to latent homosexual tendencies, releasing a "witches' brew of sensuality."\(^3^6\)

Running counterpoint to Aschenbach's psychic and physical degeneration is his apotheosis of Tadzio. The Apollonian consciousness ordinarily hiding the Dionysian world from the vision\(^3^7\) remains an active energy. Aschenbach seems to be serving only the obscene symbol of the stranger god of his Dionysian dream, yet he is repeating the Greek tendency to create a "beautiful illusion"\(^3^8\) to hide the ugliness of life. Showing intellect to be subservient to the will, Mann calls upon Greek mythology as he traces Aschenbach's rationalization of his desires by transforming the object of his passion from a Polish boy with a sickly appearance to a god:

The sight of his living figure[Tadzio], virginally pure and austere, with dripping locks, beautiful as a tender young god, emerging from the depths of sea and sky, outrunning the element—it conjured up mythologies,

\(^{3^4}\text{Ibid., p. 66.} \quad ^{3^5}\text{Ibid., p. 67.} \quad ^{3^6}\text{Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, p. 40.} \quad ^{3^7}\text{Ibid., p. 41} \quad ^{3^8}\text{Ibid., p. 35.}
it was like a primeval legend, handed down from the beginning of time, of the birth of form, of the origin of the gods.\textsuperscript{39}

Later, beholding Tadzio again on the beach, he felt himself seeing beauty's very essence, "form as divine thought, the single and pure perfection which resides in the mind . . ."\textsuperscript{40} --the theme of Narcissus.\textsuperscript{41} As the dying artist sits on the beach he sees Tadzio-Hermes, the Summoner, motioning him into the promises of the sea, beckoning in the name of life and love, consuming in the name of art.

Using Aschenbach's repressed instinct as motive for his creation of art (Tadzio) Mann has created a myth of art. His use of psychology combined with myth and myth-making emerges as a forceful technique which he carries to its utmost bounds in the Joseph tetralogy.

Mann does not, however, permit psychology to rob myth of its mystery. The irrational forces of the demonic realm also have their Apollonian form in the shifting shapes of the red-haired stranger. Used by Mann as leitmotif, the stranger is arbitrarily assigned as soothsayer and agent of ineluctable fate and demonstrates Mann's ingenius blending of stylistic

\textsuperscript{39}Mann, \textit{Death in Venice}, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 44.

and conceptual effects. First seen at the cemetery, he later appears as the rouged young-old man from Pola—a travesty of the Sebastian-like hero\(^{42}\) then as the gondolier, and finally as the old beggar displaying his lewd "art" with his guitar. His physical appearance also moves him into the mythical as Mann expands the leitmotif to include ideas: his red hair suggests sensuality; the snub nose suggests the mask of the satyrs or the human skull of Dürer's "Death," as well as being a feature of Socrates;\(^{43}\) the rakish hats and similar dress place him in the present and suggest the rogue. Each time he appears he fills Aschenbach with both distrust and desire. It is not until the author's complete moral degeneration, when he abandons all pretense, rouges his cheeks, and dyes his hair, that it becomes apparent that the stranger is the demon within himself.

As past and present run parallel, so do the real and surreal. Each phase of Aschenbach's journey through life is symbolic of his journey into the deep recesses of his mind, into that stratum where myth is made. His visions of jungle scenes, symbolic of primal beginnings, creates a desire for distant shores. The "widening of inward barriers"\(^{44}\) suggests


\(^{44}\)Mann, Death in Venice, p. 5.
the trip to the psyche. From the time he concludes his pact with the devil, the goateed ticket agent on the Italian line, he has begun his trip to the subconscious. Charon ferries him to the mythological city of Venice, "half fairy-tale, half snare."\(^{45}\) From here Aschenbach progresses to his dream world and finally to death, itself as ambiguous as the dissolution process throughout the tale.

Isadore Traschen has suggested that there is yet another area of myth, combined with the more obvious Apollonian-Dionysian myth, which has gone unnoticed. Here Mann anticipates both Eliot and Joyce. Aschenbach's journey, Traschen feels, follows the pattern of the monomyth set forth by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."\(^{46}\) The pattern of the journey, the Adventure of the Hero, is divided into three phases: Departure, Initiation, and Return. The first phase, that of Departure, can be taken in all seriousness. Aschenbach, like the mythical heroes, is a man of unusual gifts and honors. His general unrest (like Mann's own) reflects the general unrest of society "when Europe sat upon the anxious seat beneath a menace that hung over its head for months."\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) Ibid., p. 55.

\(^{46}\) Traschen, "The Uses of Myth in *Death in Venice*," p. 165.

\(^{47}\) Mann, *Death in Venice*, p. 3.
The result of his overwork is his Departure. The second phase, however, shows Mann's ironic intentions. The Initiation, characterized by a Road of Trials, an ultimate adventure, and a metamorphosis, is travestied as Aschenbach's trials become snares: he accepts his ticket to Venice; he allows the gondolier to impose his will on him; he rushes into the labyrinth—the maze of infected Venetian alleys—in pursuit of Tadzio. The ultimate adventure, usually a mystical marriage of the hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the world, has its ironic counterpart in Aschenbach's dream, his apocalyptic fall. His metamorphosis also is false. He does not transcend his sensuality: his appearance—his rebirth—is mock. Neither does Aschenbach return, and herein lies the tragedy. The hero's transcendence, ordinarily putting an end to passing joys and sorrows, is parodied in Aschenbach's ravaging sensuality, which symbolizes the decline of Europe.48

Mann's use of myth hinted at in Death in Venice is prophetically structured, suggesting far more than Mann could possibly have planned or foreseen. His use of the symbolic mode, of the mythic method, of leitmotif, of myth parody, and of the combination of myth and psychology, are all examples of his technique encapsulated in his novella that later expand and recirculate throughout the vast system of

his art. As myth becomes central to his technique, it also becomes thematic as Mann likens artistic impulses to myth-making. In the figure of his hero, too, Mann has transcended the individual as Aschenbach emerges as the prototype of the artist, carrying within himself the ambiguities that Mann saw as essential to the artist's nature: the demonic and the serene, the sensual and the bestial, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, ill-gotten inspiration and the highest of artistic performance.

While Mann's decadent hero displays the true representative nature of the artist, he does not achieve the synthesis Mann sought in his own life. In his almost Faustian striving to know and achieve an ideal happiness, Mann called forth the substance of his own will in "Tonio Kröger," and if Tonio's love of the "commonplace" cannot be reconciled to his exotic nature, it nevertheless results in the "fruitful dilemma of the middle," as opposed to the sterility of art and the artist too heavily weighted by spirit in "Tristan," or with the perversion or "incest of the spirit" of Aschenbach, who creates art from his own substance. 51


What Mann's intellect divides, his art unites, not in the nacreous hue of synthesis, but in clear, sharp harmony and with a mythic innocence that allows Aschenbach to travel down the twin paths of degeneracy and mysticism, if not with equal beauty, at least with equal dignity. In so doing Mann achieves for art what he could not do for the artist: rescuing it from the constraints of bourgeois morality, allowing it to better serve life.
CHAPTER III

THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN AND JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

The grouping together of two such different works as The Magic Mountain and Joseph and His Brothers might bring questions to the reader's mind about the wisdom of a comparative study. It would seem inconsistent to include the former at all in a study of myth since it is not considered a mythic novel, while the latter marks the apex of Mann's interest in myth. Disparity should not prove a problem to the student of Mann's work, however, for there is much to be gained by adopting the artist's own use of opposites, and a closer examination will prove the ascent to the Magic Mountain to find what is German a necessary step before dipping into the well of antiquity to find what is human. Both reflect strongly a political sensibility—which Mann was adverse to admit—and mark a transcendence from the individual into the social and ethical. One emerges the cameo, the other the intaglio, of the human soul.

The Magic Mountain (1924) occupies a period all its own in Mann's career. The First World War ended his early creative period, and there was no major work of fiction between Death in Venice and The Magic Mountain. It was during this time of the war that Mann felt a need to defend
the musical, romantic, and conservative tradition he associated with Germany. The result was his "war book," *The Reflections of a Non-Political Man*, a group of lengthy essays with the central notion that there is an irreconcilable opposition between German culture and "politics," which Mann equates with democracy and Western civilization.¹ He speaks of it as a work of "painful introspection" which became a preparation for the work of art itself.² He conceived the idea for his novel as early as 1912 during a visit to Davos, where his wife was suffering from a lung ailment. It was originally meant to be a humorous treatment of "the triumph of drunken disorder over the forces of a life consecrated to rule and discipline,"³ seriously dealt with in *Death in Venice*. But the twelve years in which the story grew included the First World War and the shaky Weimar Republic, and the quest for personal understanding took on a mature social aspect. *The Magic Mountain* became a transition novel: while it must be considered as belonging to the early writings in a strictly mythical classification, it issued a new philosophy which was to become the basis of the later fiction composing his "mythic" period.

The years of his Davos novel removed from Mann's mind the pressing problems of the artist. The revelation of the Socratic dialogue in *Death in Venice* that the poet cannot endure transcendence—he cannot walk the way of beauty without Eros as his companion and guide—and that knowledge "is the abyss"\(^1\) appears to have exhausted on the aesthetic level the artist-bourgeois conflict while pointing the middle way Mann's future hero would take. Still Mann was drawn toward the way of death and beauty, toward the demonic. In the social sphere this was the side of irrational *Kultur*, of music and metaphysics and the community. The battle achieved a personal level in a bitter political feud between Mann and his brother, Heinrich, advocate of rational *Zivilisation* and Western "democracy." It was perhaps the emotional exhaustion of the feud, as well as the outcome of the war, which led Mann to wane in his outrage and modify *The Reflections in The Magic Mountain*. Weigand contends that Mann knew all too well that the drift of evolution was carrying Germany in the direction of the rational pole and that Mann's own literary personality was one of the outstanding symptoms of the drift, but that he had stuck to his conservatism to retard the process.\(^5\) Mann departed from this stand

\(^1\)Mann, *Death in Venice*, p. 72.

in The Magic Mountain as he sought to go beyond the German's position of "the middle" to that of the human.

This he does in the person of his young "simple-minded" hero, Hans Castorp—simple only in the sense that his mind is uncluttered. A potential genius, Castorp is another Hanno Buddenbrooks and Tonio Kröger, and his education is Mann's own spiritual autobiography.

The implications of Mann's presenting his own spiritual odyssey in what he classes as a German Bildungsroman, or novel of education in the manner of Wilhelm Meister, is readily apparent: the mediating position of the artist coming directly through the early works is transferred to the mediating position of the German, who faces a social function for which his personality is unsuited. It is not simply a function but an "inner task" or mission, so characteristically German that it cannot be rendered adequately in any other language. The name is "Bildung,"—given articulate form by Goethe. Perched between the mystic East (Russia) and the rational West (France), the German walks a perilous path while carrying the heavy yoke of his social responsibility. In his essay, "Goethe and Tolstoy," which predates The Magic Mountain by two years and serves as a sort of exegesis, Mann explains the pragmatic aspect of Germany's

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7 Weigand, Der Zauberberg, p. 135.
social position:

A people settled in the bourgeois world-middle must needs be . . . a protean folk: a race that practises sly and ironic reserves toward both sides, that moves between extremes, easily, with non-committal benevolence; with the morality, no, the piety of that elusive "betweenness" of theirs, their faith in knowledge and insight, in cosmopolitan culture.

It is noteworthy that Mann concludes the statement with the word "culture," for the German's relation to the world he sees as mystical and abstract:

The German mentality is essentially indifferent to social and political questions. This sphere is utterly foreign to it. This is not to be understood merely negatively but we can actually speak of a vacuum, of a lack or deficiency. . . . Faced with immediate problems, this deficiency leads to attempts at solutions that are evasive and carry the imprint of a mythical substitute for the genuinely social.

This statement comes from an address delivered in 1943 and thus had the advantage of many years of hindsight, including the rise of fascism. Yet this facet of the German personality pervades the early writings in the absence of a social setting and in the reticent character of Tonio Kröger, Spinell, and Aschenbach, and bears heavily on the hero and the author of The Magic Mountain.

Mann saw politics as a realm closely kin to art in that it occupies a creatively mediating position between nature and spirit, but he also speaks of it as the "art of the

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impossible."¹⁰ And while his sympathies were completely with Germany during the First World War—feeling that she had been forced into war—it appears that from the beginning Mann saw Germany's place not as ruler but rather as moderator and stabilizer in the concert of nations, and he speaks of her function as that of a "European ferment."¹¹

The Magic Mountain is Mann's first attempt to augment his fiction with the social and political. It is done, however, in a very German way. Unlike the idea-oriented social criticism of the French, as exemplified by Balzac's Eugene de Rastignac,¹² who becomes a different person in every social situation, Mann's young hero grows spontaneously as a result of inward searching and criticism, and all ideologies become simply additives stirred in the brew. Mann does indeed retreat into the mythical as Castorp becomes the prototype of the German. Yet he succeeds in breaking the bounds of solidarity in a dream of love.

For all its symbolic and pedagogical intent, the story is very bare. It centers about the young hero's trip from Hamburg in Northern Germany to visit Joachim Ziemssen, a tubercular cousin, at the Davos-Platz, high in the Alps. His intended three-week visit to the Berghof sanatarium before

¹⁰Mann, "Germany and the Germans," p. 58.
¹¹Weigand, Der Zauberberg, p. 107.
¹²Honoreé de Balzac, Père Goriot.
beginning his career as an engineer in a ship-building firm is lengthened to seven years as the result of a cold or moist spot on his lung. When at last he leaves for the flatland, it is to join the German forces in Flanders.

Young Castorp's spiritual journey is a leave-taking from tradition, from the religious certainty of the old ancestral house of his grandfather and the baptismal bowl, to a "heightened" spiritual realm, where time stops and in its place there is a condition of ever-present health and disease, life and death, nature and spirit. Each is presented antipodally in poetic and passionate unfolding of plot and in intellectual discourses which preclude emotional response. The characters function mythically as representatives of "domains of the spirit," indicative of the discordant impulses in Mann himself. Each is diseased, carrying the germ of his own destruction. Vying for Hans' soul are Joachim, a professional soldier, the advocate of honor and duty; Herr Settembrini, Hans' social conscience, the upholder of humanism and the Enlightenment, and the representative of the West; and Naphta, the Italian's adversary, the son of a ritual slaughterer, a Jew turned Jesuit, a nihilist and communist, who champions, in exaggerated form, many of Mann's ideas about Kultur as set forth in The Reflections. The

14 Hatfield, Thomas Mann, p. 77.
lure of the apathetic East comes in the form of Castorp's beloved seductress, the Kirghiz-eyed Clavdia Chauchat, agent of death and the Tristan-morality of abandonment. Reinforcing her is her alcoholic companion, Mynheer Peeperkorn, embodiment of the Dionysian, dynamic life force.

Hans has much of the artist in him in that he is receptive and willing to shape himself. Arriving as a reflective young man, his surrender to disease has the same symbolic significance as Faust's concluding his pact with the devil. Never quite satisfied with the career he has chosen, he moves into another realm, pursuing the universal and trying like Faust to assimilate within himself what is assigned to all mankind.\(^15\) In mythic fashion he pursues first the sensual sphere. Succumbing to the diseased red-haired Russian woman on Walpurgis Night, Hans belies his natural propensity toward the seductiveness of death as he is initiated into knowledge of sensual love. After Clavdia's departure, the contest becomes more spiritual in the labyrinthine political, scientific, and philosophical debates between Naphta and Settembrini. Castorp's initiation and moment of rebirth, however, come through the revelation of a mythic dream, not in the logic of debate.

It is in the Chapter entitled "Snow" that Mann returns to myth as a mode of knowledge. Skiing alone in a snowstorm,

\(^{15}\text{Kaufmann, }\textit{Will and Representation, p. 101.}\)
Castorp becomes lost and, realizing that he has traveled in a circle, takes a sip of port. The white sea of nothingness suddenly opens to reveal a lovely Mediterranean beach peopled by "children of sun and sea." He is enamored with the high seriousness of the young inhabitants and the gentle and friendly manner in which they work and play together. Art and life become fused. His enchantment breaks, however, as he looks into a Doric temple to see two witch-like old women dismembering a child. This, too, he had known from unspeakably far back. Upon awakening Castorp realizes that he has dreamed of man's state, his social state, "behind which, in the temple, the horrible blood-sacrifice was consummated."

The result of Castorp's Tartarian revelation is that there are two ways to life: one is direct; the other, through knowledge of death, is the way of genius. It is this knowledge that Mann professes makes The Magic Mountain a novel of "initiation." It is the latter that in silent recognition begets spiritual love. The seeds of action, apparent as the contenders of the mythical drama of life, are synthesized in Castorp's contemplation:

17 Ibid., p. 491.  
18 Ibid., p. 495.
Disease, health! Spirit, nature! Are these contradictions? I ask, are they problems? No, they are no problems, neither is the problem of their aristocracy. The recklessness of death is in life, it would not be life without it—and in the centre is the position of the Homo Dei, between recklessness and reason, as his state is between mystic community and windy individualism . . . Man is the lord of counterpositions, they can be only through him . . .

Castorp's development after the dream is definitely toward the more articulate and directive. The debates between Naptha and Settembrini become more and more diaphanous. When Castorp leaves for the flatland, he is leaving the mountain of metaphysics and death for a stable socialibility.

Whatever Mann had in mind about the war and Castorp's joining the "feast of death" is less important than the fact that the young hero is descending into the world of humanity, an act of symbolic significance equating to his growing articulateness, viewed by Kaufmann as the developing solution of the age-old problem of the German search for a "break-through" to the world community.

It is this same desire that most likely caused Mann to seize upon Herman Nemerov's thesis in "The Quester Hero." Nemerov maintained that Mann's use of myth was in the direct line of the ancient quest for the Grail. Mann went beyond this thesis and placed Goethe's Wilhelm Meister—in fact,

20Mann, The Magic Mountain, p. 496.
21Ibid., p. 716.
22Kaufmann, Will and Representation, p. 103.
the entire Bildungsroman genre—in that universal quester tradition. The desire to transcend the personal, rational, and partisan to a world community leads directly from The Magic Mountain to the Joseph tetralogy. Castorp realized that "it is not out of our single souls we dream . . . but anonymously and communally, if each after his fashion." The search for the source of dreams, the "great soul," moves from the Fatherland to the mythical land of the arch-fathers, the patriarchal Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

The selection of the Old Testamental subject would seem an unlikely choice for an author seeking a German audience during the thirties. But Mann felt that a novel of the Jewish legend was "timely, just because it seemed untimely." He admitted that there were certainly defiantly polemic connections between it and certain tendencies of our time which he had always found repulsive, in particular the fascist mob-myth and the growing vulgar anti-Semitism. The social and political aspects of the work cannot be overstressed, for Mann used the Jewish legend to take myth out of the hands

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26 Ibid., p. 11.
of the fascists while giving body and content to his new humanistic conception. It incorporates several of the distinct strands of the fascist myth and reweaves them into a universal tradition: namely, romanticism, racism, or the idea of a Chosen Race, and vague economic socialism. And all this in a hero of dreamy makeup and epicene beauty who might pass for a German himself, but who develops into a man of the world in the strictest sense, going beyond the poetic to promote a "new deal." It is a development running counterpoint to fascism, the evolvement of an individual from the community, of the "Ego out of the mythical collective," and back into a humanistic synthesis. It is a humanization of the living myth, the myth of creation.

Creation implies re-creation as death and rebirth become the theme of the tetralogy. Mann viewed the essence of myth as "recurrence, timelessness, a perpetual present," a conception based on an attitude toward time adopted from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, who like the Greeks saw time as circular, dependent on recurrent content. Mann's work, however, bridges the gap between the Oriental idea of

30Kaufmann, Will and Representation, p. 125.
resurrection and the Occidental idea that man rises heightened and transformed.\textsuperscript{31}

It is an echo of the romantic idea of man as becoming, reflecting Goethe's view of man not as a depraved human who must address himself to grace as his only means of salvation but who by good deeds and honest effort can attain that end.\textsuperscript{32} It was Goethe's Faust as a symbol of humanity that Mann confesses to be the clandestine tendency of the Joseph saga.\textsuperscript{33}

The biblical epoch too plays a decided role in the study of man's conditions: in appealing to a mythically-instructed community it opens both the back and front doors to the nature of man, for it was the time when present values were established and the first foundations of national life begun. It was also a period when history lapses imperceptibly into myth, an ideal setting for the recurrence of events—history giving them anchorage and myth lending transcendency.

The biblical material had "long roots" in Mann's life, and he had long agreed with Goethe's observation of the Joseph story that "it seems too short, and one is tempted to carry it out in all its details."\textsuperscript{34} The thin biblical sketch

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 142.


\textsuperscript{33}Mann, "The Theme of the Joseph Novels," p. 13.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 5.
grew into Mann's most monumental work, including *The Tales of Jacob*, *Young Joseph*, *Joseph in Egypt*, and *Joseph the Provider*. Under Mann's skilled hand the story outgrew the Jewish legend. Joseph became an Adonis and Tammuz figure and later in Egypt drifted into Mann's beloved Hermes.

The interweaving of other myths with the biblical legend permits both a critical questioning and the confirmation of tradition. Joseph's story, like a series of filmy curtains, is made transparent by the recurrence of the similar patterns in other myths, and by that very transparency, the reader may glimpse farther and farther back into the bottomless past where perhaps the pristine pattern of all man's trials was the Fall, when Spirit was sent to rescue Soul from his love of matter. The journey also points to the future actually predicting the way of the cross and beyond Christianity to the exhilaration of a thought about to be formed. The path from Bethlehem to Calvary is the path of all pagans, of all pre-Christian humanity: Osiris of Egypt, Tammuz of Babylon, Adonis of Canaan, Dionysus of Greece.\(^\text{35}\)

The prophetic-lending patterns of the myth are paralleled by a developing psychology, and, by an elliptical continuity between action and commentary on psychology, myth is actually expanded to include psychology, not merely to represent the other end of the pole as in *Death in Venice*.

\(^{35}\)Kaufmann, *Will and Representation*, p. 150.
The search for what man is leads into the underworld and death, where Ishtar once sought Tammuz and Isis Osiris.\textsuperscript{36} It is also a Faustian search for the original "Ur" and a Freudian search into the chthonian region. The Freudian "mythic subconscious" is the romantic metaphysic: the id and ego become a higher transformation of Schopenhauer's will and idea. And at this stage of his mythic thinking Mann defines myth poetically as the "garment of the mystery"\textsuperscript{37} enshrouding the nature of man and with a Freudian ring as "the timeless schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it reproduces its traits out of the unconscious."\textsuperscript{38} It is studied intensely and with much humor as Mann with microscopic ingenuity unmasking man's motives and adjusts them to fit the cosmic patterns.

It is primarily in the character development of Joseph that Mann dramatizes his philosophy of the importance of myth in the life of modern man. Joseph is the artistic ego, a late child of his people, more likely to view life as typical or mythical, and his success in society is largely due to his transferring his knowledge of myth into the "lived myth." It is not a retreat into a shelter that excuses inhumanity and frees one from responsibility but a psychological aid.

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\textsuperscript{36} Mann, "Prelude," p. 33.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{38} Mann, "Freud and the Future," p. 422.
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for satisfying two basic human needs—identification and imitation.

It is with a sense of striving and optimism that Mann resurrects the myth by first leading the reader back through the childhood of civilization into the "womb" of time, "further and further into the general." The Tales of Jacob serves both to inform of the endless quests of man and to provide the roots of Joseph's character. From Abraham the moon wanderer came the "tradition of spiritual unrest" and consequently the God of the Spirit, with Whom the covenant was made for a nation dependent on a moral obligation. From the immediate father Jacob and the favorite wife Rachel comes the habitual knowledge that he is loved and preferred, knowledge which had conditioned his life:

It was decisive likewise for his attitude towards the Highest, to Whom, in his fancy, he ascribed a form, so far as was permissible, precisely like Jacob's. A higher replica of his father, by Whom, Joseph was naively convinced, he was beloved even as he was beloved of his father.

So with a spirit of unrest to be fed by knowledge and an ego nourished by love, the young Joseph, blessed from the heavens above and from the earth below, is destined to fit into an antique mold of leader.

40 Ibid., p. 30.
41 Ibid., p. 30.
It is not a path without peril that Joseph will travel, for he must descend to the pit twice and be reborn. The first descent occurs in Young Joseph while the artistic ego is still in its narcissistic stage. Joseph has been well versed in myth by his tutor Eliezer, but he has not consciously identified with a mythic character. Still he is aware of his role as leader and makes it too apparent to his jealous brothers when he interprets his dream of their sheaves bowing down to his sheaf. It is only after they have thrown him into the pit that he seeks psychic relief by identifying with the "true son," Adonis, who spends half of each year in the underworld. As he lies at the bottom of the pit and watches the coming and going of the sun, he associates the patterns of the universe with the patterns of the earthly and feels that everything earthly is guided by its starry prototype and counterpart. The great certainty of his life became the "belief in the unity of the dual, in the fact of the revolving sphere, the exchangeability of above and below, one turning into the other, and gods becoming men and men gods." He could not conceive of the darkening and setting of the sun without the idea of reappearance, new light, resurrection. He also realizes that for some reason he continued to antagonize his brothers.


\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 391.
while knowing he was doing so, thus preparing for his own
descent. After three days in the pit, Joseph does not
ascend the same man as before. Reborn partially free of
guilt, he accepts his place as a slave to the Midianite
merchant and begins his trip downward to Egypt, the land of
the dead.

When Joseph reaches Egypt, the stage is immediately set
for his second descent. Here he learns of the myth of Osiris,
the Egyptian counterpart of Adonis and Tammuz. And realiz-
ing that not simply the ruler but all the people now identify
with the god, he pragmatically changes his name to Osarsiphe,
meaning the dead Joseph or Osiris Joseph. Because of his
education he also becomes associated with Thoth, the Egyptian
Hermes. **Joseph in Egypt**, though the least mythic in tone,
is the most mythic by stylization, for the forces of light
and darkness begin their Zoroastrian conflict. Joseph is the
force of light, and Mut, wife of Joseph's eunuch master,
Potiphar, represents the forces of darkness in the form of
sex. In a metamorphosis reminiscent of Aschenbach's, this
lovely priestess of Amun becomes transformed by her passion
for Joseph into the vulture Isis. The battle soon rises
above personal conflicts to become a battle between Joseph's
God and the Egyptian god of darkness. In this highly sophis-
ticated and decadent culture, much to Joseph's liking,
political elements are also brought to light. In a setting
resembling that of *The Magic Mountain*, Potiphar's household
becomes a microcosm of Egypt, with the conservative reactionary forces who have their god of darkness and the liberal element, the followers of Aton, the sun god.\(^44\)

Joseph remains relatively aloof, practicing "sly reserve," learning rather than participating. In his association with Mut, he was not above reproach, however, for he found many reasons not to avoid her. But the words he had once spoken to his small brother, Benjamin, in the grove of Adonis resounded in his mind: "Yea, I keep myself clean."\(^45\)

As a result of withholding his favors, the "scion of the Chosen One" goes to prison.

When he ascends the pit again as the "inspired lamb," he is indeed reborn, and like Faust II, ready to drain the swamp for humanity. In *Joseph in Egypt* the tone is picaresque as Joseph becomes the roguish Hermes, a mediator in human affairs. After leading Pharaoh to interpret his own dreams, Joseph secures for himself the position of Viceroy. Through calculation he serves his master well, becoming an economist and establishing an economic system that not only staves off the years of famine but strengthens the government as well.

It is in his last book that Mann frees Joseph from the bounds of collectivity and enables him to realize his place

\(^{44}\)Hatfield, *Thomas Mann*, p. 107.

\(^{45}\)Mann, *Joseph in Egypt*, p. 750.
as a free agent. Joseph relates to Pharaoh:

For the pattern and the traditional come from the depths which lie beneath and are what binds us, whereas the I is from God and is the spirit, which is free.  

Less secure in his new position, Joseph still realizes that he is in a play but that "one can easily be in a story and not understand it." After his reunion with his family, he is not disconcerted to find himself bypassed by his father's blessing or by being reminded by Jacob that his blessing is a "worldly blessing, not a spiritual one."

The character of Joseph can only be realized when compared to that of his father in The Tales of Jacob. Joseph, though far more social, is less human than his roguish father. There is nothing in Joseph's life to compare with the tender love story of Jacob and Rachel and for Jacob's love of the true son. Still Joseph is an advancement in that he is the provider of bread for his brothers. Harry Slochower has pointed out that Abran is the superego and Isaac the id, who combined to form Jacob, the ego. Joseph unites them all. He is the humanistic synthesis, which in Mann's thought is predominant.

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46 Mann, Joseph the Provider, p. 937.
47 Ibid., p. 1207.  
48 Ibid., p. 1155.
It has been stated before that the Joseph saga had as its intention serving as a symbol of humanity, as well as appealing to a mythically-instructed community by employing biblical material. It nonetheless should be viewed as a German book, for Joseph's loyalty to his Jewish heritage and his willingness to follow his own ambitions while serving humanity parallel Mann's appeal and artistic mission to the German nation to examine the ancient German Kultur tradition of the nobility of the German blood and to coin the past with the present with an eye to the future.

The Magic Mountain, written in Germany, served as the embryo of Mann's new humanism. The Joseph novels were begun in Germany, continued in Switzerland, transplanted to America, and finished under sunny California skies, where Mann came in contact with the pioneer optimism and hearty faith in man, which is the American myth, our "Way of Life." Perhaps Eric Heller has made the most appropriate comment of Mann's choice of subject when he states that for the conservative imagination, wounded by its outcast destiny, it could not have been comforted with a happier tale than that of a son who loses his patriarchal home and the paternal blessing but gained the world and the power to save his brothers.51

50 Mann, "The Theme of the Joseph Novels," p. 18.
CHAPTER IV

DOCTOR FAUSTUS

In his essay "Freud and the Future" Mann reiterates what he had dramatically portrayed in his Joseph tetralogy—that life is a drama and that mythically conceived truth is a necessity to offset the feeling of isolation in modern man, whose God is dead, thanks to science and psychology. The fact that Mann took a stand against fascism, a cult founded on myth, especially the myth of superman as propounded by Nietzsche, made his position appear untenable, for Mann himself admitted that he was greatly influenced by the great prophet. He contends, however, that his Nietzsche experience was "intellectual and artistic" rather than "spiritual" and that he believed Nietzsche not at all. In 1943, seeing the dark days ahead for Germany, Mann decided to write Doctor Faustus (1947), which is based primarily on the life of Nietzsche and which also contains elements of Schopenhauer and Wagner—three great contributors to the development of German culture, who are combined in the composer protagonist, Adrian Leverkühn, to symbolize the German spirit, steeped in myth, metaphysics, and music. The novel is Mann's

1Mann, Sketch, p. 22.
attempt to portray the German soul, to form a synthesis in point of view between aesthetics and morality, and, like Joyce, to create a conscience for his race. The novel might well be Mann's defense of myth.

The Faust myth, long a favorite of the metaphysically inclined Germans, has come to represent the German soul. It has always been characterized by the interplay between nature and spirit, but Mann has added a new dimension, one that is quite foreign to the nonpolitical German, but which appears necessary in the author's epoch. Without help from the beneficent God Who aided Goethe's Faust when he erred, Mann's Faust is spirited to the political arena where he must represent not simply the human soul but the soul of the entire German nation. In his Story of a Novel Mann writes that the alternate reading of the fifteenth century Faust Chapbook and the newspaper accounts of the war resulted in the central idea of his novel:

the flight from the difficulties of the cultural crisis into the pact with the devil, the craving of a proud mind, threatened by sterility, for the unblocking of inhibitions at any cost, and the parallel between pernicious euphoria ending in collapse with the nationalistic frenzy of Fascism.²

Mann's modern hero, like the fifteenth-century Faust, signs a pact with the devil, allegorically portraying the pact in blood between the German people and Nazism.

Leverkühn's career prefigures the history of Germany from 1670-1940. Mann allows himself the role of commentator in the person of Serenus Zeitblom, longtime friend of Adrian, who is in charge of his papers. Zeitblom's commentary, which he records in a diary, and his interpolations of current news make it possible for the story to run on a dual plane of time, giving the book its "curious brand of reality" and its "total artifice." He begins his story in 1943, the day that Mann began his novel. Leverkühn, two years younger than the narrator, was born in 1885 during the Hohenzolern Reich. He became insane in 1930, just prior to the rise of the Nazis, and died ten years later. The story is concluded in 1945 amid the destruction of the Third Reich.

The two friends grew up in Kaisersaschern, an old German city which had retained a medieval atmosphere. Zeitblom is a Catholic, in whom religion and humanism are in perfect accord, while Leverkühn is a Lutheran, who is cold and distant in human relations. The childhoods were happy, but from a very early age Adrian had been "set apart" by his ability to see the relativity of knowledge, which made him view everything in parody. After graduating from the gymnasium Leverkühn decided to study theology, as the earlier Fausts, not because of a particularly deep feeling as much as for intellectual exercise. An avid interest in music parallels the theological interest, but because Leverkühn (like Mann)

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considered music to be demonically inspired, he awarded it only a secondary place, hoping to make it serve theology. He composed some pieces during this time, but he "outgrew" them before he could get them down. He was primarily interested in form and theory.

When he was twenty-one, he decided to make music his career. He moved to Leipzig, a more modern city, to join his music teacher. Upon his arrival there, rather than being taken to a restaurant, as he thought, he was driven to a brothel. He became so terrified by the situation that he ran to the piano, played a few chords, and fled into the night. One of the women he could not forget; her arm had brushed his cheek. He later followed her to Hungary, where, although having been forwarned by her that she had syphilis, he possessed her and thus infected himself. This agent of the devil he called Hetaera Esmeralda.

Primary symptoms of the disease failed to materialize, and he began a period of great creative activity in which his work began to show signs of a "breakthrough." He began experimenting with a new form, a twelve-tone system, resulting in an atonal music.

He then moved to Munich, where he lived with the Rodde family. Here he met a dashing young man with homosexual tendencies, Rudi Schwerdtfeger, with whom he became involved. His stay in Munich was interrupted by a short trip to Italy, where he recorded in his diary a conversation with Shemmael,
the angel of wrath, a scene reminiscent of Ivan Karamazov's conversation with Satan. In the conversation, written in Old German, the angel explains Leverkühn's pact with the devil, how his brain will become infected with syphilis, which will produce soaring moments of inspiration and euphoric feelings of power—both in exchange for his soul, for he will be denied human love. Shammael continues his prophecy:

On your madness they will feed in health, and in them you will become healthy. . . . Not only will you break through the paralysing difficulties of the time—you will break through time itself, by which I mean the cultural epoch and its cult, and dare to be barbaric . . .

The next phase of Leverkühn's life is characterized by intense suffering alternating with extreme euphoria. During this time he tries to find love; he even proposes marriage, or rather sends Rudi to propose for him, but Marie Godeau decides instead to marry Rudi, who is shot shortly afterward by a jealous girlfriend. Leverkühn's last and most heart-breaking denial of love comes when his nephew, little Echo, meets a dreadful and untimely death.

His disease and suffering only serve to heighten the musician's creative powers, and in 1919 he composes his "Apocalipsis cum figuris," based on the Dürrer woodcuts. This fantastic composition, using dissonant tones to describe spiritual essences and tonal ones to characterize evil,

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predicts the end of the world where all is engulfed in an abyss. Allegorically it portrays the demolition of Germany.

Blaming himself for both Rudi's and Echo's deaths, in 1927 Leverkühn composed his last great piece, "The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus." It is the only one of his works which is free of parody. It was to hear this composition, denying the joy of life and the brotherhood of man, that he called his friends together the day of his paralytic stroke, beginning his ten years of mindlessness. The end of the composition, which is the lament of God over his lost world, Zeitblom describes as the most melancholy imaginable, where one group of instruments after another retires, leaving only the high G of a cello, which itself fades into silence, where then the spirit hearkens. It changes its meaning and abides as a "light in the night," offering "a hope beyond hopelessness, the transcendence of despair."^5

The breakthrough of Leverkühn's atonal music sounds the hope of a breakthrough of the German spirit to the world community. The creation of a new tonal system, which speaks of a new art, and the "hope beyond hopelessness" could, however, be interpreted to mean that the German has a mission, as yet unfulfilled. Mann, being warned about the possibility of creating a new myth by flattering the Germans with their "demonism," changed the title of the novel, inserting the

^5Ibid., p. 491.
word composer, the full English title reading *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*. It was not Mann's wish to create a new idealism in a nation that already allowed spirit to stay in absolute domain. His mission was to "mirror" the German soul.

The person he chose to represent the German spirit he called the "most perfect aesthete in the history of thought." "Cold and gelid," a solitary, like his mythical counterpart Leverkühn, Nietzsche's personal life fits very neatly into this Faust story. Like the composer, Nietzsche was a Lutheran bourgeois with an artist mother, as was Mann. Chaste and respected he also studied theology. When a very young man he was taken to a house of prostitution where, it is believed, he contracted syphilis. He proposed marriage by proxy to Lou Salome, who married his agent and friend, Paul Rée. After he left home, he never had a satisfactory human relationship, and his last years, the years of *Ecce Homo*, on which the last pages of *Doctor Faustus* are based, were years of extreme poor health and emotional frenzy, signaling his oncoming insanity, which lasted ten years until he died.

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6 Mann, *Story of a Novel*, p. 55.

7 Mann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Recent History," p. 172.
Of more importance than the details of his physical life is the extent to which he influenced Mann and the fact that Mann translated the prophet's life in Nietzsche's own terms. It was through Nietzsche's eyes that Mann interpreted Schopenhauer's will and intellect in favor of "life" and "nature." Through him also Mann conceived the demonic artist. Nietzsche's destruction of morals, paralleled in Leverkühn's destruction of form in music, was not in favor of no morals and no form, but a reevaluation, a new structuring on instinctively-arrived-at values.

It is this primacy of instinct and the destruction of morals that the Nazis rationalized into fascism. Mann does not stress, however, that Nietzsche created fascism, although Leverkühn's career allegorically portrays it. Instead he achieves a reversal of perspective, implying that fascism made Nietzsche. Hinton Thomas quotes Mann's description of Nietzsche's life as "a phenomenon of stupendous cultural fullness and complexity, gathering together within itself the essential elements of the European tradition, a phenomenon which had absorbed much from the past, which it . . . repeated in a mythic manner." One might say a Faustian manner.

Mann keeps Leverkühn a mythical figure. It is a story about him, and Zeitblom recounts only a few conversations in

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which the composer takes part. Neither he nor Zeitblom are described, although other characters are. When Mann was asked the reason for this, he replied, "to conceal, namely, the secret of their being identical with each other." So Faust is also Mann. The moral, humanistic Zeitblom represents the bourgeois and anti-intellectualism, and Leverkuhn is the artist, two opposing sides of Mann, which had been the theme of "Tonio Kröger," Death in Venice, and other of his early writings. Although Mann turned to a study of myth in the Joseph tetralogy, the problem of the isolation of the artist had been his constant companion, and the Faust theme, he states, had been conceived in 1901, his "Tonio Kröger" period. After more than forty years he combined the quest for a unifying myth on the personal level with one on the national level, assigning them a theme in the Faust tradition.

The decision to make the artist a musician helps to raise the story to the national level. The German people are very musical, and the music of Wagner, which involves myth and demony, helped sow the seeds of decadence which led to fascism. Nietzsche and Mann were both great music lovers and would have both agreed with Leverkuhn's statement that "music and speech . . . were at bottom one." Schönberg

9Mann, Story of a Novel, p. 90.
10Ibid., p. 17.
11Mann, Doctor Faustus, p. 163.
was the originator of the twelve-tone system, although Wagner did experiment with atonal music in his "Tristan."

Mann also incorporated music into technique. The novel as a whole is symphonic. Themes of politics, personal quest, and myth are introduced and restated in action many times. Nietzsche's Eternal Recurrence is evident in the Faust theme. The Oedipal theme runs through the novel, ending when the mother takes her erring son back to childhood—mindlessness and innocence. Wassertrom declares that the novel is the only one ever charted to be both Oedipal and archetypal.\(^\text{12}\)

The leitmotif, seen in the demonic aspect of music, the link of genius to disease, and many others, creates overtones of meaning, adding greatly to the mythic quality of the work, as does Mann's use of Old and Middle German in Adrian's diary and in the little verses Echo recites.

Opposed to the symphonic technique for emotional response is Mann's use of reportage. Zeitblom gives current news and records detailed conversations on ideologies, which run concurrent to Leverkühn's artistic development. His accounts of the conversations on politics and religion between the theology students at Halle in Leverkühn's younger years give a feeling of time, a time when psychology has robbed religion of its deep meaning, its myth. The

\(^{12}\text{William Wassertrom, "In Gertrude's Closet," Yale Review, XLVIII (December, 1958), 250.}\)
discussions of the theoretical aspects of statism portray
the German character as youthful, nonpolitical, and inex-
perienced, a logical beginning for the state of mind of the
Kridwiss group of pseudo-intellectuals who seek out Adrian
in Munich after hearing his atonal composition, the
"Apocalipsis cum figuris." This post-World War I group of
arch-fascists who favor the mass myth for nationalistic
purposes are made to appear ridiculous in the light of
psychological rendition. Unlike the poetic portrayal
which adds depth and timelessness to the character of Lever-
kühn, the reportage robs fascism of its myth.

Giving temporality to fascism is Mann's way of achiev-
ing an optimistic outlook, of suggesting the possibility
that it will not return. He does not imply that it is a
"false" myth. Mann's definition of myth as "the timeless
schema, the pious formula into which life flows when it
reproduces its traits out of the unconscious,"13 permits
nothing but a "true" myth. What Mann is saying is that
Nietzsche was a "hero of our time"14 in that his life right
down to his self-mythicizing, his madness, was a work of
art, an aesthetic phenomena, a myth, in which the German
people may view themselves. His was a fearsome atavism,
producing traits from a racial unconscious, only to be

13 Mann, Story of a Novel, p. 88.
reborn through his art. The Germans, recognizing their own, had an affinity for and adopted that which was theirs already.

With a cold intellectualism counterbalanced by frenzied emotion, the German nation lives the life of the artist—spiritual isolation in a social world. The musicality of the German spirit does not serve him well in the political sphere. The ease with which Leverkuhn moves from theology to demonology (music) suggests the road the German treads when he moves from high idealism to drunken barbarism, while his moral integrity, like Zeitblom, must keep its distance, looking on in horror and sympathy.

Nietzsche once said that there is no fixed point outside man whereby he must feel guilty. Mann answers him saying, "Really not? In man nature and life somehow go beyond themselves; in him they lose their innocence. They acquire mind—and mind is life's self-criticism." In Doctor Faustus, his only novel free of parody, Mann is calling for this self-criticism. He is lamenting the fate of Germany, whose soul, like Nietzsche's, seems doomed to perdition. But it is also a hope, born of despair, that perhaps by the joining of aesthetics and ethics, art which is critique, where the light of psychology plays upon the

Mann, "Nietzsche's Philosophy in the Light of Recent History," p. 161.
myth, his countrymen might better recognize the nature of the German spirit and create a new Faust, a new Germany, and a new world.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Looking back over the works of Thomas Mann, it is apparent that from the beginning of his career Mann was inclined toward a mythic attitude and justification of life. Progressing from a narcissistic youth whose early works reflect the deep personal dichotomy between spirit and nature until the two wars when he descended the pit twice to arise transformed to a man of extreme social conscience, Mann never ceased to elevate tradition to what he thought was its appropriate place and to equate it to myth. As a young man emotionally close to suicide, the artist-bourgeois problem absorbed him, and "Tonio Kröger," "Tristan," and Death in Venice mark the growth of his mythic thinking as he presents his personal problems in the myth of the sick artist in the romantic tradition of Schopenhauerian metaphysics and Nietzschean psychology. Mann, however, was too much the man of genius to fail to recognize the fatality of decadence, and when his country moved toward the self-destruction that Death in Venice had so clearly outlined, he was forced to declare that "the need of my nation is also my personal need."1

He transcended the personal to search for the soul of the German in *The Magic Mountain*, there to find not simply the prototype of the German, but the door to a new humanism based on the common search of all men to find meaning in life. The event of *Joseph and His Brothers* is a continuation of the leave-taking of the aesthetic irrationalism associated with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche begun in *The Magic Mountain*. Yet it reaffirms the worth of the German heritage. For while the Germans were progressing with incredible madness down the road to fascism, Mann fused the romantic tradition with myth and psychology to divert the stream of romanticism down the path of fruitful humanism, providing modern man with deeper roots than perhaps any artist had ever done before, while permitting him to step from the bounds of collectivity to full moral freedom.

When Mann out of the depths of despair and love turned back to the typically German in *Doctor Faustus*, it was a reminder that the myth of an ancient necromancer had through lack of ethical conscience been repeated in the myth of a modern nation.

Mann's bitter accusation against Germany resulted not from an effort to separate himself from his brothers, but to explain their deficiencies. Mann's Departure from the conservatism of his countrymen and his Initiation into the knowledge of man as the *Homo Dei* served only to heighten his Return to the fold as an enlightened German artist,
truly a man of his country. "How much Faustus contains of the atmosphere of my life!" he once wrote, and again to his brother, "Wherever I am is German culture." No one can fail to note the great semblance between the haughty young artist, who strives to be like the blond and blue-eyed, and the Germany, which many years later Mann was to describe as having a "timidity . . . rooted in arrogance" and "an international social inferiority complex." Nor can one fail to associate the strain of decadence throughout his works and the homosexuality of the German military machine.

His art no less than his life reflects his German heritage, for he elevated the personal to the metaphysical and proceeded from there to the archetypal and the mythic, seeking ever to interpret the German's need through personal self-criticism, moving like Goethe's Faust through the sensual to the aesthetic and finally to the social.

Mann was not a mythmaker, but he felt that the drive that discloses itself in imitation should be channeled through mythic identification, giving the "actor" a reason to be and a feeling of native worth. Going so far in his Joseph story as to show God dependent on man's needs, he

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2Mann, Story of a Novel, p. 154.


4Mann, "Germany and the Germans," p. 48.
lays the cornerstone for what he hopes will be the foundation of a new and coming humanity, the City of Man. That backward glance into the dark regions, the true sources of life, will perhaps enable man to better understand himself by providing patterns that will both remove guilt and give an assurance for the future.

The German-artist recognized the heart of the dilemma. The problem of the creative man in bourgeois society is the problem of man generally. And Mann lived the myth. As an artist with a long-range view, he believed that life may be observed as an aesthetic phenomenon, but it must be lived in an ethical spirit fully aware of individual responsibility and in the knowledge that all men are brothers.
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