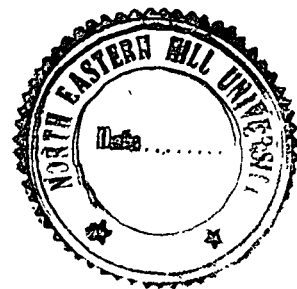


THE IRONIC VISION OF LIFE
IN
THOMAS MANN'S FICTION - A SELECTIVE STUDY

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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THESIS
SUBMITTED IN
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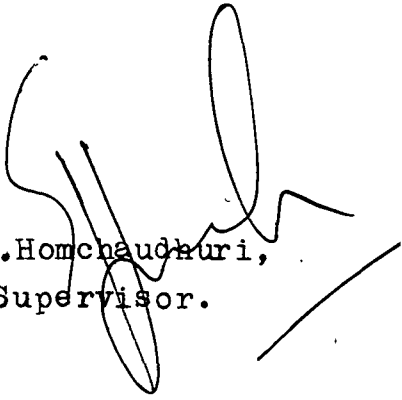
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Dated 24th October, 1990

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Certified that the dissertation entitled
"The Ironic Vision of Life in Thomas Mann's Fiction -
A Selective Study", submitted by Molly Charles embodies
the record of original insights gained in the course of
investigations carried out by her under my supervision.

She has been duly registered and the disserta-
tion presented is worthy of being considered for the
award of the M.Phil degree.


S. Homchaudhuri,
Supervisor.

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

When Dr.Homchoudhury, Dean, Department of Languages introduced me into the world of Mann, I didn't quite realize how rewarding an encounter this would prove for me. He was kind enough to help me find my bearings and charter my course in the complex fictional universe of this great master of irony. I wish to thank him for the valuable and timely guidance he provided me with.

I also wish to record my deep sense of gratitude to my parents who have been a constant source of strength and inspiration to me.

Above all, to my husband and my children I remain gratefully indebted for being so helpful, patient and understanding.

Shillong.

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Molly Charles.

Molly Charles

THE IRONIC VISION OF LIFE

IN

THOMAS MANN'S FICTION

(A SELECTIVE STUDY)

PREFACE

Mann's presence on the literary screen of the 20th century is so overwhelmingly towering that it is impossible to ignore him without missing out on a vital strand of the mainstream of modern experience and response. His literary output was prodigious and he had a tremendous capacity for analysing and synthesizing the widest spectrum possible of human thought, as also the varied nuances of emotional sensibility and feeling that go into our encounter with life and death. As a German writer whose life span (1875 - 1955) stretched across a crucially significant and painful era of human history he was close to the surge and ebb of violent passions that stirred up the the I and II World Wars and seemed to signal the barbaric celebration of human extinction. Moulded and conditioned by the nihilistic interpretations of life as embodied in the works of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Mann's voluminous novels and many novelas seem to be reconciled to an acquiescent approach to life and inevitable death. But it is not hopeless despair or bitter fury that underlines Mann's writing. He offers no strained philosophy of optimism, of faith, or far-fetched meaning. Like his philosophic godfathers he has no compunctions about looking the horror of existence in the face. His literary art is, like music,

a temporary reprieve from life's repetitive process of desire, endeavour and frustration, a vicious cyclic pattern that is finally laid to rest by the meaningless oblivion of death. But the feeling which the reader carries away after a reading of Mann is not futility but 'the surpassing of the idea of despair by a sense of spiritual tranquility.'

This study attempts to probe the irony that results from this paradox: the sustained nihilistic content of Mann's works and its power to evoke a tremendous sense of the latent richness of life, along with the possibility of achieving it. Irony in Mann's fiction consists in the juxtapositioning of a slow but steady draining of vitality against the highest and richest possibilities of human endeavour and achievement. I have been constrained by the limits of a paper such as this to concentrate on a few chosen novels and novellas and highlight the intense involvement with life and the bewildering submission to a nihilistic approach to existence that life and its meaningless experience of pain forced on Mann. In an evaluation of the ironic vision of the writer, as contained in selected works, I have focussed on the most fruitful period of his artistic career, beginning with Buddenbrooks (1901) an achievement that thrust him into literary prominence at the age of 25, and extending to the twilight zone of his life to include The Black Swan, a novella published in 1953, two years before his death.

A direct appreciation of Mann's literary achievement, restricted though it may be to a vintage of his serious works

of fiction (excluding his lighter, humorous novels and his epic exploration of biblical myth in Joseph and his Brothers) may yield a greater insight into the psyche of the artistic consciousness than the avowed beliefs and policies of the public figure. Mann claimed in later years that his 'moral horizons' had outgrown the restrictions laid down by later German romanticism as it found expression in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Wagner. Mann believed that his vision gradually came to incorporate the European democratic religion of humanity.² But the novel that followed not long after in 1947, Doctor Faustus and the novella The Black Swan in 1953 continued to be expressions of the nihilistic approach to life. One cannot escape the persistent nihilistic pattern of Mann's fiction. But at the same time one has to resolve the undeniable humanistic appeal that Mann exercised over generations of readers acclimatized to an atmosphere that bred disillusionment, horror and apathetic surrender to the forces of annihilation. What concerns us here is what lies at the heart of Mann's irony; the capacity to assess both the uncompromising viciousness of life and the magnificent splendour of human experience, endeavour and achievement in the realms of imagination and reason.

In the interests of a fairly comprehensive outlook on the position of Mann within the framework of modern thought and achievement, I have begun my study with a consideration of his relation to the prevailing philosophies of the time, existentialism and nihilism, narrowing my focus of attention to the ironic attitudes these schools of thought adopt in relation to pontifical interpretations of life. Chapter II of this study attempts to delineate the influences in Mann's personal and intellectual development

and the kind of impact this had on his artistic work. In Chapters III and IV, I have concentrated on 2 major novels, Buddenbrooks and The Magic Mountain and 3 novellas, Tonio Kroger, Death in Venice and The Black Swan, analysing them in the light of Mann's ironic vision of life. Chapter V concludes the study, synthesizing the above strands of thought, focussing attention on Mann's overwhelming capacity to stir an awareness of the fecund possibilities of human existence despite his ironic and tragic vision of life.

It may not be amiss here to mention the obvious handicap a student labours under in studying a foreign author without direct access to his works - the ignorance of the language which serves as the vital artistic medium of expression and creation, in this case, German. Language experts have expressed dissatisfaction with existing translations of Mann's works but if the author's genius is so profoundly stirring in mediocre translation it is only an indicator of the glory of the original and, one has perforce, to learn to be content with available reflections of the same.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION : EXISTENTIALISM AND NIHILISM

"Nothing has any meaning".¹

- Nietzsche

Fiction in the 20th century has been involved with the possibilities of capturing the essence of reality. In the process it has transformed itself to the extent of shocking our sensibilities into a new awareness of the meaning and nature of existence and of the genre itself. Mann's work in this context is concerned with probing into the depths of the European experience and by extension, of human existence in the 20th century. Art and the capacity of fiction to reflect and create the meaning of life are part of this overwhelming concern and in the convulsive creative process of expressing himself and his apprehension of life, there lies some amount of cathartic relief, so essential to the sensitive genius. The modern experience is an experience of pain and turmoil and modern art is preoccupied with discovering the means to give meaninglessness, a pattern and form. It is also a subtle form of escape from the anguish of life.

Discussing the quest of modern fiction for increasing symbolic, mythological and timeless validity, John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury compare Mann's use of irony with that of Proust and Joyce.

'In Proust and Joyce and Mann we can see as one of the results of Modernist introversion the

desire for pure form for what E.M. Forster calls in 'Aspects of the Novel', and in all respect 'faking', that making of pattern and wholeness which makes art into an order standing outside and beyond the human muddle, a transcendent object a luminous whole. All three writers embody the desire, all three struggle with it and the result is a profound element of irony presiding in the spirit of modernism. Mann's irony is however the most complete, because the claims of history, of naturalism, of the present are intensely real to him Mann always compromises the metamorphosis that his own art creates; that is the basis of his own irony. But the irony is recurrent in Modernism - an irony that recognizes the chaos and the abyss that underlie and condition artistic perfection. The world of art becomes a strangely dangerous world, a world of perceptions and illusions generated by powers themselves capable of coming under suspicion. And similarly the completeness and coherence of the work of art can be paradoxically no more than an elegant fiction.²

If irony is latently present in the creative process of Mann's fiction, ironically exploring the authenticity of art, it is also an inseparable element of his approach to the subject or theme of his writing. The dictionary defines irony as an attitude of detached awareness of incongruity.³ Irony has been employed over the ages as a tool of satire and mockery, in comedies as a technique of underlining pain and futility or horror in tragedies. Skilled writers have honed the tool to suit various purposes and one needs to ascertain what particular need irony fulfilled for Mann. Firstly, in Mann's fiction irony is not an imposed technique to create any particular effect but an inherent and inextricable element of the dual vision of the author. Mann apprehended life as simultaneously capable of immense

satisfaction and fulfilment in the potential and as sliding irrevocably towards annihilation in the actual. Secondly, it served to distance the author from his subject; a defensive mechanism to extricate himself from the painful involvement with and the incomprehensible compulsion of suffering and death and get on with the day to day business of life. One recognizes in this strain of irony a 20th century symptom, manifested in different forms of art, a total divorce from sentimentality in order to enable one to endure the aching sense of futility and drudgery in life. It would be interesting to note here Author Koestler's remark, as quoted by Hollingdale that 'in Mann's universe, charity is replaced by irony'. Koestler felt that Mann manifested 'symptoms of a bluntness of moral perception, a defect in ethical sensibility', caused by the absence of charitas.⁴ Far from being an indication of moral apathy, Mann's irony grows out of an intense sensitiveness to the lack of moral meaning in human life, to the unbearable anguish of unjustified suffering.

"Irony", said Mann "is the pathos of the middle".⁵ "It is the refusal", elaborates Durrant,⁶ "to see only one side. Originally it may have grown out of his patrician background which viewed human affairs with a condescending smile, it may have taken a bitter or satiric tang from his early addiction to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, but more basically it was the philosopher's resolve to seek impartiality, objectivity and perspective, to check sentiment with intellect and yet to distrust intellect as too ready to remain on the surface

of things.⁶ Entering Mann's world one seems to have gone beyond morality, not into an atmosphere of crass irreverence, but of a higher order of sanctity, if one can call it that - a region in which contradictions and polarities are explored and none is condemned or discarded. What transpires is the establishment of the authenticity of each tenet of the paradox. In effect, the reader is overwhelmed by the felicity with which Mann accommodates the panorama of diverse and opposed schools of thought which jostle for acceptance, in modern intellectual life. In the final analysis, Mann seems to suggest that clear-cut demarcations of good and evil are absurd simplicities..... Life is a conglomeration of the daemonic and the divine with no certainties and any dogma has the right to exist and triumph without rhyme or reason to justify its claim supremacy. This is the paradox of life itself.

One final aspect of irony to be mentioned in relation to Mann is the discrepancy between Mann's avowed shift to a belief in Western democratic outlook on life and the actual drift towards death manifested by the characters of all this great novels and stories. In his later life Thomas Mann said that his 'moral horizon' had broadened during the I World War to include 'the European democratic religion of humanity', whereas previously it had been bounded solely by late German Romanticism, by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Wagner'.⁷ But one wonders if Mann really did succeed in breaking out of the tradition that takes its place in modern philosophy by the term nihilism. But before we attempt to study the nihilistic

influences on Mann we shall try to establish an overall view of the 20th century mind and temper that resulted in the growth of self annihilating and chaotic expressions of thought and art such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Existentialism and Nihilism.

Survival at any cost was the motivating force that drew man from the dregs of the evolutionary cauldron and set him on the road to progress and civilization. He erected signposts of religion, morality, ethics, reason, science and technology to chart his way through the retarding forces of fear and ignorance. But today, the modern man seeks a reason, not to live, but the slightest justification to court death. There is no will or fight left in him, except to stave off life itself.

The beginning of modern apathy and acquiescence to the painful lot of life can probably be traced back to the Enlightenment that dawned over the Western World in the 17th century and reached the glory of high noon in the 19th century, when Reason and Science appeared to be triumphing over all areas of man's activity and poised to abolish poverty, drudgery and unhappiness. But the 19th century also witnessed the processing of an atmosphere in which man felt totally alien from the forces of nature and the demands of the socio-religious and ethical systems with which civilization sought to ensure conformity from the individual members of its society. The 20th century witnessed man's final alienation from the illusory and comforting notions of a benevolent Providence. The conscious individual sought to break out of the padded

cocoon of false faith, to step out into the frightening reality of an existence which had no meaning outside of the individual's awareness of life. The only value possible in such conditions was the authenticity of experience and response.

The dawning of such a realization resulted in traumatic expressions in the various facets of 20th century civilization. In the field of art and philosophy man sought to give vent to his agony and quest for something real in the grotesquely authentic expression of Impressionism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism, Existentialism and Nihilism. The focus in all these forms of creative modes is the individual's personal experience of life which is the only ultimate reality, over the years the individual's passive submission to collective knowledge and norms have given way to man's determination to be responsible only unto himself. Existential and nihilistic literature seeks to provide no palliatives, no soothing solutions. In fact the ultimate value it does provide is man's triumph over forces and elements over which he has no control by transcending fear of death itself.

In the world of the existentialist, there is only one sacred entity, life itself. To experience it in all its fullness and mystery and vagaries is the only mystic obligation recognized by modern man. The whole suffocating blanket of given thought and ideas is thrown overboard — religious and moral judgements that have had a strangehold on man's receptivity to life — these have

been replaced by a fresh and unhampered awareness of the joy and pain of existence; to submit wholeheartedly to life and thereby to allow death no triumph, that is the basis of the existentialist's freedom, a freedom that echoes with loneliness and anguish and fear; but which he will not exchange for the meaningless comfort of illusory dogmatic beliefs. To respond to life without the blinkers of preconceived notions, or assumptions laid down by society or religion, to let nothing come between one's awareness and life, to savour the actuality of existence at first hand; these are the norms of the existentialist as he struggles for a foothold on the slithering quicksands of modern knowledge and cynicism.

Simone de Beauvoir speaks of celebrations and festivals as being very important in her life:

abrupt

"For me the fête is primarily an impassioned apotheosis of the present in the face of anxiety concerning the future. When the days pass smoothly and happily, there is no stimulus towards a fête. But if hope is rekindled in the very midst of despair, if you regain your hold upon the world and the times - then the magic moment catches fire, and you can plunge into it and be consumed with it - that is a fête". The distant horizon is uncertain, still, half threatening, half promising; that is why every fête has a quality of pathos about it. It faces up to this uncertainty, and doesn't dodge the issue. Nocturnal fêtes in honour of young love, gigantic fêtes on a day of victory: beneath the lively wine - flown raptures there is always a faint taste of death, but for one resplendent moment death is reduced to nothingness. Dangers still threaten us; after the hour of our

deliverance there would still be disillusion aplenty in store for us, endless sorrows, and months perhaps years of uncertainty and chaos. We did not deceive ourselves about this. We merely wanted to snatch a few nuggets of sheer joy from this confusion and intoxicate ourselves with their brightness, in defiance of the disenchantments that lay ahead.⁸

Beauvoir is expressing the creed behind the existentialist's determination to savour every moment of existence despite the shadow of death.

Kierkegaard the Danish philosopher, with whose thought existentialism may be said to have had its beginnings stressed that:

"Man had lost his subjectivity, his own concrete life, and consequently, has virtually ceased to exist. Kierkegaard found that the chief problems were..... human: specifically, how was the individual to come to terms with existence in a technological civilization? As a result of man's new role, his doubt and scepticism have turned inward and led to despair; man has lost most of his familiar props, and those that still remain prove insufficient. Within this frame of reference, the individual - unsupported by tradition, custom, or belief - must make his own decision. Even the traditional baptism which the Church provides at birth is useless, for that decision comes from without, who while the chief, and sole truth is subjective. It is only man and his consciousness which matter and all philosophy must be in terms of man's existence, that is existential.....If the individual accepts Kierkegaard's challenge

and seeks his religious centre within himself, then he begins his fierce encounter with nothingness. Man floats in a foreign world in which human existence is feeble, contradictory, and contingent upon an infinity of other forces. Nothing can be certain except the individual's certainty of his own response. All we can hope to know is that he is superior to any universal force, and to recognize that the universal or collective force can never understand the individual. He must be alone: for in his very aloneness is his salvation. As Nietzsche said, if all the gods are dead, then man must be mature enough to proceed from there".

alone?

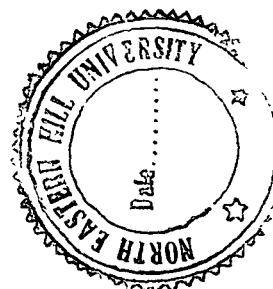
If Existentialism concerns itself with making the best out of a terrible situation, without seeking recourse to legends and dreams to ease the pain, Nihilism is totally sick of life and its unending cycle of frustration. Nihilism according to the encyclopedia¹⁰ was a movement of ideas in Russia during the middle of the 1800s. The name comes from the Latin word 'nihil' which means nothing. It first appeared in Ivan Turgenev's novel Fathers and Sons. One character in the book says, "A nihilist is a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle may be enshrined in".¹¹ While the Existentialist still seeks to create meaning out of his own existence the nihilist turns away from life and is enamoured of death. The existentialist's attempt to carve a pattern out his existence are rudely shattered by the crâss dictates of a hypocritical society and eventually by death and in the process the ephemeral and intense beauty of sheer individual existence, independent

of social codes and pseudo-sentiments is painfully felt. (Meurseult's evocation of the wonder and joy of life on receiving the death sentence). The fearless acceptance of the inevitable is what finally brings about the existentialist's triumph over death. The nihilist's willing submission, even pursuit of death is apparent when we contrast the reactions of Camus' hero with that of the Buddenbrooks, Hans and Peeperkorn and other characters of The Magic Mountain. The existentialist hungers for authenticity in life, whereas the nihilist is fatigued. In the most refined and exquisite manifestations of human life and endeavour the nihilist seeks the closest kinship with death. Music in nihilist literature, is the closest approach to death and Mann's heroes are intoxicatingly involved with the charms of music, Hans in The Magic Mountain, and Hanno, in The Buddenbrooks. The existentialist is quietly but steadily engaged with life but the nihilist turns his back on it yearning for the stillness of death, the cessation of conflict. The existentialist is forever attempting to define existence in keeping with the highest dictates of reason and aspiration. In this attempt he is forever doomed to failure as a study of K in The Castle and Meruselut in The Outsider, will prove.

Until we reach the modern age we find that the contradiction between man's yearning for order and meaning and existing chaotic, purposeless reality, led to the individual's attempt to impose his will and reason on his own life and the milieu, or to his submission to a belief in an all-knowing Providence which made a great

pattern out of all the incomprehensible pain and confusion attending Man's endeavour to lead a meaningful life. But the nihilist has no such illusions regarding the power of Reason to finally bring about an ordered life or the existence of an Almighty Will guiding the destiny of man and the universe. In fact the nihilist has given up the attempt to wrest with life and its absurdities; he has turned his back on all the pain and fury — lured on by the soothing deadly charm of death and its ministrel, music. Physical activity is almost absent in Mann's fictional world; his heroes are armchair philosophers engaged in intense mental and verbal exercises, preoccupied with the intricacies of many imagined and real illnesses. Music is an irresistible field of indulgence; The existential outlook pits the individual against society. In Mann's world we seem to be witnessing a gay communal, funeral procession. It's not so much the interior world of the individual as the common plight of humanity in a bizarrely indifferent universe that is portrayed in Mann's novels. Both the existentialist and the nihilist are overwhelmed and frustrated by the meaninglessness and absurdity of human existence, but for all that existence is not arid for either. On the contrary it is the richness and fecund possibilities of life that bring tears to the eyes when juxtaposed with the nigh-malignant twists that life eventually does take. Man's capacity to render meaning, beauty and harmony is totally annihilated by the overpowering absurdity of human existence. This is the fulcrum of the ironic vision of Thomas Mann. The irony in existentialism lies in the continual rebuff of the

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individual's attempts to live happily, as if some weird malignant Will governed the Universe. In Nihilism one finds irony in the gradual realisation of a slowly but steadily debilitating vitality, in circumstances of the highest and richest evocations of life. This is what is mourned in Mann's tragedies.

Existential and Nihilist literature cannot be dismissed as stray cases of despair — they constitute a genuine body of expression of a genuine form of existence. Continental literature may be predominantly existential in the last 100 years or so, but both English and American literature in the same period have spoken of a universally felt anguish.....one cannot but call to mind the preoccupation with guilt and individual sin, with death and despair in Hawthorne, Dickinson, Faulkner and Hemingway, Hardy's anguished commentary on human aspirations and sufferings, the psychological novel's attempt to identify reality in the consciousness of its characters by novelists like Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and find in all these works of a common (era) the same horrified awareness of meaningless existence and death which was the impulse behind the existential and nihilistic literature of 20th century Europe.

CHAPTER II

MANN : LIFE AND FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

"I stand between two worlds. I am at home
in neither and I suffer in consequence".

Thomas Mann was born on June 6, 1875, in Lübeck, North Germany. He hailed from a family of merchants and senators but his mother was from the south and artistically inclined. Thomas grew up with a persistent struggle within himself between his bourgeoisie inheritance and his artistic heritage. The constant strife between these conflicting tendencies bred in him a sense of insecure identity and an ardent desire to belong to what he perceived as the normal, healthy crass majority of society. He was not an academic scholar in the formal sense of the term, losing his interest in studies at fifteen, when he lost his father and gave up institutional schooling. But the amount of learning he did imbibe over the years was astounding and he was the recipient of many academic honours. A tendency to brood and a keenly felt sense of isolation led him to flirt with notions of death by the time he was twenty. By then he had also become acquainted with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and their interpretation of life laid the basis for Mann's own reading of modern existence. Wagner and Goethe are two other figures who contributed to Mann's development. But Goethe stood in direct opposition to the cynical pessimism of the other

three and Mann continued to have an ambiguous relationship with this stalwart defender of the positive values and significance of life. Goethe took a long time to make any serious dent in the hold that Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had on Mann. As an artist with its co-existent strain of oversensitivity, Mann's family suffered the burden of being unable to cope with life. Two of his sisters and a brother committed suicide and so did his son. It appears that creativity helped Mann and his brother Heinrich come to terms with life.

In 1905, Mann married Katja Pringsheim, the only daughter of rich Jew, a mathematician and patron of arts, who made piano transcriptions of Wagner's operas and whose palace was a gathering place of Munich artists and intellectuals. His marriage was a delightfully happy affair and he took great pride and joy in the four children that were born of it. Thomas Mann had achieved literary fame and popularity at the age of 25, with the publication of Buddenbrooks in 1901. It dealt with the themes that engrossed Mann throughout his literary career — the artist as an alien in a bourgeoisie society, the increasing decadence in a family with succeeding generations, its gradual succumbing to the death-wish and the rise of a new ethos devoid of belief or morality and the consequent horrifying sense of meaningless existence. These themes took various forms in the novels and novellas that followed, prominent among them being Tristan, 1902, Tonio Kroger, 1903, Death in Venice, 1911, The Magic Mountain, 1924, Joseph and His Brothers,

1933-43, Doctor Faustus, 1947 and The Black Swan, 1953. Mann touched on a vein of humorous irony in The Confessions of Felix Krull Pt I, 1911 Pts II & III, 1954. It made a parodic study of genius, specifically of Goethe, in Lotte in Weimar, 1939. Mann was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1929. He was riding the crest of fame. But hard times were round the corner.

Mann was living in a time of great political happenings. He perceived in rising Nazi power the possibility of great calamity to Germany, but he continued to hope that saner influences would prevail and prevent the Nazis from coming to power. He publicly stood by German policies, though painfully aware of his novelist brother Heinrich's opposition to their country's aggressive nationalism. Mann's hopes were belied when in 1933 Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Rabid Nazi propaganda led him to denounce Hitler's brutal pursuit of racial purity and superiority. Sensitive to his Jewish wife's predicament, he decided to seek assylum outside Germany. America and several European countries vied with one another to honour and provide a home to this pre-eminent man of letters, but Mann was restless and moved from place to place until the end of the great war saw him finally settle down in Switzerland.

Until he died in 1955, Mann made several pronouncements on his rejection of Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche and his faith in democratic humanism. As early as 1900 he wrote to Heinrich, "There is still something left in me which is not mere irony, something

which is straightforward, warm and good. No, not everything in me has been distorted, corroded, laid waste by cursed literature. Literature is death and I shall never understand how one can be enslaved by it without hating it".²

The struggle to liberate himself from the stranglehold of Nitzchean cynicism and Schopenhauerian pessimism was not easy nor entirely successful. To witness the holocaust of the II World War and the heinous crimes it begot against basic human values, to see his philosophic mentors' predictions come true and to feel in his own life, the seeds of decay take root and grow to yield fruits of despair and irony, and despite this to yearn for freedom and wholesome life: this was the basis of irony in Mann's personal life. The experience of anguish intermingled with gleanings of joy which led to dogged statements of affirmative belief in values of humanism which are scarcely borne out by the great literary masterpieces which he wrung out of his soul. But before we proceed to analyse the texts of Mann's fiction it will be in order to delineate the main tenets propagated by the four important figures who made such an impact on the vision of Thomas Mann.

Schopenhauer (1788-1860) had in his epoch-making work 'The World as Will and Idea' advanced the proposition that man is essentially driven and governed by the life force, the will which is the sum of the unconscious strivings within each of us. Schopenhauer perceived Reality as:

that Will, in the interests of which Knowledge arises, that Will which is a blind striving in whose service the slavish intellect constructs a practical and illusive world. It is a will toward no rational end. It is a blind will to live. In human beings it cloaks itself with sophistries of intellect and rational excuses. In brute and unconscious nature it operated with naked blindness.....Schopenhauer finds two grounds for pessimism in the fact that the will is doomed to privation. It is striving because it is unfulfilled. Secondly where it does find fulfilment that fulfilment turns out to be illusion.....Half of life is the stinging pain of frustration, the other half the dull pain of boredom. Schopenhauer is the apotheosis of romantic irony expressing a romantic disgust over a world that does not meet the needs of the assertive will and the irony of that will which finds the emptiness of what it thought it needed.³

In view of the impossibility of ever satisfying the strivings of the will, Schopenhauer advised men to disassociate themselves as much as possible from the striving of the will. In the quiet contemplation of natural and artistic beauty, Schopenhauer advocated an important way of stilling the incessant drives of the will. The plastic and the literary arts hold up to the imagination and contemplation the eternal essence of nature, life and man, and thereby delivers us from involvement with the petty irritations and frustrations that arise from our dealings with individuals in our day-to-day life. But music, says Schopenhauer is an expression of the will itself, revealing the will with immediacy and urgency to itself.⁴

In Schopenhauer's system of thought, aesthetic experience is a temporary refuge from the cycle of

anguish and frustration. Lasting relief is afforded by ascetic attainments whereby the will is denied and its imperious blind urgings subdued. At a certain point Mann departed from Schopenhauer's line of thought to incorporate Nietzsche's views on life and death.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) has contributed so much to modern thought that one cannot dismiss him with neat formulations of his philosophy. Daringly provocative and different in thought he aroused intense admiration or dislike. His postulate that God is dead, was made in the 1880s in Thus Spake Zarathustra. And to him can be traced the origins of existential thought which is the basis of modern philosophy. Our interest in Nietzsche is confined to his theory about Greek civilization and his concept of the will to power as the ^{root} of all human endeavour.

Nietzsche's intention in The Birth of Tragedy (his first book) was to explain the origin of art in the imposition of form and measure (Apollo) upon the primitive emotions (Dionysus): the outcome is a species of 'illusion' masking the terrible face of reality, if the power of Dionysus over a people is very great, if, that is to say they are a ferocious and barbaric people, as Nietzsche asserted the primitive Greeks were- then if they succeeded in controlling him the result will be an art and culture of a very high and beautiful order, since the Appollonian form-giving force will have to have been even more powerful among this people than Dionysus. The closing image of the book is that of a visitor to the Greek world declaring the obviousness of this fact, and then being reminded by Aeschylus that the

message of tragedy is that both gods, Dionysus and Apollo are required for the production of this civilized beauty.⁶

Later Nietzsche solved the problem of science for himself on the basis of his understanding of the Greeks. 'What he asks 'is the meaning of all science ?' What is the end - or worse, what is the beginning - of all science ? Is the spirit of science perhaps no more than fear in the face of pessimism and flight from it ? A subtle means of self-defence against - the truth ?⁵ Nietzsche worked out that Socrates made his bizarre equation that reason - virtue happiness out of sheer fear of being overwhelmed by his passions and therefore felt an overpowering need to assert the power of rationality to an exceptional degree. Man the world over, swamped by the same fear, accepted Socrates' formula because like Socrates they sought to 'counter' the dark desires by producing a permanent daylight — the daylight of reason.⁷

Human behaviour according to Nietzsche is basically motivated by the 'will to power'. This is the desire to gain not just ascendancy over others but also control over one's own unruly passions. Contrary to Schopenhauer's theory that the artist creates by effacing the will Nietzsche asserted that the artist, philosopher and saint are all exalted types of humanity because they 'embody a very strong and very highly spiritualized form of the will to power'.⁸ Thus the ascetic and the artist who exercise discipline over themselves, in Nietzsche's scale of values, possess a higher form of power than those

who seek to tyrannise others by virtue of their physical prowess. Nietzsche's ideal person is the total man who learns to control his rich, emotional and passionate power and channelise it into creative areas. In his later works Nietzsche discarded the dichotomy between the Dionysian and the Appolonian:

Subsequently, however, Nietzsche came to think this dualistic idea unwarrantable: the basic drives must somehow bestow form on themselves. From this there arose his conception of sublimation or self-overcoming; and when he had reduced the remaining multiplicity of drives to a single drive, which he called will to power, he was left with the monistic conception of sublimated will to power as the form-giving force; to this phenomenon he then transferred the name Dionysus, who is now the former Dionysus plus the former Apollo. In Nietzsche's later works, the 'Dionysian man' is the self-overcome' man or 'superman'; and his description of Goethe in fact defines what he means by 'superman' more concisely than any other passage in his works.⁹

Nietzsche has suffered much unwarranted criticism - spurious editing and interpolations have led to his being depicted as a waspish prophet of doom and annihilation. He did foresee the destruction of all values but it was a prelude to new values, based not on the transcendental but on the human, the only kind of reality he acknowledged and from this could be created a new society of new beings capable of happiness and fulfilment.

Mann found it convenient to marry Nietzsche's theory that any form of abnegation of will power results in

decadence to Schopenhauer's conception of the artist's creative powers as the result of the temporary negation of the will. Mann therefore embodies the artist as a figure of decadence. Out of this conception flows the whole stream of nihilistic matter that informs Mann's fiction.

Decadence is the ethos of Mann's world: the decadence that Nietzsche described as unavoidable before the generation of new values. Lingering strains of music, notably Wagner's, soothes its death - enamoured inhabitants. Mann associates music with lothargy, self-indulgent sexuality and death, and uses it as 'the dialectical opposite of rationality, clarity, outgoingness, life.¹⁰ Wagner's compositions haunt the highly enlightened and highstrung characters of the enclosed microcosm of Mann's fiction. Wagner depicted characters who were self-engrossed embodying a closed system within which emotions can enjoy only themselves. Wagner's interpretation of life and man was confirmed by his reading of Schopenhauer. In his works 'Nibelung's Ring', Tristan and Isolde and Parsifal, Wagner gave dramatic form to

"the Schopenhauerean conception of the ethically reprehensible nature of the will and its 'redemption' from existence through self-knowledge. In Tristan and Parsifal the will appears at what Schopenhauer had called its most intense focal point, namely sexuality, the drive through which the will most powerfully asserts its continued existence. In these two operas, the central characters are led via the torments of sexuality to the

knowledge that the will is the source of all and that death their own death (Tristan) or the death of desire (Parsifal) which is metaphysically the same thing - is the only positive good because it is the only thing which effectively puts an end to the otherwise enduring ethical evil. In The Ring Wotan represents 'Will' and the drama lies in his slow acquisition of self-knowledge to the point at which he 'wills' his own annihilation, i.e., ceases to will.¹¹

The heroes of Mann's books are also self-regarding: incapable of and uninterested in any outward action or relationship. Intellectually developed and highly accomplished as they are, their artistic refinement is excessive to the point of being unnaturally removed from the earthy realities of existence. But the superabundance of intellectual and artistic achievement is the direct consequence of ebbing physical vitality, the miasmatic resultant of a draining life-force, whose overpowering surge to ensure identity and existence had been the basis of a healthy and normal life in times gone by. Nietzsche reads in the decadence of the modern world a steady withering of the will to live and the will to power. The nihilistic movement is merely the expression of a physiological decadence, says Nietzsche in The Will to Power.¹²

With the loss of Christian faith, man had to admit that the 'Higher World', the metaphysical derives from the human which is to say that the values based on anything but the human, will eventually disvalue themselves. In the 19th century Nietzsche foresaw that the idealism of mankind was on the verge of turning suddenly into

nihilism, into the belief in the absolute valuelessness i.e., meaninglessness, in the 19th century. It is this collapse of values and the consequent chaos that we are witnessing in our own times.

The pathos of nihilism - the feeling that there is no truth and no morality, and that life might as well end as go on - became a public fact in Germany during the early years of the present century. Nietzsche had written that 'man would rather will nothingness than not will' (On the Genealogy of Morals, Pt III section 25) and that a people of strong will to power deprived of satisfaction will will its own destruction rather than refrain from the exercise of the will and that was what by all appearances, it was coming to in Germany. The Reich - the 'German Empire' which was not merely an area of land and its populace but an empire of the spirit went down to moral and physical destruction unparalleled in the modern world, because it wanted to, because there was nothing left for it but to want to. Throughout this century Germany has wanted to be destroyed. This is the meaning of Hitler a nation's secret will to perish made flesh: the nihilistic pathos incarnate.¹³

If this is the heritage that gave impetus to Mann's writing, gave ironic flavour to his outlook on life, then one cannot be surprised by the fact that

he writes about European men and women in a condition of physical decay and mental confusion and moral uncertainty. He depicts the decline of a family and the neurotic isolation of exceptional individuals within the normal world, he describes incest in Berlin (The Blood of Walsungs) and death in Venice and life in a Swiss sanatorium; he paints a corrupt and

darkened continent in which the only light is the light of genius and then wants us to see that this light is only phosphorescence of corruption. He is obsessed with illness..... Thomas Mann's subject is a detailed description of European nihilism.....the breakdown of European civilization as predicted and diagnosed..... by Nietzsche.¹⁴

The fourth figure which looms in the background of Mann's intellectual life is Johann Wolfgang van Goethe (1749-1832). He precedes Schopenhauer and Nietzsche chronologically. But it is a matter of debate whether Mann proceeded from the progressive humanism of Goethe to plumb the dark night of nihilism or whether he climbed out of the abyss of a meaningless universe to achieve the kind of equilibrium and positive serenity that the Weimar philosopher preached. "I am no Goethe" said Mann in an address on the German Republic, "yet a little afar off, somehow or other I belong to his family".¹⁵

Goethe, in his own time and in ours stands for ideas of emancipation, of human development and harmony. Advocating restraint of emotions and of excesses of judgement, he called for a positive response to life; Mann reports how the words "deserving life" which Goethe used in a poem impressed him at first reading. The concept gave him a strange sensation of being paradoxical and imposingly bold at the same time. With sarcasm turned against his own past, he says, "Here life was considered the highest achievement and to deserve it such a great distinction that it should be a protection against annihilation; that was something to confuse my youthful

conception of superiority, which rather included a refined unfitness and unsuitability for this earthly life".¹⁶

A study of Mann's attitude to Goethe as seen in *Lotte in Weimar* reveals a peculiarly strong desire in Mann to deride Goethe, to strip him of his deistic aura and to reduce him to something of a leering sly and autocratic genius. Goethe takes a more complicated presence in one great work, namely Joseph and his Brothers which took 16 years in the making. In this modern analysis of a Biblical story, Mann appears to be in quest for a myth relevant to a century of people who wander like cursed Cain without a home or destination. Goethe's notion of bildungsroman "the shaping of the human being through the powerful influence of admiration and love, the childlike identification with a father image elected out of profound affinity"¹⁷ seems to be at work here. How exactly did Mann attempt to delineate the great master of humanist thought? Basically he infuses in him the idea of unity, totality - "to be all-sided, to experience and contain everything He refuses to take sides against one part of life on behalf of another part, he wants to accept, to refer, relate, to the whole, to shame the partisans of every principle by rounding it out and the other side too". Mann's Goethe signifies that love can encompass terror, that genius is the other side of a coin that spells criminal. Mann's Goethe is morally ambiguous, ironically detached, against fanatic nationalism and is 'an astonishing combination of of versatility and the highest excellence'.¹⁸ This

picture of Goethe tallies, if not with the historical Goethe, with Nietzsche's evocation of the great poet and humanist;

Goethe conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being, skilled in all physical accomplishments, who keeping himself in check having reverence for himself dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for this freedom; a man of tolerance, not out of weakness but out of strength, because he knows how to employ to his advantage what would destroy an average nature; a man to whom nothing is forbidden, except it be weakness, whether that weakness be called vice or virtue."19

In humanising Goethe, Mann provided an acceptable myth for modern man in Nietzsche's image of the superman.

Joseph and his Brothers is a happy departure to airier regions of hope but Mann came back to negotiate with subterranean forces of darkness and agony in perhaps one of the most painful creative works of our century, Doctor Faustus. He is harping on a Goethean theme but with what anguish of soul ! Goethe's blithe and facile idealism in the face of the tortured existence of the twentieth century - did Mann find ways to reconcile these extremes ? Did Mann discover the meaning of existence or at least the basis for hope and tranquility in life ? Did he discard his ironic attitude to life ? the armour of irony which protects him from pain, perhaps from life itself ? Herein is the basis for the enigma of Mann's irony: Mann's irony is not the result of detachment, it is

the irony of involvement: Mann's depiction of life is not the view from the ivory tower, nor the theorising of the recondite philosopher; it is born of total submersion in the ecstasies, bitterness and enui of life. Mann is conscious of the multifarious implications of irony. In The Magic Mountain, Sèttebrini, the voice of reason warns the novice Hans Castrop:

Where irony is not a direct and classic device of oratory, not for a moment equivacal to a healthy mind it makes for depravity, it becomes a drawback to civilization, an unclean traffic with the forces of reaction, vice and materialism.²⁰

We have attempted to define and account for Mann's outlook on life. In the following pages we shall study the creative forms Mann gave to his ironic vision.

CHAPTER III

WORKS : BUDDENBROOKS, TONIO KROGER,
DEATH IN VENICE

"The nihilistic movement is merely the expression of a physiological decadence".¹

- Nietzsche

Buddenbrooks is a semi-autobiographical evocation of the life of upper class families in the latter half of the 19th century, committed to increasing prosperity through hard and careful management of finances. Behind the gay swirls of lovely women at sumptuous banquets, the scrupulous regard to social niceties and etiquette, the graceful manners and affectionate family gatherings there are arguments about domestic finances, about arranged marriages of convenience, heartbreaking farewells between lovers separated by rank and class, heated quarrels between the artist and the banker behind the facade of aristocratic nonchalance there are qualms about choices made, about decisions to be taken.

Johann Buddenbrook is the existing patriarch of the clan. He lives with his son Consul Jean Buddenbrook and his wife in a lovely palatial home. The Consul has two sons and two daughters. Tom and Christian are inclined to business and the theatre respectively. Tony is vivacious and attractive while Clara the youngest is a serious pious girl and her role is important only to

the extent that it affects the rest of the family. Johann Buddenbrook has amassed a huge capital and is proud of having stabilized enough wealth and reputation to fear no rivalry. Hearty and outspoken, he has tremendous faith in his second son, Jean. Gotthold is his first born, from an earlier marriage and has earned his father's displeasure by marrying against his express wishes into a middle class family. He is constantly badgered by his son for a bigger settlement than the one agreed upon soon after his marriage. Jean is inclined to support his father against the increasing demands of his step-brother but delicacy advises restraint.

Consul Jean Buddenbrook is religious and principled. In delineating Jean, Mann seems to be having a dig at the religious fervour of the calculating businessman who thinks it advisable to keep the Higher Authorities in good humour lest they thwart earthly plans for prosperity and profit. Jean is a fervent Christian but a shrewd businessman and there is nothing that he will not sacrifice at the altar of the firm's welfare. The chronicle Diary is a highly regarded record of the family's devotion to the firm and it is potent enough to clinch matters in Tony's mind and make her determined to give up the man she loves and marry the man her parents believe she should, even though she finds him extremely repulsive.

Mann's saga of the Buddenbrook clan begins in an atmosphere of rich family ties, friendly community gatherings, of strongly maintained traditions and loyalties. But the canker of decay has begun to make itself felt in the

lives of individual characters. Christian the younger son, is given to digestive disorders and dental problems, which in Mann is a sure sign of declining vitality. He has a marked inclination for the theatre. Jean Buddenbrook, despite his strong advocacy of the family motto 'Attend with zeal to thy business by day but do none that will hinder thee from sleep at night',² and his Christian piety is not above lying to Grunlich about the actual sum of family dowry. Wealth is important enough to justify a loveless marriage in the case of Tony and Thomas. Uncle Gotthold and Christian go ahead with their unapproved matches but nothing but misery comes of that too. Neither Thomas's practical industry nor Christian's profligate indulgences lead to happiness.

In the conflict between Christian and Thomas, Mann is using a theme that he will repeat in many of his works: namely 'the conflict between bourgeois and artist, the irreconcilability of the artist and his bourgeois environment',³ a conflict which will find further elaboration in the history of Hanno, who will embody Mann's interpretation of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche : that the artist represents decadence, in so far as art is the result of self-abnegation of will (Schopenhauer) and that weakness of will is the mark of decreasing vitality (Nietzsche).⁴ The nihilistic impress is patently obvious. The whole novel in fact is an elaboration of Mann's version of Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean philosophy.

The Buddenbrook history unfolds to reveal Tom's marriage to the beautiful Gerda. Her silent brooding

nature and musical inclinations add to her ethereal loveliness. She brings in a dowry that increases the Buddenbrook coffers and prestige: all in all the kind of match a Buddenbrook scion should make. Like Tony, Thomas gives up love to stand true to the interests of the firm. But is Gerda the kind of woman who will bear sturdy offspring to continue the Buddenbrook lineage? Does Thomas feel a twinge of premonition when he describes her to Tony thus:

She is a wonderful creature: there are few like her in the world. She is nothing like you Tony to be sure. You are simpler, and more natural too. My lady sister is simply more temperamental', he continued, suddenly taking a lighter tone. 'Oh Gerda has temperament too - her playing shows that; but she can sometimes be a little cold. In short she is not to be measured by the ordinary standards. She is an artist, an individual a puzzling, fascinating creature.⁵

Mann's sense of irony is surely at play when he follows up this conversation between brother and sister to describe the silent entry of Gerda in the twilight dimness

The corridor opened and there stood before them in the twilight, in a pleated pique house frock, white as snow a slender figure. The heavy dark-red hair framed her white face, and blue shadows lay about her close-set brown eyes. It was Gerda, mother of future Buddenbrooks.⁶

The second half of the novel is a journey through the twilight zone of disintegration. Christian has grown into a self-preoccupied hypochondriac with zest only for the arts.

Tom cannot abide him and in the interests of the family and firm he sends him away to enter into business partnership with a firm in another city. One cannot help recalling Consul Jean's sustained attempts to conciliate his wayward step brother Gotthold and his success in keeping him in control without compromising on the firm's welfare. We recall Jean's fervent plea to his father:

This bitter feud with my own brother, with your eldest son, is like a hidden crack in the building we have erected. A family should be united, Father. It must keep together. "A house divided against itself will fall".⁷

Thomas' aversion to Christian is an ironic expression of his fear of himself. While discussing Christian's morbid self-preoccupation with imagined and real ailments, Thomas tells Tony

I have thought a great deal about this curious and useless self-preoccupation, because I had once an inclination to it myself. But I observed that it made me unsteady, hare-brained and incapable - and control, equilibrium, is at least for me the important thing. There will always be men who are justified in this interest in themselves, this detailed observation of their own emotions: poets who can express with clarity and beauty their privileged inner life, and thereby enrich the emotional world of other people. But the likes of us are simple merchants, my child; our self-observation are decidedly inconsiderable. We can sometimes go so far as to say that the sound of orchestra instruments gives us unspeakable pleasure, and that we sometimes do not dare try to swallow - but it would be much better, deuce

take it, if we sat down and accomplished something, as our fathers did before us.⁸

Thomas is expressing the dictates of Reason, much as Settembrini will do in The Magic Mountain. The clarion call to duty and action is the voice of active and healthy participation in life but nihilists would have it that it is also the voice of fear in the face of the unavoidable desolation of reality.⁹ Tom himself ultimately gives in to finicky concern with his outer appearance as decreasing vitality snaps at the exuberance of his practical attitude to life.

Buddenbrooks may conform to a nihilistic pattern of life but one must account for Mann's immense power to recreate the pulsating immediacy of life with a feeling and love that is not quite in accordance with the cynical nihilists's outlook on life. Several scenes come to mind: Hanno's impatient anticipation of his vacation and his feelings as it gradually dwindles in the inexorable flurry of Time, the celebration of the firm's centenary year with the reverent insight it provides into the different aspects of such a function, focussing on people and events alike with the humane, though ironical viewpoint which comes close to compassion, though that is a term hardly thought of in relation to Thomas Mann. Mann's description of particular episodes are Dickensian in its capacity to delineate humour while capturing the essential mood of a given situation or the essence of a character. Consider for example this description of Tony's second suitor Permaneder. Tony's disastrous marriage with Grunlich has

ended in divorce. Her large dowry disappeared in the sea of debts that had brought bankruptcy on her husband. Tony is very keen to enter into a second marriage - to remove the blot that her divorce has placed on the family reputation and of course to become a person of importance in her own right with a life of her own. She has only her beauty and vivacious charm to draw another suitor - no second dowry to speak of. Holidaying in Munich with her friend she meets a bachelor brewer, a hearty, homely man of modest means, but he is her best bet to the matrimonial status. She returns home to wait expectantly for her admirer. Mann describes his first meeting with Frau Consul, Tony's mother with a tongue-in-cheek humour. Permaneder has just sent in his card to the lady of the house.

On the card was printed : 'X. Noppe and Company'. The 'X. Noppe' and the 'and' were crossed out with a lead pencil, so that only the 'Company' was left. 'Oh, Frau Consul', said the maid, 'there's a gentleman, but he doesn't speak German, and he do' go on so -' 'Ask the gentleman in', said the Frau Consul; for she understood now that it was the company who desired admittance. The maid went. Then the glass door was opened again to let in a stocky figure, who remained in the shadowy background of the room for a moment and said with a drawling pronunciation something that seemed as if it might have been; 'I have the honour -' 'Good morning', said the Frau Consul. 'Will you not come in ?' And she supported herself on the sofa-cushion and rose a little; for she did not know yet whether she ought to rise all the way or not. 'I take the liberty', replied the gentleman in a pleasant sing-song; while he bowed in the

politest manner, and took two steps forward. Then he stood still again and looked around as if searching for something - perhaps for a place to put his hat and stick, for he had brought both - the stick being a horn crutch with the top shaped like a claw and a good foot and a half long - into the room with him.

He was a man of forty years. Short-legged and chubby, he wore a wide-open coat of brown frieze and a light flowered waistcoat which covered the gentle protuberant curve of his stomach and supported a gold-watch chain with a whole bouquet of charms made of horn, bone, silver, and coral. His trousers were of an indefinite grey-green colour and too short. The material must have been extraordinarily stiff, for the edges stood out in a circle around the legs of his short broad boots. He had a bullet head, untidy hair, and a stubby nose and the light blond curly moustache drooping over his mouth made him look like a walrus.¹⁰

Mann continues in the same vein to bring out the salient features of the character and situation.

The purpose of this rendering in this study is to emphasize Mann's affinity with life, its quirks, its humours. What is derived from the above reading is Mann's affectionate engagement with life. The tone of the above description is not the bitter detachment of the nihilist who had given up all attempts to draw pleasure from life. The detached tone is to aid better perception - there is no cynical derision here - the humorous element is held up to ridicule but in harmless laughter. The whole content of the novel flows towards a nihilistic finale

but life itself is the most potent character of the novel, not death. The ability to live is dwindling, this is the general malaise of the 20th century. But at no point is life condemned. Life refuses to be compartmentalized and categorized, to fall into set formulae - but that is its irresistible element. We fail to measure up to it - stricken by a malady that draws us into the quicksands of self-indulgent death. That is Mann's diagnosis of the human situation.

Tony's marriage proves luckless : neither is Permaneder awe-struck nor inspired by the Buddenbrook ideals of industry and dignity, which was what she had hoped for, nor is he overtly concerned with Tony's idea of happiness. A baby girl that is born of their union does not survive and Tony suffers in the alien atmosphere in Munich whose inhabitants are not inclined to accord her the respect that she feels is due to her lineage. When she finds Permaneder paying drunken court to the maid in the house, she gives vent to all her loathing and frustration and returns home to pursue a second divorce. Permaneder is more than willing to grant it, so is he to return the dowry and Tony resumes her solitary position as divorcée dependant in the family. Even in her personal sense of misery, her predominant thoughts are for the family. With heartfelt emotion uncommon to a person so given to feminine vanity, she tells Thomas

'You must go on alone now', she said. There's nothing good to be looked for from Christian, and I am finished, failed, gone to pieces. I can do no more. I am a poor,

useless woman dependent on you all for my living. I could never have dreamed, Tom that I should be no help to you at all. Now you stand quite alone, and upon you it depends to keep up the honour and dignity of the family. May God help you in the task'.¹¹

Thomas Buddenbrook is increasingly becoming conscious of the responsibility lying heavily on his shoulders - he is enterprising, hard-working, upright and popular in his dealings with neighbours, colleagues and family members. He attempts not to compromise on the ideals he inherited from his father, notwithstanding his personal desires. Yet he breaks off with Christian who at the first chance he gets marries a woman of loose morals. The lady, having ensured that all the benefits of marriage accrue to her, promptly has Christian shut up in an assylum. Mann narrates this with the clinical irony which identifies him as nothing else will:

Bad news came of Christian. His marriage seemed not to have improved his health. He had become more and more subject to uncanny delusions and morbid hallucinations, until finally his wife had acted upon the advice of a physician and had him put into an institute. He was unhappy there, and wrote pathetic letters to his relatives, expressive of a fervent desire to leave the establishment where, it seemed, he was none too well treated. But they kept him shut up, and it was probably the best thing for him. It also put his wife in a position to continue her former independent existence without prejudice to her status as a married woman or to the practical advantages accruing from her marriage.¹²

Thomas' ardent dream of seeing the firm multiply its profits and his family name forge ahead remain hampered by inherent liabilities. There are flashes of success but these are too fragile to boost the sagging fortunes of the firm. Against his own better judgement he accepts Tony's advice to buy the Poppenrade farm, exploiting the strained circumstances of the owner and hoping to reap a rich profit when it is harvest time.¹³ But events give an ironic twist to his hopes. The harvest is blighted and the firm suffers a tremendous loss. Thomas finds it increasingly difficult to cope with the challenges of business and is bewildered by his fatigue and loss of interest. A heavy sense of despair and futility begins to bother him.

Hollingdale analyses the cause of the withering Buddenbrook clan as the death of scruple-ridden conscientious family.¹⁴ The Hagenstroms go from strength to strength and what characterizes them most clearly is the total lack of inhibitions or remorse. Expansively built, Herman Hagenstrom is given to good food and easy manners, riding smoothly from success to success. What marks the difference between Herman Hagenstrom and Thomas Buddenbrook is the total absence in Herman of the kind of soul-searching conscientiousness that Thomas habitually gives in to.¹⁵ Buddenbrook's tendency to brood over the moral finesse of his deals signals him as the outsider in the modern success cult which exclusive club demands the unfeeling pursuit of power and prosperity. In that pursuit one would be a fool to waste time

agonizing over who has been trampled underfoot in the rat race. When Tony hears that Herman Hagenstrom is the prospective buyer of the old Buddenbrook home she makes an impassioned appeal to Thomas to shut out all possibility of Hagenstrom presiding over their family abode.¹⁶ But practical necessities compel other decisions and Tony has to accept Hagenstrom as the new owner of their mother's beloved home.

Thomas, in the heyday of his career, had built a vast palatial home, but the maintenance of its loveliness continues to take a heavy toll of his finances and peace of mind. He gradually begins to realize that he is presiding over the decline of the Buddenbrook fortune. He finds himself being over-cautious and timid in his business enterprises and it was in an attempt to rid himself of his sense of self-doubt that he had gambled his chances on the Poppenrade harvest. But the gamble didn't pay off and Thomas finds himself helplessly ineffective - to Combat the sudden but steady decline of his firm's standing. These things begin to weigh heavily on him. He begins to disintegrate physically and mentally, suspecting that he has no will to fight the adversity that dogs his footsteps. Most of the energy that he can summon up is used to maintain with fastidious care, the shine of his outer appearance: he spends hours to ensure that his thinning hair and ageing face are groomed to provide the exterior world with a facade of spruced alertness and clan. His clothes are brushed and pressed to satisfy his increasingly finicky tastes. At forty,

Thomas has become an old man with an intolerable urge to let everything be - to be left alone. He recognizes this as a symptom of old age and with embarrassment seeks to mask its manifestations in himself. The Thomas of the latter half of the novel is a hollow shell of the well-bred businessman, with recourse to a fairly high standard of acting talent that dictates the smiling set of his mouth, a stance that he will drop only in privacy to assume its natural drooping position.¹⁷ One cannot avoid the irony of a man embodying the disintegrating will summoning all his failing resources to prove to the world that he is still in control of his rational faculties and in possession of enough dynamism, to give direction to his life.

Thomas' blighted life still sees possibilities of promising hope in his only son, Hanno. But Hanno has been a sickly babe and has grown into an introverted child, morbidly sensitive to human pain. He shrinks from all the healthy activities that other boys of his age indulge in and is preoccupied to obsessional extremes with music. All attempts by Thomas to wean him from his mother's influence and school him in the practical aspects of business life are futile because Hanno is dutifully attentive and willing to observe his father's advice but his heart is not in it and he cannot adapt himself to the philistine world of profit and loss. Thomas begins to brood over his dreamy son and hope for the future slowly withers.

Comprehension of the nature of his malaise eludes Thomas until he chances upon Schopenhauer and is elated by his diagnosis of modern man's affliction as the increasing debility of the will.

He was filled with a great, surpassing satisfaction. It soothed him to see how a master-mind could lay hold on this strong, cruel mocking thing called life and enforce it and condemn it. His was the gratification of the sufferer who has always had a bad conscience about his sufferings and concealed them from the gaze of a harsh unsympathetic world until suddenly from the hand of an authority he receives as it were justification before the world, this best of all possible worlds which the master-mind scornfully demonstrates to be the worst of all possible ones.¹⁹

A decayed tooth proves to be the cause of Thomas's death. Schopenhauer provides him with the alibi to give in to the death instinct. The nihilist's fascination with death is revealed in Thomas's delirious exposition of the significance of death:

What was Death ? The answer came, not in poor, large-sounding words: he felt it within him, he possessed it. Death was a joy, so great, so deep that it could be dreamed of only in moments of revelation like the present. It was the return from an unspeakably painful wandering, the correction of a grave mistake, the loosening of chains, the opening of doors - it put right again a lamentable mischance.¹⁹

But here we discover that along with the urge for extinction is a deep need to merge with life in a more potent and happy manner. Curiously enough the death enamoured individual is in quest of a fuller richer life:

Have I hoped to live on in my son ?
In a personality yet more feeble, flickering,
and timorous than my own ? Blind childish
folly ! What can my son do for me ? Where
shall I be when I am dead ? Ah it is so
brilliantly clear, so overwhelmingly simple !
I shall be in all those who have ever, do
ever, or ever shall say 'I' - especially
however, in all those who say it must fully,
potently and gladly !

- Somewhere in the world a child is
growing up, strong well, grown, adequate able
to develop its powers, gifted, untroubled,
pure, joyous, relentless, one of those
beings whose glance heightens the joy of
the joyous and drives the unhappy to
despair. He is my son. He is I, myself,
soon, soon; as soon as Death frees me from
the wretched delusion that I am not he as
well as myself.

Have I ever hated life - pure, strong,
relentless life ? Folly and misconception !
I have but hated myself, because I could
not bear it. I love you, I love you all,
you blessed, and soon, soon, I shall cease
to be cut from you all by the narrow bonds
of myself; soon will that in me which loves
you be free and be in and with you, in and
with you all.20

What is envisaged here is some kind of spiritual metamorphosis; disclaiming responsibility and shrugging off the obligation to live in the given present in the given conditions. A form of escapism which at the same time highlights the desirability of a happy active life, which physiological disability makes impossible.

What appears to be wishful thinking on the part of one totally enamoured of death could also be a subconscious attempt to still any remnant of guilt that may nag his conscience. It also adds validity to our contention that death is not the ultimate destination of Mann's fiction: it is total life, life lived befittingly in wholesome, vibrant and splendid fashion - what is bemoaned is the unhappy creature struggling with a decaying will, heavily encumbered by remorse and fears, making him unworthy of life.

Thomas, the fastidiously turned out senator is found dying in dirt and squalour, where he fell after a painful dental operation. His will reveals that he had no designs for a business career as far as Hanno is concerned. The business is liquidated, Gerda sells the lovely home that had become an ironically opulent expression of deteriorating fortunes and Thomas' widow and his heir settle in the country to live in quiet comfort. Hanno's end has been prophesied with pathetic irony early in his life. As a little boy he had found the family chronicle with the names of all the family members, past and present recorded on it. He had ruled a line across the page after his own name. When his father reprimands him for it, the little child stammered 'I thought - I thought - there was nothing else coming'.²¹

Tony, his aunt has great hopes for him. Tony is now an ageing matron, her life bereft of any hope for the future as Erica has been deserted by her husband and lives

with her daughter in her mother's house. She hopes that the family and firm will see happier days, if not as glorious as those she enjoyed as a child, if only Hanno will take up a career that will further the family pride and prestige. But Hanno himself has no such aspirations: life itself is too unwanted a burden to bear. Every moment of normal routine is an anxiety-ridden space of time and the only solace he finds are in theatre and in music. Self-absorbing indulgence in the arts is the only form of existence his nervous system can take. It heightens his desire to languish effortlessly in the arms of death. The ritual of being rudely awakened every morning by the alarm clock is a strain that he attempts to slumber through increasing his sense of guilt in being disloyal to the call of everyday life.²² This call which to the healthy individual ought to be a challenge to meet the new day gradually becomes the cry of life itself which Hanno chooses to ignore. He finds in cholera the escape to the realm of eternal slumber.

Cases of typhoid take the following course:

When the fever is at its height, life calls to the patient, calls out to him as he wanders in his distant dream, and summons him in no uncertain voice. The harsh imperious call reaches the spirit on that remote path that leads into the shadows, the coolness and peace. He hears the call of life, the clear, fresh, mocking summons to return to that distant scene which he had already left so far behind him, and already forgotten. And there may well up in him

something like a feeling of shame for a neglected duty; a sense of renewed energy, courage, and hope; he may recognize a bond existing still between him and that colourful callous existence which he thought he had left so far behind him. Then however far he may have wandered on his distant path, he will turn back - and live. But if he shudders when he hears life's voice, if memory of that vanished scene and the sound of that lusty summons make him shake his head, make him put out his hand to ward off as he flies forward in the way of escape that has opened to him then it is clear that the patient will die.²³

The novel ends with the Buddenbrook women bidding farewell to Gerda who has lost everything and is leaving for Amsterdam to play duets with her old father. Gerda has lost husband and son, but the most bereft personality is not Gerda, but Tony. She has lost her dream, her hope. She who at no juncture of her stormy life has lost faith in the family, in the pride and dignity of the Buddenbrooks, is now reduced to a faltering sense of loss and puposelessness:

God forgive me ! When one begins to doubt - doubt justice and goodness - and everything Life crushes so much in us, it destroys so many of our beliefs - ! A reunion - if that were so -24

Sesemi Weichbrodt, the old hump-backed schoolmistress asserts her faith in a final reunion, a final pattern out of the meaningless chaos of existence,²⁵ but one can hardly equate that with Mann's own convictions. By the end of his

literary career, when he sought to identify his views with those of Goethe, it is more feasible to attribute a positive belief to the author. But in Buddenbrooks, the assertion of belief over the ruins of the family lineage is an ironic statement sufficient to demolish itself by its own hollow testimony. The positive element in Mann is not Christian, it is not based on the hereafter, but existential and humanistic, based on life, this side of the grave.

II Tonio Kroger

Tonio Kroger is a sad lyric in which the artist for once tries to describe himself and the pathos of the artist-nature without irony and as a result falls into self pity.²⁶

Mann seems to have closely identified himself with Tonio Kroger, but irony is not absent from his study of the artist-alien. The irony is focussed closer home and the novella becomes the author's arena for pitting the sensitive genius against society in which the hale and hearty stomp cheerfully and ruthlessly through life unencumbered by the painful knowledge that the artistic Cain has to lumber with in life. The delineation of Tonio Kroger is based on the nihilistic equation between the prodigy and the withering will, criminal inclinations, sickness and warped spirits. Shame stalks

the artist because he has this unwanted gift: the power to see into the nature of things and the urge to give expression and form to his insights. Knowledge of things is the shameful brand on his brow and he squirms with embarrassment he has to endure. What he craves for is a sense of belonging, of normalcy but this is what he has forfeited by the burden of vision and expression. He wanders solitary and marked the only form of ecstacy he can enjoy being the artistic experience.

Tonio Kroger touches directly upon the theme of irony we have been dealing with : the irony we have associated with Thomas Mann; the detached tone he adopts and the contrast between the nihilistic content and the bounteous sense of life that one actually experiences from his works:

If you care too much about what you have to say, if your heart is too much in it you can be pretty sure of making a mess. You get pathetic, wax sentimental something dull and doddering, without roots or outlines, with no sense of humour - something tiresome and banal grows under your hand, and you get nothing out of it but apathy in your audience and disappointment and misery in yourself. For so it isFeeling, warm, heartfelt feeling, is always banal and futile; only the irritations and icy ecstasies of the artist's corrupted nervous system are artistic. The artist must be unhuman, extra-human; he must stand in a queer^o aloof relationship to our humanity; only so is he in a position, I ought to say only so would he be tempted, to represent it, to present it, to portray it to good effect. The very

gift of style and of form and expression, is nothing else than this cool and fastidious attitude towards humanity; you might say there has to be this impoverishment and devastation as a preliminary condition. For sound natural feeling, say what you like has no taste. It is all up with the artist as soon as he becomes a man and begins to feel.²⁷

The above section explicates the nature of Mann's own use of irony as is to be perceived in his attitude to his creative powers, his style and content.

Tonio Kroger aspires with all his heart and soul to be one with the blue-eyed and blonde individuals who skip from activity to activity, carelessly garnering the rich harvests of love, friendships, fun and laughter. The kind of life the artist in his isolated loneliness longs for :

People say..... that I hate life, or fear or despise or abominate it. I liked to hear this, it has always flattered me; but that does not make it true. I love life.....Life as the eternal antinomy of mind and art does not represent itself to us as a vision of savage greatness and ruthless beauty; we who are set apart and different do not conceive it as, like us, unusual; it is the normal, respectable and admirable that is the kingdom of our longing: life in all its seductive banality ! That man is very far from being an artist, whose last and deepest enthusiasm is the raffine, the co-centric and satanic; who does not know a longing for the innocent, the simple and the living, for a little friendship,

devotion, familiar human happiness - the
gnawing, surreptitious hankering.....for
the commonplace.....28

But no matter how ardent the longing for the ordinary,
Tonio cannot shrug off his artistic temperament and all
he can do is settle down to make the best of it though
he is unable to ward off the suffering it entails.

Tonio has an intense crush on two individuals during
his adolescence; first on Hans Hansen and later on Ingeborg
Holm. Hans is everything that Tonio is not: blonde,
blue-eyed and gregarious, popular and active. Inge is
the pretty girl who fall for men like Hans and show
nothing but contempt for the introverted and awkward
artist. Tonio worships them ardently but hopelessly
knowing he can never claim kinship with their world.
Time takes him to the south after his father's death and
his mother's remarriage. Here he hobnobs with people
of his own kind but he cannot assume the pose of one
who feels contempt for the ordinary and normal life
of mankind. He lives in wanton profligacy while he
creates literature with the compulsion of the born artist.

In due course he decides to holiday in Denmark,
breaking journey in the city of his birth and childhood.
He visits city and home, like a stranger, unknown and
unrecognized. His home has been transferred to strangers
and part of it has been converted into a public library.
Tonio realizes that his personal reminiscences cannot
find a place to roost here anymore. He returns to his

hotel to be accosted by security man who demand identity papers for they have to distinguish him from a wanted criminal, 'of unknown parentage' and unspecified means wanted by the Munich police for various shady transactions and probably in flight towards Denmark'.²⁹ Tonio Kroger has no papers to establish his identity and finally uses proof-sheets of his literary work to wriggle out of the situation. Tonio is upset by the incident but senses some propriety in the proceedings because deep within himself he does identify himself with a shady character 'of unknown parentage'.

In Copenhagen Tonio Kroger relaxes like a dutiful tourist, but the highlight of his holiday is the spectacle of a dashing Hans Hansen and a lovely Ingeborg Holm dancing in wonderful abandon. These two epitomize for him all that has lain beyond his reach and in his silent tribute to their normalcy he chants:

You must not cloud your clear eyes or make them dreamy and dim by peering into melancholy poetry.....To be like you ! To begin again, to grow up like you, simple and normal and cheerful, in conformity and understanding with God and man, beloved of the innocent and happy. To take you, Ingeborg Holm, to wife, and have a son like you, Hans Hansen - to live free from the curse of knowledge and the torment of creation, live and praise God in blessed mediocrity ! Begin again ? But it would do no good. It would turn out the same - everything would turn out the same as it did before. For some go of necessity astray, because for them there is no such thing as a right path'.³⁰

The excruciating agony he has to live with is born of the agony of his situation :

To long to be allowed to live the life of simple feeling, to rest sweetly and passively in feeling alone, without compulsion to act and achieve - and yet to be forced to dance, dance the cruel and perilous sword - dance of art; without even being allowed to forget the melancholy conflict within oneself; to be forced to dance, the while one loved31

Tonio Kroger is such an intimate portrait of the author and by extension of the artist and so neat a formulation of the ironic aspect of the life and work of the literary figure that it is very tempting to quote endlessly. But in the interests of economy I shall satisfy myself with two more passages. Both are deeply moving. The first is a painful summing up of his life:

He looked back on the years that had passed. He thought of the dreamy adventures of the senses, nerves, and mind in which he had been involved; saw himself eaten up with intellect and introspection, ravaged and paralysed by insight, half worn out by the fevers and frosts of creation, helpless and in anguish of conscience between two extremes, flung to and fro between austerity and lust; raffine, impoverished exhausted by frigid and artificially heightened ecstasis; erring, forsaken, martyred, and ill - and sobbed with nostalgia and remorse.31

The second is a lyrical evocation of the commitment of the writer along with the concomitant irony of his deepest desires

As I write the sea whispers to me and I close my eyes. I am looking into a world

unborn and formless, that needs to be ordered and shaped; I see into a whirl of shadows of human figures who beckon to me to weave spells to redeem them: tragic and laughable figures and some that are both together - and to these I am drawn. But my deepest and secretest love belongs to the blond and blue-eyed, the fair and the living, the happy, lovely and commonplace.³²

Nowhere has Mann revealed himself with such naked honesty as he has in Tonio Kroger.

III DEATH IN VENICE

We have acquainted ourselves with the artist-product of the nihilist age - as Hanno the sickly babe, the introverted child and the gravely self-preoccupied adolescent. In Tonio Kroger we are introduced to the writer passing on from adolescence to early youth and manhood. Gustave Aschenbach represents the middle-aged author. He was

the poet-spokesman of all those who labour at the edge of exhaustion; of the over-burdened, of those who are already worn out but still hold themselves upright; of all our modern moralizers of accomplishment with stunted growth and scanty resources, who yet contrive by skilful husbanding and prodigious spasms of will to produce, at least for a while, the effect of greatness. There are many such, they are the heroes of the age. And in Aschenbach's pages they saw themselves; He justified, he exalted them, he sang their praise - and they, they were grateful, they heralded his fame.³³

Death in Venice has that perfection of execution which tempts one to expound on its excellence of craftmanship. But the most painfully vibrating nerve in the anatomy of the novella is that of irony. The tide of occurrences and coincidences that lead Aschenbach to his tryst with dissolution and death partake of a nightmarish quality - lending to the story a touch of the grotesque and surrealistic. A chance glimpse of a passing traveller rouses in the ageing writer a hankering for the remote, for the primeval. The lure of the imagined vista of wild growth and fiery beasts holds him spell-bound and he finds himself on his way to Venice. ^{On} the sea-passage he is fascinated by a ludicrous old man who attempts by his behaviour, clothes and cosmetic-aids to pass off for a young man. The mysterious gondolier who rows Aschenbach to Lido knows the author's destination before he can mention it and disappears before he can be paid. Every incident that befalls Aschenbach resounds silently with ironic overtones : the purport of Aschenbach's flight from daily routine is relaxation, pleasant change, but it turns out that he is being led ignorantly but compulsively to dissipation and death.

There seems something within the artist himself seeking out destruction and Aschenbach becomes conscious of it while he sits on the resort beach contemplating the sea.

His love ^{of} the ocean had profound sources: the hard-worked artist's longing for rest, his yearning to seek refuge from the thronging manifold shapes of his fancy in the

bosom of the simple and vast and another yearning, opposed to his art and perhaps for that very reason a lure, for the unorganized, the immeasurable, the eternal, in short, for nothingness. He whose preoccupation is with excellence longs fervently to find rest in perfection; and is not nothingness a form of perfection ?³⁴

The terrible unknown exerting such a tremendous power over Aschenbach takes the form of a Polish boy, fourteen years old and ethereally lovely. He is holidaying with his family in the same resort and Aschenbach finds himself increasingly and irresistibly drawn to the alluring perfection of the boy. He begins to watch out for and study the grace and charm of the child with growing absorption.³⁵ But this outer perfection conceals the seeds of decay which in Mann manifests itself in rotting teeth as in the cases of Tom and Hanno Buddenbrook. At close quarters Aschenbach notices that

Tadzio's teeth were imperfect, rather jagged and bluish.....'He is delicate, he is sickly', Aschenbach thought. 'He will most likely not live to grow old'. He did not try to account for the pleasure the idea gave him.³⁶

That Death in Venice is another evocation of the nihilistic sweep towards the whirlpool of death is becoming very obvious.

The air and surroundings that lend the setting to the narrative are heavy with the overabundance of vegetation, filth and sultriness that one associates with

the tropics. Aschenbach had been vacillating between a notion of leaving if the heavy heat didn't break off and a growing need to stay as long as Tadzio³⁶ was in the vicinity. At one stage he even decides to move to a more congenial resort but on his way he is filled with overwhelming regrets and at the station he learns to his great joy that his trunk by some quirk of fate had been sent the wrong way and of course Aschenbach has to return to his hotel and wait till the missing trunk is located. He returns, never to leave the city again. Aschenbach is now inextricably wedded to his fate and experiences a sense of resigned and excited anticipation of whatever is to come.

As he now settles down to a languid period of ease with no end in sight, he ponders over the change in his attitude:

Always, wherever and whenever it was the order of the day to be merry, to refrain from labour and make glad the heart, he would soon be conscious of the imperative summons - and especially was this so in his youth - back to the high fatigues, the sacred and fasting service that consumed his days. This spot and this alone had power to beguile him, to relax his resolution, to make him glad.³⁷

Death has already laid its soporific touch on him and his torpor has its glowing centre in 'the lovely apparition'³⁸ of Tadzio³⁹ as it ran and played in noble splendour against the vast background of the sea. Aschenbach comes to worship him as the epitome of creative perfection.³⁹ Aschenbach's growing love for the boy renews his poetic

response to the world and everything around him and Tadzio is bathed in the splendour of new love. Every day is a beginning brimming with possibilities. Aschenbach's infatuation reaches almost uncontrollable intensity and he begins to follow the boy whenever he goes out to visit places with his family. Though there is no verbal communication between Tadzio and Aschenbach, the boy seems to have become aware of the passion he has roused in the ageing writer and often startles his ardent lover by turning to meet his eyes, returning his gaze with serious intensity.

A fourth grotesque character is introduced to add to the unknown traveller, the indecent old man rigged in a young rake's attire and the mysterious gondolier. This is a street singer who comes to entertain the hotel guest with his group of performers. Singing lustily, he gyrates his thin body - suggestively, and looking up impudently at the members of his audience as they lean on the balustrade laughing down at his antics. While collecting money, he whispers hoarsely to Aschenbach that Venice is being disinfected as a routine, precautionary measure.⁴⁰

Aschenbach realizes that he has flirted with danger long enough and that he ought to take concrete measures to leave Venice before it is too late. He learns confidentially from a British embassy official that the authorities are suppressing the magnitude and seriousness of the cholera epidemic as they fear economic reverses if the tourist inflow slackens. Cholera had

raised its vicious head in the 'hot moist swamps of the delta of the Ganges, where it bred in the mephitic air of the primeval island jungle, among whose bamboo thickets the tiger crouches, where life of every sort flourishes in rankest abundance.....'⁴¹ It had spread via trade routes and had settled in the hot stagnant moist air of Venice, reaping a rich crop of lives. But due to official censorship most of the gay visitors to Venice remained unaware of the infectious calamity that lurked in the wings waiting for an opportune moment to strike. The close presence of death had loosened all sense of morality and restriction in the city and men gave way with desperate abandon to vice and indulgence. The official advised Aschenbach to leave Venice at the earliest as a blockade would prevent possibilities of escape.

Aschenbach's saner urge to advise Tadzio's mother to leave with her children at the earliest is suppressed by dreams of licentious freedom in a city at a time when the pestilence will break down all norms of decency and moral behaviour. Aschenbach now turns into the old man who on the ship to Venice had flaunted the clothes and mannerisms of a youth. He spends hours on his looks, getting his face and hair done in imitation of a younger man. The change that illicit love has brought in this revered man of letters is incredible.

There he sat, the master: this was he who had found a way to reconcile art and honours; who had written The Subject and in a style of classic purity renounced bohemianism and all its works, all sympathy

with the abyss and the troubled depths of the outcast human soul. This was he who had put knowledge underfoot to climb so high ! who had outgrown the ironic pose and adjusted himself to the burdens and obligations of fame; whose renown had been officially recognized and his name ennobled whose style was set for a model in the schools. The he sat, He eyelids were closed, there was only a swift sidelong glint of the eyeballs now and again, something between a question and a leer; while the rouged and flabby mouth uttered single words of the sentences shaped in his disordered brain by the fantastic logic that governs our dreams.42

In his silent communion with the boy of his desires, Aschenbach reveals the irony in the discrepancy between what appearances suggest and what actuality is.

.....beauty alone is both divine and visible; and so it is the sense's way, the artist's wayto the spiritdo you believe such a man can ever attain wisdom and true manly worth, for whom the path to the spirit must lead through the senses ? Or do you rather thinkthat it is a path of perilous sweetness, a way of transgression, and must surely lead him who walks in it astray ? For you know that we poets cannot walk the way of beauty without Eros as our companion and guide. We may be heroic after our fashion, disciplined warriors of our craft yet are we all like women, for we exult in passion, and love is still our desire - our craving and our shame. And from this you will perceive that we poets can be neither wise nor worthy citizens. We must needs be wanton, must needs rove at large in the realm of feeling. Our magisterial style in all folly and pretence, our honourable repute a farce, the crowd's

belief in us is merely laughable. And to teach youth, or the populace by means of art is a dangerous practice and ought to be forbidden. For what good can an artist be as a teacher when from his birth up he is headed direct for the pit? We many want to shun it and attain to honour in the world; but however we turn it draws us still. So then, since knowledge might destroy us, we will have none of it. For knowledge,does not make him who possesses it dignified or austere. Knowledge is all-knowing, understanding, forgiving; it takes up no positions sets no store by form. It has compassion with the abyss - it is the abyss. So we reject it, firmly and henceforward our concern shall be with beauty alone. And by beauty we mean simplicity, largeness and renewed severity of discipline; we mean a return to detachment and to form. But detachment and preoccupation with form lead to intoxication and desire they may lead the noblest among us to frightful emotional excesses, which his own stern cult of the beautiful would make him the first to condemn. So they too.....lead to the bottomless pit. Yes they lead us thither, I say, us who are poets, - who by our natures are prone not to excellence but to excess.⁴³

Aschenbach embodies the final stages of a faulty decaying will and Tadzio⁴ is the ironically beautiful expression of the same flawed, drooping will of the 20th century. The pursuit of one by the other is the natural outcome of the irresistible summons of death. The nihilistically deterministic pattern of the story is heightened by the rich splendour of Venice which comes across as overblown and disease-ridden though still enticing and alluring. The sense of fatality is

prevalent here to a degree that one encounters again in Doctor Faustus. Adrian Leverkühn grimly pursues destruction, Aschenbach is lured by the same irresistible urge embodied in the beautiful boy whose Greek proportions leads him into the world of shame and indulgence. Eventually he succumbs to the disease Man's helplessness against the spasms of a death-seeking will which seeks manifestations in art, crime and perversion is a theme that is reiterated throughout most of Mann's works.

CHAPTER IV

WORKS : THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN, THE BLACK SWAN

"For the sake of goodness and love man shall let death have no sovereignty over his thoughts"¹

IV - THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

Beautiful is resolution. But the really fruitful, the productive, and hence the artistic principle is that which we call reserve. In the sphere of music we love it as the prolonged note, the teasing melancholy of the not-yet, the inward hesitation of the soul, which bears within itself fulfilment, resolution, and harmony, but denies it for a space, withholds and delays, scruples exquisitely yet a little longer to make the final surrender. In the intellectual sphere we love it as irony: that irony which glances at both sides, which plays slyly and irresponsibly yet not without benevolence - among opposites, and is in no great haste to take sides and come to decisions; guided as it is by the surmise that in great matters, in matters of humanity every decision may prove premature, that the real goal to reach is not decision, but harmony, accord. And harmony, in a matter of eternal contraries may lie at infinity yet that playful reserve called irony carries it within itself as the sustained note carries the resolution.²

Mann's concept of the use of irony is valuable both for the insight it provides into his own works as also to prove the point of his study that Mann's irony is not rooted in cynical negation but painful, to a certain extent helpless compassion, what he quietly refers to as benevolence. His characters have never been portrayed without honesty, even brutal honesty, but the truth of reality is accepted with 'benevolence' and undeniably, irony. This will be an important consideration of our study of The Magic Mountain.

Hans Castorp, the protagonist of one of the most voluminous novels of our century was to hear the first cough of a tuberculosis patient in the International Sanatorium Berghof, with a sense of horror. Mann describes it thus

It was coughing, obviously, a man coughing, but coughing like to no other Hans Castorp had ever heard, and compared with which any other had been a magnificent and healthy manifestation of life; a coughing that had no conviction and gave no relief, that did not even come out in paroxysms, but was just a feeble, dreadful welling up of the juices of organic dissolution.³

The Sanatorium is a temple dedicated to the worship of the 'organic dissolution' of the human species. It is an expensively maintained luxury hospital-resort, equipped with gadgets and facilities that speak of the technological wonders of modern human achievement. Under the aegis of its highly qualified physicians, human endeavours,

intellectual and cultural, attain their highest individual possibilities within the portals of the sanatorium, situated on the great heights of the Alps - 1600 metres above sea-level far-removed from the wrangling, sweating and squabbling masses far below on the plains. 'The Magic Mountain' is an allegorical device to encompass the shifting layers of significance attributed to the sanatorium - in its culminative import it is a citadel against the reality and vigour of existence - it is a remote castle of splendid ease - an ease that is the prelude to the eternal slumber of sleep.

That Hans Castorp is the modern Everyman - seems obvious in the following analysis that Mann makes of the individual and his times:

A man lives not only his personal life, as an individual, but also consciously or unconsciously, the life of his epoch and his contemporaries. He may regard the general, impersonal foundations of his existence as definitely settled and taken for granted, and be as far from assuming a critical attitude toward them as our good Hans Castorp really was; yet it is quite conceivable that he may none the less be vaguely conscious of the deficiencies of his epoch and find them prejudicial to his own moral well-being. All sorts of personal aims, ends, hopes, prospects hover before the eyes of the individual, and out of these he derives the impulse to ambition and achievement. Now, if the life about him, if his own time seem, however outwardly stimulating to be at bottom empty of such food for his aspiration; if he privately recognize it

to be hopeless, viewless, helpless, opposing only a hollow silence to all the questions man puts, consciously or unconsciously, yet somehow puts as to the final, absolute, and abstract meaning in all his efforts and activities; then in such a case, a certain laming of the personality is bound to occur, the more inevitably the more upright the character in question; a sort of palsy as it were, which may even extend from his spiritual and moral over into his physical and organic part.³

The nihilistic pattern of the novel has been already set in motion. The times are deteriorating and man has no will left to fight through existence - he drags himself through life fatigued before the battle has begun.

Hans Castorp who has lost both father and mother in his childhood and has grown up first with his grandfather and, on losing him, with his uncle, returns from his engineering exams looking pale, and his doctor advises him to take a change of air at Davos before he settles down to a job. Hans is reluctant but his uncle persuades him to take the advised rest and use the occasion to visit his cousin who is critically ill. Mann ends chapter II of the novel with the ironic statement : 'He left for a stay of three weeks'.⁵ Hans is not to return for seven years.

In the course of the novel one begins to notice several ironic instances. People who arrive mildly indisposed or even healthy stay on to develop into seriously ill patients. The doctors themselves are ill

and are more impressed by developing symptoms than with subsiding ones. The patients themselves take pride in the incurability of their illness and those with minor symptoms hope ardently to graduate into dangerously ill cases. Love tokens assume bizarre dimensions with Hans and his lady love Clavdia exchanging the X-ray copies of their afflicted interiors. But to return to Hans' early days at the sanatorium: he begins to feel feverish and also to wax eloquent on philosophic subjects especially with regard to the undefinable concept of Time. This agitates the upright, soldierly Joachim whose sole intention is to follow the regime ordered by the doctor so that he may return to don military colours. But Hans is highly intrigued by his own condition. He finds he cannot enjoy his cigar here on the mountains.⁶ To add to all this he discovers that his hitherto respectable attitude to life takes on a delirious quality to which he cannot assign any reason or purpose. Dreaming of Mmd Chauchat, the Russian woman who exerts a highly sensuous charm despite or because of her total disregard of social norms he feels that 'there swept over him anew, from head to foot, the feeling of reckless sweetness he had felt for the first time when he tried to imagine himself free of the burden of a good name, and tasted the boundless joys of shame'.⁷

Hans' initiation into the realm of these who have submitted to the supremacy of death is characterized by 3 distinct factors : 1) a sense of the subjectivity of Time - Time exists only in its realization of intensity and duration by the subject 2) a highly stimulated

intellectual and erotic sensibility 3) the dissolution of all bonds that keep man on the road of respectability. Here in the rarefied atmosphere of the high Alps among people who live from hour to hour and whose lives are dominated by temperature charts and meal times, time has no relevance or importance beyond its impression on the sensibility of the individual. The patients consume enormous and temptingly rich meals, rest for long stretches, take walks around the town and engage in amorous involvements and furious intellectual debates. Music is another popular pastime. In fact the whole of the expansive novel is weighted down, not by the passage of years, but by the density of each moment - density of impression, experiences, thoughts, emotions, feelings and recollections. Action is skeletal - The movement of the novel is the pulsation, the throbbing, of every second of existence, not the forward motion of action and endeavour. Death enfolds the sanatorium and its inmates but there is a delirious effulgence of life among people whose brows are already marked by the cold signature of Death. This is the source of the ironic fascination the novel exercises on the reader.

One would be justified in classifying The Magic Mountain as a Bildungsroman novel or the novel of education. The reader is processed through a series of experiences as they impinge on the consciousness of the protagonist. Most of the time we share Hans Castorp's sense of befuddled wonder at the varied assortment of ideas and impressions that rain on him. Mann projects

three schools of thought, ezch holding within itself indications of its contrary thought, in other words the paradox Mann speaks of as essential to plumb the full gamut of any idea.⁸ Mann projects three attitudes to life embodied in three different characters. The first is Herr Settembrini, an Italian humanist, a Freemason, impoverished but free of embarrassment, highly articulate and filled with fervour to rouse Hans Castorp to action and an early return to the plains. Castorp is mostly tongue-tied in their encounters, but he gradually begins to oppose his own ideas no matter how naive, to those showered on him. In the latter half of the novel we meet Leo Naphta condemned to live like Settembrini for the rest of his life in the remote conditions of the mountain heights. He is a Jew turned Jesuit and a reactionary who depicts the ruthless course of nature in all living things as rushing headlong towards a climatic destruction. He scoffs at Settembrini's progressive ideas for human welfare as a fool's dream, rendered nought by the actuality of a willed and self-interested surge of the human race towards annihilation. He negates the body and believes that only in its destruction can the spirit attain salvation and freedom. Settembrini's mission is to prevent such regressive ideas from warping the plastic mind of impressionable youth like Castorp.

Rich is too poor an adjective to contain the kaleidoscopic panorama - physical, natural, intellectual and emotional - that forms the content of The Magic Mountain. The impressions vary and shift in multifarious

combinations to both fascinate and bewilder the mind and imagination. We find ourselves most of the time in the dilemma of Hans Castorp who cannot figure out the antimonies which in the ultimate analysis are the violently opposed gospels of Naphta and Settembrini

Hans Castorp's brain reeled. Here was blue-mantled death masquerading as a humanistic orator; and when one sought to gaze at closer range upon this pedagogic and literary god, benevolent to man, one discovered a squatting ape-faced figure, with the sign of night and magic on its brow.⁹

Not only does Naphta bewilder Hans by his chameleon like ability to change his philosophic colours, but he also succeeds in making out the vociferous, liberal Settembrini to be the arch advocate of the forces of darkness. According to Naphta

These so-called reformers of humanity did indeed take the words purification and sanctification in their mouths but what they really meant and intended was the emasculation, the phlebotomy of life. Yes their theory and moving spirit were in violation of life; and he would destroy passion, that man desired nothing less than pure nothingness - pure at least in the sense that pure was the only adjective which could be applied to nothingness. It was just here that Herr Settembrini showed himself for what he was: namely, the man of progress, liberalism, and middle-class revolution for the progress was pure nihilism, the liberal citizen was quite precisely the advocate of nothingness and the Devil..... Thus did Naphta astutely go about to turn Herr Settembrini's paeon the wrong way and represent himself as the Incarnation of the

cherishing severity of love - so that it was again impossible to distinguish which side was in the right, where God stood and where the Devil, where death and where life.¹⁰

Mann's sense of irony is both so profound and impish that he uses it to both build and destroy the bombastic and fanatical rhetoric of his intellectual characters. Settembrini preaches liberal progress but he is also a committed Freemason.¹¹ He is not averse to the use of violence to establish his ideal world or to eliminate unwanted elements once it does begin to exist. Naphta on the other hand, a born Jew and a converted Jesuit is sworn to a life of obedience and poverty but his style of living is princely, Naphta is almost avariciously in pursuit of destruction and spouts out theories of physical annihilation that smack of a sick mind. But Mann makes him a keener observer of life, a truer interpreter of its course and significance. Naphta prophesies war and describes liberal thought as a cowardly refuge and illusion to avert a headlong collision with reality. Naphta personifies the nihilistic principle ruthlessly using his sharp mental prowess and his acid language to destroy the existence of any objective truth: 'Whatever profits man, that is the truth'.¹²

Disease which with its manifold significances and implications can be regarded as the primary motif of the book is again subjected to ironic scrutiny from different

angles. Early in the novel, Settembrini rejects Hans Castorp's notion that disease ennobles man and that good health is synonymous with mediocrity:

Disease has nothing refined about it, nothing dignified. Such a conception is in itself pathological, or at least it tends in that direction. Perhaps I may best arouse your mistrust of it if I tell you how ancient and ugly this conception is. It comes down to us from a past seething with superstition in which the idea of humanity had degenerated and deteriorated into sheer caricature; a past full of fears in which well-being and harmony were regarded as suspect and emanating from the devil whereas infirmity was equivalent to a free pass to heaven.¹²

Much later in the book Naphta refutes the humanist's view-point:

All progress, in so far as there was such a thing, was due to illness and to illness alone. In other words, to genius, which was the same thing. Had not the normal, since time was, lived on the achievements of the abnormal? Men consciously and voluntarily descended into disease and madness, in search of knowledge which acquired by fanaticism would lead back to health.....¹⁴

This was not all though: Naphta has more esoteric ideas regarding disease

Disease was very human indeed. For to be man was to be ailing. Man was essentially ailing, his state of unhealthiness was what made him man. There were those who wanted to make him 'healthy', to make him 'go back to nature', when the

truth was he never had been natural'.....it was the spirit alone that distinguished man as a creature largely divorced from nature, largely opposed to her in feeling, from all other forms of organic life. In man's spirit then resided, his true nobility and his merit - in his state of disease, as it were; in a word the more ailing he was, by so much was he the more man. The genius of disease was more human than the genius of health.¹⁵

But both Settembrini and Naphta for all their learned and voluble eloquence, pale into insignificance beside the charismatic persona of Mynheer Peeperkorn, the Dutch planter-millionaire from the East. He is Clavdia Chauchat's new companion and though Hans has waited in vain for her return to his arms, and suffers much anguish, he is totally overwhelmed by the magnetism of her lover. Built on a large scale, Peeperkorn's personality is in keeping with his epic proportions. His speech is hardly coherent and he is old and ailing. But these facts cannot diminish the rugged splendour of the man who insists on draining the cup of life to the lees. Hearty and gregarious, Mynheer Peeperkorn lives every moment of his life, taking no cognizance of the advanced state of his illness or his years. He expresses joy, pain and anger and all his friends hang on every word he utters and quail before him should his rage fall on them.

In juxtapositioning these three characters it seems that Mann clinches the doubt in Hans Castorp's mind about

the progressive and reactionary strains of thought by leading him through a raw experience of life in its primeval sense. Mynheer Peeperkorn is one embodiment of life lived without the intervention of theories and policies. His very presence squashes the learned theories and theoretical arguments that scholars like Settembrini and Naphta specialise in. Their intellectual commentary is revealed for what it is - mere sterile theorising on a subject that scoffs definition and formulation - a subject that cannot be turned into dry pedantic equations but demands to be lived whimsically and erratically, dangerously and wonderfully to the hilt.

This revelation of life follows gradually upon Hans' amateur pursuit of the establishment of the nature of life itself. His seven years sojourn in the sanatorium becomes for him a protracted and yet condensed experience of the whole gamut of human existence, prodding him to probe through books and discourses into the mystery of life. With the kind of comprehensive conciseness that genius alone can attain Mann sweeps across the annals of the evolution of man from the material, and of the emergence of the material from the insubstantial. He telescopes the whole range of scientific study on the subject of life and the baffling substance protoplasm which continues to evade actual definition. The ironic conclusion that this exhaustive view of life and consciousness leads to is that life is the expression of diseased matter.

Disease was a perverse, a dissolute form of life. And life ? Life itself ? Was

it perhaps only an infection, a sickening of matter ? Was that which one might call the original procreation of matter only a disease, a growth produced by morbid stimulation of the immaterial ? The first step toward evil, toward desire and death, was taken precisely then, when there took place that first increase in the density of the spiritual, that pathological luxuriant morbid growth, produced by the irritant of some unknown infiltration; this in part pleasurable, in part a motion of self-defence, was the primeval stage of matter, the transition from the insubstantial to the substance. This was the Fall. The second creation, the birth of the organic out of the inorganic was only another fatal stage in the progress of the corporeal toward consciousness, just as disease in the organism was an intoxication, a heightening and unlicensed accentuation of its physical state; and life, life was nothing but the next step on the reckless path of the spirit dishonoured; nothing but the automatic blush of matter roused to sensation and become receptive for that which awaked it.16

In his avidity for deeper revelations of actuality, and in the hope of advancing in his pet project of taking stock here in the remote sanatorium, Hans one day leaves civilization behind to battle nature on her own ground in the snowy wilderness around him and thereby thrash out some kernel of truth for himself. He soon discovers that he has lost his bearings in the snow-storm. He is overcome by fatigue but still undaunted. He decides to rest awhile and it is then that he sees a vision that imparts to him an important lesson. He sees a lovely scenario, a Greek setting of beautiful women, men and children frolicking

on the beach, others attending to pastoral duties and lovers seeking favours from each other. But beyond this dream of idyllic beauty there is a temple hidden from view and within whose precincts child-sacrifice is being performed. Mann uses Nietzsche's interpretation of Greek civilization to create for Hans Castorp a vision that combines Dionysian primeval brutality with Apollonian refinement and loveliness. In the acceptance of primitive cruelty and uncertainty as an inescapable part of life without allowing it to overwhelm norms of beauty, culture and vivilization - in this lies man's happiness and highest attainment.

Disease, health ! Spirit, nature !
Are those contradictions ?.....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 Hom^o Dei, between recklessness and reason, as his state is between mystic community and windy individualism. I, from my column, perceive all this. In this state he must live gallantly, associate in friendly reverence with himself for only he is aristocratic, and the counter-positions are not at all. Man is the lord of counter-positions, they can be only through him, and thus he is more aristocratic than they. More so than death, too aristocratic for death - that is the freedom of his mind. More aristocratic than life, too aristocratic for life, and that is the piety in his heartI will let death have no mastery over my thoughts. For therein lies goodness and love of mankind.....Death is a great power.....Reason stands simple before him for reason is only virtue while death is release, immensity, abandon, desire. Desire says my dream. Lust not love. Death

and love - no, I cannot make a poem of them, they don't go together. Love stands opposed to death. It is love not reason, that is stronger than death. Only love not reason gives sweet thoughts. And from love and sweetness alone can form come: form and civilization, friendly, enlightened, beautiful human intercourse - always in silent recognition of the blood-sacrifice. Ah, yes it is well and truly dreamed. I have taken stock. I will remember. I will keep faith with death in my heart, yet well remember that faith with death and the dead is evil, is hostile to humankind, so soon as we give it power over thought and action. For the sake of goodness and love, man shall let death have no sovereignty over his thoughts.¹⁷

The intensity and novelty of the experience give Hans the proselytizing zeal and fervour which he believes will stay with him for the rest of his life. That he will forget is of course, a matter of course and he does forget. How much validity his insight has against the actuality of existence is again left unresolved in the typical ironic manner of Mann. But if we are to judge by the conclusion of the novel, Mann did give conscious approbation to Hans's reading of life, and he did seek to be more involved with life than his protagonists are shown to be. If Mann is not Christian nor Humanist, neither is he nihilistic, for in the final analysis he chooses to leave all options open and his philosophy is a sad and solemn hymn to the eternal mystery and uncertainty of life.

Mann's narrative tapers to a close. Mynheer Peeperkorn kills himself when he cannot live like a man

any more. Naptha challenges Settembrini to a duel over their never-ending verbal battles and when the humanist refuses to shoot him, he shoots himself in a terrible rage.¹⁸ He hadn't been anxious to settle a score with Settembrini but to find an opportunity to quit living. Hans Castorp has now reached the end of his analytic journey. Clavdia Chauchat, who embodied for Hans all the pleasure and enticement of the forbidden fruit of life (or death, if one chose to call it that) leaves the sanatorium after the death of Mynheer Peeperkorn. At the end of seven years, Settembrini has the pleasure of seeing his 'delicate child of life' depart for the plains. The clouds of war have struck a thunderbolt - a cry of warning that awakens the slumbering dreamer and he departs to participate in his country's war programmes. In effect it is Peeperkorn and Settembrini who win the day - life and progress - in full cognizance of the pit of evil and terror on whose brink we precariously perform the grotesque dance of life - man must act and live - therein lies his pride and dignity Death awaits us but life must triumph. 'For the sake of goodness and love man shall let death have no sovereignty over his thoughts'.¹⁹

Settembrini comes up with one of the sanest attitudes to death in the course of his lectures to Hans Castorp. 'Death was neither spectre nor mystery. It was a simple, acceptable and physiologically necessary phenomenon; to dwell upon it longer than decency required

was to rob life of its due'.²⁰ Settembrini also attempts to educate Hans by jumping at Hans' use of the expression 'fit for life' and equating it with the phrase 'worthy of life'.²¹ and suggesting by a natural process of association another, equally beautiful, 'worthy of love'. 'One might with truth say that he who was worthy of the one was fully worthy of the other. And both together love-worthy and life - worthy made up the true nobility'.²² These phrases in conjunction recall Goethe's phrase 'deserving life'.²³ which had so profoundly moved Mann. Mann himself regarded The Magic Mountain as an attempt to withdraw 'from dangerous sympathies, enchantments and temptations - a farewell address and an attempt at self-discipline'.²⁴

THE BLACK SWAN

The conscious attempt in The Magic Mountain to stem the surge towards unmitigated annihilation that nihilism envisaged, leads on to the exploration of a myth relevant to modern times in Joseph and his Brothers. But the search for structures that will support and render meaning to life disappears in the stark, almost raving madness that finds agonizing expression in Doctor Faustus. In this novel, Adrian Leverkühn, the composer-genius becomes the metaphorical embodiment of doomed man, who has transactions with Evil and wills his own destruction. Nihilism and desolation are too

painfully and intensely overwhelming to be subdued by reason and hope. The Black Swan lacks the sweeping grandeur of Doctor Faustus. But the novella is replete with the irony which we have begun to think of as essentially belonging to Mann's vision of life.

The narrative outline is simple: a middle-aged, attractive widow is suffering the physiological and psychological discomfort associated with menopause. She finds herself drawn increasingly to a pleasant young American who associated with the family in the capacity of an English tutor to her son. Feeling ashamed of her wanton thoughts in her time of waning womanhood, she is suddenly filled with the wonder of the awareness that her periods have resumed. She attributes this miracle to the benign care of Nature, whose daily and seasonal bounties and changes, she has always delighted in. Her intellectual spinster daughter is alarmed by her mother's obvious infatuation, but is sympathetic and understanding. Rosalie eventually summons enough courage to confess her feelings to the young man and fixes a rendez-vous for a secret tyrst. But the same night she is distressingly afflicted by a severe loss of blood. She is rushed to the hospital where her ailment is described as a hopelessly advanced state of cancer in the uterus. The irony lies in the situation of the woman who had believed that Nature had performed a miracle by restoring her womanly nature, only to learn that this happy miracle is the sign of a malignant tumour. The irony is highlighted

throughout the story by several events. Rosalie Tumbler is taking a walk with her spinster daughter. They are drawn by the strong odour of musk and on investigation discover that the smell is the combined exhalation of putrefying human excrement and decomposing remains of some animal and some putrid vegetation.²⁵

Mann uses the biblical Sarah and her disbelief in God's promise of a fruitful womb when she has entered old age, as an ironic contrast to Rosalie's naive belief that womanly youth has been restored to her. Rosalie brushes aside her daughter's words of caution:

You remember how Sarah sinned ? She laughed to herself behind the door and said: 'After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also ? But the Lord God was angry and said: 'Wherefore did Sarah laugh ?' In my opinion, she laughed less on account of her own withered old age than because her lord, Abraham, was likewise so old and stricken in years, already ninety nine. And what woman could not but laugh at the thought of indulging in lust with a ninety-nine-year-old man, for all that a man's love life is less strictly limited than a woman's. But my lord is young, is youth itself, and how much more easily and temptingly must the thought come to me.²⁶

Rosalie's daughter, Anna, is close to thirty, handicapped by a club-foot and dedicated to the intellect and art. She is disturbed by her mother's emotional indulgences and tries to gently swerve her away from a collusion with what she fears will be destruction. Rosalie is not to be put off:

What can induce you to make the slightest connection between what you call my visitation, & this Easter of my womanhood what the soul has done to my body - and the concept of sickness ? Is happiness - sickness ? Certainly it is not light-mindedness either, it is living, living in joy and sorrow, and to live is to hope - the hope for which I can give no explanation to your reason.²⁷

Rosalie's childlike trust in the overwhelming munificence of Nature receives no alarming warning from her seasonal caprices.²⁸ Throughout the short novel Anna has been certain that the soul will adjust to bodily changes and that Rosalie will finally get reconciled to physical ageing and that she will attain the dignity and tranquility of a respectable matron. Rosalie is convinced that her youthful spirits and the resurgence of love in her autumnal years will influence her body too. But as events turn out the story for Mann becomes a 'final demonstration that the most valued spiritual states can be the product of physiological morbidity'.²⁹ But even on her death-bed Rosalie stands staunch by her belief in Nature:

Anna, never say that Nature deceived me, that she is sardonic and cruel. Do not rail at her as I do not. I am loth to go away - from you all, from life with its spring. But how should there be spring without death ? Indeed, death is a great instrument of life, and if for me it borrowed the guise of resurrection, of the joy of love that was not a lie, but goodness and mervy.....Nature - I have always loved her, and she - had been loving to her child.³⁰

Whether Mann was seeking a positive belief to rest on and in this his last completed novel gave expression to faith of the kind Rosalie demonstrates or whether it is exactly the opposite truth, that he is ironically emphasizing is of course a matter of further debate. But if Mann's final work ends with a 'gentle death'³¹ I would be inclined to believe that irony was not ashamed to give way to open tender regard and affectionate involvement. Goethe has at last won Mann - Hans Castorp's willed allegiance even if psyche and spirit are still loath to leave the thrall of despair and death. We end our analysis of Mann's works with a nostalgic comment by the author himself.

There is no metamorphosis more familiar to me than that which begins with sympathy with death and ends with the decision to be a partisan to life.³²

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

"I hope it will be said of my work that
it was well-disposed towards life,
while being acquainted with Death".¹

- Thomas Mann

Man in Mann's fiction is like Hardy's protagonists in a desperate quest after pattern and meaning. The horrifying realization slowly dawns on him that there never can be a design to life - it lies beyond the petty claims of reason and morality and is erratic and whimsical often bizarre and agonizing. Hardy's fictional structure evokes awe and tragic despair. Mann's fictional ambience on the other hand, heightens a surrealistically grotesque incredulity at the irony of life and man's futile attempts to categorize and ennoble life by consecrating its vagrant events as providentially planned incidents.² The grotesque element is the result of the dryly detached tone that distances the author from the pain of existence. In Hardy, man is passionately involved to the end with attempts to subordinate life to meaning, but in Mann man seeks music and highly intellectualized pursuits that take him into the stillness of death. Cessation of life, of vigour and enterprise,

of battles and pursuits, stillness is what enamours Mann's heroes.

But if Mann's heroes and heroines are intended to depict dying wills surrendering to apathy and death, their fictional rendering is by no means restricted to this purpose. Mann's intellectual and philosophic convictions were based on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and Wagner, but Mann's creative soul speaks a different tongue; even in the depiction of a dying society, one is pleasantly surprised to discover a certain passion and power that one associates only with surging life. Mann's technical excellence, it can be argued, is just another symptom of the final stages of a withering life force, but Mann's creative execution cannot quite be described as the perfection of cold marble, it pulsates with life. His characters are delineations of particular schools of thought, as clearly demarcated and defined as the characters of a morality play but their intellectual embodiment does not define them totally. Thomas Buddenbrook is a man who stands for the dying individual but isn't his evocation itself a testimony to the wonderful undeniable gifts of life? Mann's work can hardly be described as that of the intellectual bystander who has submitted to the power of death. Every detail he brings in from the barber's morning rituals on Thomas to Hans Castorp's unadulterated joy in his cigar, speak of a feeling for life, that has not fallen prey to a decaying will. In creating tapestries of

deteriorating life, Mann has given the richest tribute to life, its nuances and its unpredictable quirks and joys, its ups and downs. What transpires in the long run to impress us is that even the deep experience of pain is a tremendous experience of life and to immerse in it even while accepting the lack of any verification of pattern or meaning from an all-powerful agency - that is to be worthy of life. Mann imposed Schopenhauer's and Nietzsche's intellectual reading on his fictional universe, but his instinctive feeling for life evaded the grim impress of his philosophy and it is this that brims over the rim of his fictional universe, filling his reader with a wonderful sense of the richness of existence.

If Mann unconsciously betrays a positive involvement with life, there is irony in the contrast between the effect and thematic contents of his work. For the reader apart from becoming aware of the nihilistic reading of life that German philosophy had engendered is also awakened to the opulence of life, the opulence of not just happiness and fulfilment, but the painfully enriching experience of anguish, the lethargy of ennui, the oscillating emotions of fearful hope, the agony of loss and parting, the bitter taste of rejected achievement and also the unpredictable and ironic turns that life takes, with just one final certainty at the end of it all, beyond which there may be just dust and ashes, utter non-being - even then life doesn't lose its glory and splendour: to

have lived and lost is better than ~~not to have lived at all~~.
(with due apologies to Milton for the liberty).

In pursuing Thomas's career or Hanno's career one is moved at their inability to ward off the lure of death. Hollingdale points out that Mann equates decadence with physical decadence.³ Hence hope lies in uplifting man physically and then finding a new basis for new values which is why with all its nihilistic content Mann and his reader do not lose sight of the unavoidable richness and possibilities of life and human achievement. Mann's fictional world, and creative style and tone embody the pathos of nihilism but the form it assumes in the obsession with physical infirmity and decay - is also a pointer to the solution - find a physical remedy to the physical ailment and the sickening miasma of morbid intellectual and spiritual preoccupation will yield to a healthy life - oriented basis for constructive values.

The complex vision of life that Mann brings to his fictional work envisages the irreducible puzzle of life. Irony is prevalent at so many levels - conscious or unconscious - in the method, tone, and the theme of his creation that to embrace all its manifold implication is almost impossible. The pursuit of certain specific strands of the ironic cast of Mann's vision illuminates a mind overwhelmed by the tragic

desolation of life devoid of order, logic, or significance, but there is no fatigue or defeat in its response to the marvellous nuances of human behaviour. Like Gustave Aschenbach Mann may be 'the spokesman of those who labour on the edge of exhaustion' with this difference that he has diagnosed the problem.

Life is not discarded or abandoned.....and those who do so are shown as highly pathetic characters. Mann brings the vulnerability of life into focus. He cherished life sufficiently to bring all the depths of his perception and his indefatigable energy to his voluminous rendering of the oceanic flow of life, of people and their wonderfully distinguished individuality, their humours, eccentricities, affectations, weaknesses, loves, hopes, desires and disappointments. Only a man who sees salvageable material will bear against so much current to hold aloft something ~~our~~ fatigued wills may have no strength to bother with. Mann's irony is the language of man fighting pain not of cynicism.

Mann consciously sought to shrug off the nihilistic yoke that his reading of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had burdened him with. That he didn't quite reach the tranquility of complete faith is fairly borne out by what may appear like the contrived endings of some of his later novels. But despite what he assumed was his faith and despite what he thought was his conversion to

'democratic humanism', he unconsciously betrays a positive affirmation of life and what may be called existential values rather than nihilistic pathos in his fictional renderings. A whole world of complexities underlie the ironic vision of Thomas Mann.

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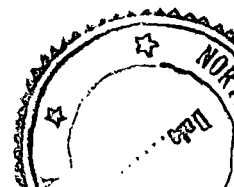
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