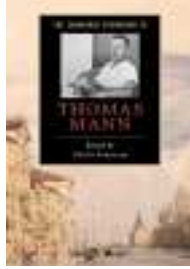


Cambridge Companions Online

<http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/companions/>



The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann

Edited by Ritchie Robertson

Book DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052165310X>

Online ISBN: 9780511998584

Hardback ISBN: 9780521653107

Paperback ISBN: 9780521653701

Chapter

4 - Mann's man's world pp. 64-83

Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052165310X.004>

Cambridge University Press

4

ANDREW J. WEBBER

Mann's man's world: gender and sexuality

The punning title of this chapter has a particular rationale. It imitates a marked feature of Mann's own writing practice, where patterns of repetition are used to accentuate strategies of imitation. My argument here will be that this repetitive formulation of acts of imitation has a particular significance for the representation of gender and sexuality, and that these categories of identity, in their turn, have a special importance for Mann's project as a whole.

T. J. Reed has commented on how Mann's narrative voice in *Death in Venice* engages in mimicry of Aschenbach's own discourse.¹ He cites a narratorial judgement of the fallen artist, 'der in so vorbildlich reiner Form . . . das Verworfene verworfen hatte' ('who in such exemplarily pure form had . . . rejected the wayward as wayward') (VIII, 521) and points out that it sounds uncomfortably close to the uninflected vigour of Aschenbach's own earlier judgements. Specifically, it is an act of ironic citation, taking up the description of Aschenbach's moral pronouncements, the 'Wucht des Wortes, mit welcher hier das Verworfene verworfen wurde' ('the weight of words, with which the wayward was here rejected as wayward') (VIII, 455). The repetition works on several levels. It is inherent in the original collocation of 'Verworfene' and 'verworfen', which is in turn ironically framed by a grotesque sequence of repetitive sounds. The narrator is, in other words, performing Aschenbach's excessive speech act by larding it with further excess, with a too vocal 'weight of words'. The reiteration later in the text clearly replays this pronounced irony, and it does so all the more tellingly by juxtaposing it with notions of 'exemplarily pure form'. It is, in other words, a form which is designed to be copied, but not in the parodic style which the narrative voice vocalises. The savage irony of this distorted repetition of the exemplar from the master's copy-book is that the model form is designed not least as a lesson in the discourse of manhood. The 'Wucht des Wortes' is a discursive template of virile ethics for young men to adopt and it rebounds brutally on the master-turned-pederast. That is, an excessively

masculine discourse marks the punishment of a man who fails to maintain the exemplary purity of his patriarchal function.

This is perhaps the most pronounced example of the economy of simulation which operates throughout the text and accounts for a large part of its irony. The title 'Mann's man's world' thus partakes of a logic of ironic mimicry which informs the narrative disposition of that world, not least in its relation to masculinity. A significant part of Mann's enterprise involves his own approximation to the idea of manhood, the mapping of Mann onto *Mann*. He is a writer who exhibits a special, acute, and ambivalent interest in manhood and rarely puts women and female experience centre stage. Many of his most significant works are driven by all-male configurations of interest, and when women are indeed focalised, there is often a suspicion that they are acting as foils or even as substitutes for men. Mann came into his chance patronymic at a time when the categories of gender and sex were beginning to be contested as never before. His own life's experience can also be understood as turning on a personal contestation of these categories. Mann, the father's name, was one that was therefore bound to become freighted with the issues of masculinity, of patriarchal conventions and their subversion, which were a key part of Mann's personal world and came to perform a no less key role in his fictional world. Mann is a writer who delights in punning play with the names of his protagonists. If he had not already registered of his own accord the persistent irony of fate produced by his own name, then Nazi propagandists, expert in the use of names, gender, and sexuality for crude ideological purposes, did it for him. They dubbed political opponents of the Mann sort 'Thomasmänner', thereby implying a sort of manhood which was not quite in order.

This essay focuses in particular on the sexually troubled character of masculinity and of male–male relationships for Mann. The partly open, partly concealed role of homosexuality in Mann's writing has received considerable attention from recent textual and biographical scholarship, most notably in Anthony Heilbut's recent literary biography, which sees homoerotic passion as the key engine of Mann's life and works from beginning to end.² Even critics of a more conservative bent have come to realise that homosexual interests in Mann's work have more than a purely symbolic value. It is certainly the case that for Mann homosexuality tends to be an object of sublimation, rarely rendered in straightforward representational ways, but, if nothing else, its sheer recursive persistence gives it the structure and the substance of real passion.

My argument here is that the direct or oblique representations of homosexuality have a paradigmatic function for Mann's depiction of identity at large and for his whole aesthetic enterprise. Homosexuality attains this

function not least through being embedded in, and revealing the workings of, the moral and symbolic order of gender. Masculinity and homosexuality are seen to be constructed here in a dialectical relationship, one of mutual dependence and of often painful contradiction. The complex of gender and sexuality is a key territory for the working out of the sort of binary oppositions which are so fundamental to Mann's intellectual grasp of things (such binaries as spirit and nature, or culture and civilisation). The working out of the binarisms of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, produces confusions both within and between the respective polarities. As such, this complex takes on a symptomatic character for the binary strategies of Mann's whole enterprise of cultural understanding.

In order to analyse the relationship between gender and sexuality, I will mobilise the categories developed over the last fifteen years by two influential theorists of gender and sexuality, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler. By extending feminist debates on gender construction to an understanding of the constitution and representation of homosexuality, Sedgwick and Butler provide a framework for working on the interaction of these concerns in Mann. Sedgwick's pioneering work in *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet* has opened up a new understanding of how constitutive homosexuality, its anxieties and its closeting are for sustaining the whole order of culture in its historic development.³ She has analysed a catalogue of literary texts and political scenarios to show how the scandal of homosexual desire functions as a foil to what she calls the homosocial, the pervasive networks of male–male desire, licensed by ostentatious homophobia. Like Sedgwick, Butler understands homosexuality as a function of social structures. In her ground-breaking *Gender Trouble* and subsequent works, she has developed a philosophy of gender and sexual identity which powerfully challenges any straightforward notion of these as natural or given, understanding them rather as made up and dressed up through acts of performance.⁴ For Butler, our identity as gendered and sexualised subjects, and the trouble which can attach itself to these key types of subject status, rely on degrees of subjection to prescribed roles. The only type of relative autonomy open to the subject is the sort which is allowed by the parodic or other strategies of mock performance.

The theories of Sedgwick and Butler will allow us to see that the troubled status of gender and sexual roles in Mann is not merely a biographical effect, but fundamentally representative in both historical and transhistorical terms. On a historical level, Mann's depiction of homosexuality is part of the more general crisis in the hold of hegemonic heterosexual culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which Sedgwick has scrutinised. In this sense, the breakdown in the sexual order of things is a culturally specific

phenomenon, an indicator of systemic problems in the culture of realism. In the late nineteenth century the ideology of knowability which sustains realism can extend to giving a name to the hitherto nameless condition of homosexuality.⁵ But the extension of knowledge of homosexuality on the level of sexological taxonomy is shadowed by obscurity, taboo and panic in the more general cultural field, where it becomes a ground for projection of broader social phobias. As Sedgwick has shown through detailed readings of the work of Mann's contemporaries, realism has a particularly fraught blind-spot or closet in the representation of homosexuality. Although the move into modernism appears to open such closures up, homophobia retains a powerful control over the representability of the homosexual subject in social and cultural contexts. The representation of homosexuality in modernism is thus only differently closeted, and homosexual desire is still constitutionally subject to the claustrophobic condition of hidden and confined spaces.

On a more general level, the work of Judith Butler can help to show that the specific structures of representation at work in Mann's man's world extend beyond the cultural models of late realism and modernism to allow an understanding of how gender and sexuality are constructed *per se*. Specifically, I would suggest that the dialectic of masculinity and homosexuality in Mann's writing is driven by structures characteristic of Butler's notion of the performative character of gender and sexuality. That is to say that both of these orders work through acts of performance in speech, behaviour and costume, acts which are citational, conforming to cultural scripting. Butler takes the founding constative sentence of identity, 'It's a girl' or 'It's a boy', assigning a sex based on genital difference, and argues that it in fact serves as the first act in the performative discourse of gender. A gender identity is pronounced for the new subject, one which has to be renegotiated and secured by the constant recital of versions of that sentence. And, as the child adopts the role of a sexualised subject, so those gender acts of speech and other social behaviour incorporate the normative sexuality which is identified with the respective gender status. The acts of the one order are implicated in those of the other: the performance of masculinity is always also a performance in relation to the oppositional structure of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In both orders, and between them, the regime of prescription is continually troubled by the mismatching of its subjects.

The representation of gender and sexuality will be shown here to operate through performativity. In as far as they work through patterns of imitation and repetition, it is argued that the orders of gender and sexuality can be understood as paradigmatic for Mann's whole aesthetic project, for his realism as for his modernism. If imitation and repetition are fundamental to any acts of representation, in the case of Thomas Mann they are self-consciously

heightened and exposed to an unusual degree. The performance of gender and sexuality according to codes of representability thus comes to function as representative (that is, imitative and repetitive) of the whole business of representation. If we recall the phrase ‘das Verworfenene verworfen’, we can see that it mimics an archetypal case of the performative, pronouncing certain forms of behaviour illicit in a judgemental gesture of casting away. The irony is that this performative condemnation is tautological, a reiteration of what should be constatively obvious. Its superfluity indicates an anxiety at the base of the representative speech act and of the order which authorises its performance.

The problem of representation, as focused on sexual identity, is a concern throughout Mann’s writing career. The examples to be considered here will cover that span, though with special consideration of the text which has identified Mann, however ambivalently, as a pioneering modern gay writer, namely *Death in Venice*. Investigation of this theme across Mann’s work as a whole will show it to function as a sort of intertextual leitmotif. It has become a commonplace of Mann criticism to see his individual texts as organised through leitmotif structures; and encounters with dissident sexual performances will be seen to undertake this role in some of the texts under review here. At the same time, the logic of emblematic repetition operates between texts and between life and text, or between the textualised life of the diary and the literary text. If individual acts in the performance of gender and sexuality are figured as repetitions or citations of culturally codified models, then their representations in Mann’s writing can be understood as a series of citational repetitions of what has gone before in both his life and his work. As leitmotifs, they attain a certain cumulative pattern and meaning, but they also partake of the darker side of Mann’s leitmotif structures, where repetition can be an empty masquerade or an uncanny compulsion.

The favoured scene for the leitmotif of illicit desire is the sea. It seems destined to act as backcloth, partly for reasons of biography and social history. Mann and his social like resort to the seaside in a regular, ritual fashion as a space which affords freedom from socialisation and workaday constraints. It provides a certain degree of openness and licence for the body, and makes a spectacle of the body’s exposure for anybody willing to view. It is, in other words, a sort of carnival space, its irregular freedoms available only as a regulated counterpoint to social order. It is a space, furthermore, which is marked as liminal, a threshold between the social and the natural. As a scene of regular resort, it is tailor-made for the leitmotif function, marking returns through time in chapters of life and over life as a whole, in texts and over the whole textual corpus. In a personal sense, it is also the place to which Mann resorts in order to write more freely, and as such it links

some of the most intense experiences of his life with the act of recording and representation. The extant diaries record examples of an archetypal scene which runs, with variations, throughout Mann's working life: the scene of the beach and the spectacle of naked or half-naked male forms. In its most telling form, its point of view is from a beach-hut, a structure at once open and enclosed, a sort of half-opened closet.

If the seaside performs such a fundamental role of structuring repetition for the meeting of life and work, it does so not least because of its peculiar material character. It juxtaposes the solid with the fluid, the apparently fixed with the recurrent. The sea becomes a particular object of fascination for Mann, above all because it is the most absolute instance of structural repetition. In the context of Mann's first major novel, *Buddenbrooks*, where the sea is a resort for the different generations, this structure is represented in the most radical fashion. The narrative flouts all conventions of mimetic representation by describing encounters with the sea, not through endless protean variety, but by brazenly copying itself. When the sea is first described during Tony's holiday it is in a classic act of realist imitation, as the order of mimesis seems able to incorporate even this liquid body. When Hanno goes down to the sea, however, the narrative resorts with him to acts of repetition; it simulates the work of mimesis, while actually reproducing verbatim the earlier reproductions of its own copy-book. If the sea is described as a shiny and metallic surface ('metallblank', I, 142, 635), then this prepares it for reflection and reproducibility; it is set to become a specular construct, 'mute and mirroring' (I, 635), as a screen for projections of word and image. The sequences mirror and parody the notion of mimetic reproduction as an act of origination, and so question at once the order of realism and the originality of the characters who move within its domain.

The leitmotif of the sea is thus established here as a framework for human scenarios of repetition and simulation. Specifically, it is prepared for recursive acts and encounters of desire which will work through the logic of the simulacrum. *Buddenbrooks* is a text which is profoundly troubled by that logic. It is famously introduced by a set-piece domestic comedy of imitation, as the young Tony is called upon to recite patriarchal articles of faith from the newly revised catechism of 1835. The comedy, cast in a bewilderment of competing languages and discursive levels, works as a crisis of linguistic performance. The text which is designed for parrot-like recital is a performative text, in the sense that speech-act theory would give to that category. That is, the act of speech performs its own meaning; the article of faith inscribes the subject as a believer. But it is only designed to be performed by a certain class of subject: adult, male, and land-owning, and while the young Tony can just about perform the performance, she can never properly qualify as

such a subject. Her grandfather seems most amused by the idea of Tony owning land and livestock, but perhaps the more fundamental discrepancy is on the level of gender: a wife can never figure as part of Tony's property. This is what permanently excludes her from anything but a simulation of this performative act. She is destined to parrot speech acts without real agency.

Encoded in this opening performance, therefore, is a significant case of gender trouble.⁶ The Buddenbrooks regime depends on an ethic of repetition or ritual imitation of what has gone before, as represented by the performative entries in the family copy-book. From the start it seems that this regime will be subject to disorder and decline, especially on the level of the performance of sexual identity. Christian's parasitic function as mimic is foreshadowed by his similarity to his father at the age of seven, where the appearance of patriarchal masculinity is 'almost ridiculous' (I, 17). When Thomas struggles to retain the appearance of patriarchal authority, he has recourse to the cosmetic methods which, by convention, should be used to heighten femininity. His masquerade exposes as much as it conceals gender trouble. This legacy of disorder is passed on to Hanno, when the masquerading father demands the postures of 'masculinity' (I, 485) from his son in the performance of a poem, and thereby transforms him into what he classifies as a 'little girl' (I, 486), robbing him of any residue of masculine performance. The disorder will culminate in Hanno's dissident sexual identity, as he is courted by Kai Mölln. It is charted against the repetitive recourse to the sea, which thus becomes metonymically invested with symptoms of that disorder. It is the scene for Tony's illicit passion for a working-class man on the 'naked beach' (I, 131); for Thomas's fatalistic confrontation with the pathological failure of his patriarchal role; and for the completion of Hanno's erotic self-absorption and feminisation.

The vaudevillian talents of the sexually dysfunctional Christian, the elaborate 'theatre' of Thomas's public life, and the investment of Hanno's dissident sexual identity in his musical composition and performance establish a pattern which will recur throughout Mann's writing. These are all intimately related prototypes for the figure of the male artist who will occupy centre stage in so many of Mann's narratives. From the start, they represent a convergence of gender trouble with aesthetic production. When Thomas makes himself up for his social appearances, he engages in what the narrative calls the 'intoxication of self-production' (I, 615). Selfhood is a thing not given, but produced and reproduced through acts of performance. And identity as male and identity as artist seem destined to confuse and contradict one another. The male role in this bourgeois context is constructed according to the conventions of patriarchy, which are compulsorily heterosexual, but which also operate according to Sedgwick's notion of homosocial desire.

This is represented in *Buddenbrooks* through the grotesque male society of the school which parodies a neo-Platonic model of the education of boys by men in the ways of masculinity. For this homosocial order of aggressive male bonding, the bond between Hanno and Kai is deemed, in the characteristic language of homophobia, to be a thing of 'filth and opposition' (I, 720). While the homosocial institution of patriarchy holds them in the grip of its 'loving embrace' (I, 742) between men, the embraces between the two of them are seen as abject and oppositional by the institution. These tentative homoerotic embraces between an aspiring musician and an aspiring writer, both producing works which offend official sensibility, seal the relationship between sexual and artistic dissidence.

The embrace between schoolboy artists is one which, it seems, has to take place on a deathbed, under the sign of Hanno's mortal sickness. Its community of passion and art is a sort of fantasy counterpart to another sort of relationship which will act as a scene of perpetual recurrence for Mann. This is a scene where lover and beloved are profoundly different, and attraction can only work through estrangement. Both types of relationship are based on Mann's personal schoolboy experience, but it is this second scene which will become the more compelling template for configurations of desire in Mann's work. Desire is engaged by similarity (not least same-sex similarity), but always through the ambivalent mediation of difference. The scene is first recreated in Mann's early story *Tonio Kröger*. It is emblematically marked as a scene for repetition by the name given to the object of love. Hans Hansen carries the name of patriarchal self-replication and so of masculine continuity; it is a name which redoubles that of the archetypal Germanic boy. It approximates to Mann's man, a convergence of patronymic with gender identity. The subject of that first love, however, is given a name which famously fails to match itself, the exotic Tonio jarring against the claims of the patronymic. Thus the pattern is set: the subject as non-self-identical, out of kilter, and the object as confirmed in his German, bourgeois, and masculine identity. And if Hans Hansen seems like a fairy-tale Hans, a stylised figure of identity through syllabic repetition, then he is suitably prepared to repeat himself again and again. The recurrence of Hans Hansen in the circular structure of the story is also a sign of a more general, intertextual recurrence, most evidently in the admittedly more complicated person of his namesake Hans Castorp in *The Magic Mountain*.

Tonio Kröger is also set to return, in the ambiguous, irregular shape of the artist, whose self-identity is questioned not least on the level of gender. If the artist specialises in mimicry, the falsity of his performance extends to the reliability of his masculinity, as questioned by the protagonist: 'Is the artist in any sense a man?' (VIII, 296). Tonio's manhood is put in question from

the very start by his passion for the man's man Hans Hansen. It is also parodied by his first encounter with artistic performance through the theatrical figure of the dance-master, whose name seems to connote an eccentric form of manhood: 'François Knaak war sein Name, und was für ein Mann war das!' ('François Knaak was his name, and what a man he was!') (VIII, 282). Just as Thomas Buddenbrook can only offer ambiguous tutelage to his son in male role-play, Knaak's strange name and correspondingly questionable manhood make him a dubious master for Tonio Kröger to follow. Thomas Buddenbrook produces himself as a man for the world, and similarly Knaak does not just present but re-presents himself: "'J'ai l'honneur de me vous représenter", sagte er' ('I have the honour of re-presenting myself to you', he said') (VIII, 282). His identity is totally performative, constructed through repeated self-presentation. Hence his pedagogic transmission of gender roles through dance classes works through mimicry, through the representation of incorrect behaviour so as to elicit disgust. When Tonio symbolically gravitates to the side of the girls, he is thus ridiculed as 'Fräulein Kröger' by a man whose by turns graceful and shrill theatre is a sort of drag, a male representation of stylised femininity, designed to represent and disgust the transgressor. The foppish woman's man Knaak and the virile man's man Hans Hansen represent in their stylised forms, in negative and positive terms, the imperative of masculine behaviour. They also represent, respectively, the spectre and the allure of homoerotic possibilities.

On the model of Hans Hansen, the same-sex object returns for Mann through male images of similarity, of symmetry and repetition. Mann develops the figure of the *Doppelgänger* in this fashion, and in the time-honoured manner of that figure, the duplication of the erotic object at once redoubles the desire and corresponds to a splitting in the desiring subject.⁷ As with Tonio Kröger, the passion for replication takes Mann back to the sea as an object at once of eternal specular similitude and of constant breaking, of utmost identity and of radical non-identity. Here the objects of his interest are always marked out by forms of specular similarity, like the Italian boys on a beach in 1934, who interest him through their graceful 'Gleichmäßigkeit' or symmetry (diary, 24 July 1934) and record their own reproducibility when one takes a photograph of the other. Similarly, after a visit to the beach in 1919, he records a recurrence of his first experience of love (for Armin Martens) and does so in a fashion which doubly recognises the repetitive character of this model passion: 'Tonio Kröger, Tonio Kröger. Each time it is the same and the emotion deep' (diary, 24 July 1919). In a reflexive sequence, art imitates life which in its turn imitates art. Tonio Kröger, the non-identical literary subject, is repeated in the writer's life, in his literary texts, and in the text which records his life, each time the same.

If the objects of Mann's homoerotic interest can encompass the Italian and the archetypally German, then it seems that the condition of being a Tonio Kröger is that of being different from both, and both are the same in as far as they are self-identical and self-reproducing. Thus the lure of that which is different, because the same as itself, can also take the form, first in biographical and then in literary terms, of a young Pole. Each time the same, but also different, the desiring subject goes down to the sea (the Baltic now become the Adriatic) and is captivated by a figure which is marked by its graceful symmetry ('Gleichmaß', VIII, 490), the Tadzio of *Death in Venice*.⁸

In *Tonio Kröger* the sea helped to transport the protagonist through its combination of dreams and intoxication. It is on board a ship, and under the influence of the sea, that he encounters the young man from Hamburg who feels encouraged to share with him a moment of poetic intimacy which, like his sea-sickness, fills the amateur poet with shame, and draws from him the masculine compensation of a soldierly greeting. Thus the pattern is set for deviations from the norm in the relations between men, sustained by sea-borne dreaming, intoxication and poetry. 'Dream' was to become for Mann a watchword for the realisation of homosexual desire, as recorded in a diary entry of 20 February 1942 (citing another entry, of 1927, from a diary which was subsequently destroyed) where an embrace with Klaus Heuser on the island of Sylt is described as a 'leap into the dreamlike' ('Sprung ins Traumhafte'). In *Death in Venice*, the leap into the dreamlike is effected, as elsewhere, under the influence of the sea. And the dream experience of the protagonist Aschenbach is represented in terms of the model of dream work developed by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams*: an encoded form which dissembles what it represents principally by the twin processes of condensation and displacement.⁹ While the patterns of performativity which were noted in the earlier texts are maintained here, they are complicated by the intervention of the sort of strategies of representation which characterise the Freudian unconscious. Freud exposes another level of representability and one particularly attuned to Mann's (by convention) unrepresentable subject: a means of signification which works through strategic distortion in order to accommodate but also outflank the forces of censorship and repression. It represents, in other words, an arrogation of the 'productive drive' ('des produzierenden Triebwerkes', VIII, 444) of the Ciceronian writer, by 'Triebwerk' of another kind, the type of drives that are produced by unconscious desires.

The Freudian strategy is signalled by the sort of discrepancy between classical surface and inner confusion which characterises Freud's analysis of Jensen's *Gradiva*. Aschenbach is represented as a rearguard classicist who resists the 'indecent psychologism of the times' (VIII, 455) after the model

of St Sebastian, one of surface elegance which hides to the last the 'inner undermining' (VIII, 453) of decay. While Sebastian is used here as a model of masculine self-control, Mann will not have been unaware of his history as an icon of homoerotic sensibility. The anti-analytic classical posture is, accordingly, itself ironically undermined from the start by a Freudian counter-figure. The lure of travel, which opens up initially into a lurid Freudian jungle of lascivious ferns and hairy palm-trees, is embodied by an anti-classical figure, a figure of 'distortion' ('Entstellung', VIII, 446). Applied thus, in isolation, to the wanderer figure, this term might innocently be read as representing only physical 'disfigurement'. When it is repeated, however, its context projects a Freudian logic back over the opening pages. The wanderer figure initiates a chain of falsified and disfigured agents, the theatrical hunchback who sells Aschenbach his ticket and the grotesquely made-up 'false youth' on the boat. And the spectacle of the second of these prompts an encoded realisation that Aschenbach's adventure, with its strange 'dream logic' (VIII, 521), is more specifically following a Freudian dream logic: 'Ihm war . . . als beginne eine träumerische Entfremdung, eine Entstellung der Welt ins Sonderbare' ('He felt as if a dreamlike estrangement were beginning, a distortion of the world into the curious') (VIII, 460). Here, 'Entstellung' demands to be read as what is standardly translated as 'distortion', the fundamental principle of dream-work in Freud's account, a term, however, which resonates for Freud both with the meaning of physical 'disfigurement' and with the etymological root of 'displacement' or 'removal'. Thus it is that this dreamlike estrangement is accompanied by the displacement of the ship onto the familiar element of dreams, the sea, accompanied by Aschenbach's visions of the 'strange shapes' of his disfigured fellow travellers, their ambiguous gestures and 'confused dream-words' (VIII, 461). This then, a scene where the framework of representative reality is shot through with the slippery representations of the unconscious, is ready for a more explicit sort of seaborne encounter between men, one subject less to the social censorship through disavowal of *Tonio Kröger* than to the censorship through distortion of the psyche. 'Das Verworfen', the depraved behaviour which we saw that Aschenbach had rejected ('verworfen'), and which ironically rebounds upon him, might thus seem closer to 'das Verdrängte', Freud's notion of the repressed, which is always set to return in disguised forms. This return of the repressed is figured not least through the sequence of disfigured figures which attend Aschenbach's journey as projections of his own self-repressive desires.

In a way which is familiar from the earlier texts, the 'false youth' on the ship embodies an exposure of the performative, a gender masquerade, but one which is distorted here in the manner of a dream figure. By performing a made-up version of youthful masculinity, the old man only accentuates

his dissidence as a male subject. The false performance of gender represents a sexuality which, for the narrative as focalised through Aschenbach, is as abhorrent as it is ambiguous. The playing of a young man in order to seduce young men represents an extension of the drag act performed by Knaak in *Tonio Kröger*. It accords with Butler's contention that the performance of a same-sex role can also be a kind of drag. Indeed Mann acknowledged this himself in his diary entry of 24 January 1934 after seeing the film *Viktoria*, where a girl performs as a female impersonator, and the confusing same-sex 'Geschlechtsverkleidung' ('disguise of sex') strikes him as being at once ridiculous and of significance for a philosophical understanding of the emotions.

A similar significance seems to be at work in the travestied gender performance here. While Aschenbach flees the attentions of the masquerader, he is unable to escape the symbolic logic of the dream. Under the influence of the disfigured, masquerading homosexual, the world tends to take on a grotesquely distorted physiognomy (again the keyword is 'entstellen' (VIII, 462)). Aschenbach's displacement into a Freudian dream world is accompanied by the sort of motions which classically characterise such worlds. As the ship sets off, the voyager has the sensation of swimming with the 'heavy and dark body' of the vessel as the engines 'work back and forth' producing a dirty slick on the water (VIII, 460). As Aschenbach beholds the drunken masquerader, he sees him 'pulled back and forth by the intoxication [*vom Rausche*]' (VIII, 462). This pulling back and forth, a rhythmic displacement over which the intoxicated subject has no control, becomes, in the language of dreams, a representation of the ambivalent lure of homosexual desire.

This sexual disfigurement is cemented by the keyword 'Rausch', which operates, as throughout Mann's writing, as a figure of Dionysiac intoxication in the Nietzschean style, but is mediated here by a Freudian logic. 'Rausch' is the intoxication which is engendered by the 'Rauschen', the rushing noise of the sea which recurrently intoxicates Mann's protagonists when they become subject to its ambiguous propulsion. The compounding of the ocean with intoxication as 'Meerrausch' (VIII, 491) completes a process which was introduced in the drunken descriptions of the sea's 'Rauschen' in the earlier texts, where it is figured in the ecstatic Dionysiac terms of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. When Aschenbach is abducted by the rogue gondolier, the strategic contamination of 'Rauschen' by 'Rausch' is exposed. As the voyager is propelled further into his homoerotic adventure through a more intimate, manual continuation of the rhythmic push and pull, 'so gently rocked by the beating of the oar by the unauthorised gondolier at his back' (VIII, 466), he is lulled by a confusion of 'Reden und Rauschen',¹⁰ of the intoxicating

rush of the sea with the obscure dream-talk of the gondolier. In psychoanalytic style, the narrative thus ensures that, in accordance with Aschenbach's later realisation, Eros is an ever-active, if encoded, presence 'in the word' (VIII, 492), operating through strategic 'Entstellung' in the word of the text.

This 'Entstellung' is at once dreamlike and fundamentally poetic. In other words, it embodies the Nietzschean element of 'das trunkene Lied' (VIII, 1069), the drunken song to which Mann alludes when he discusses *Death in Venice* in his *Gesang vom Kindchen* [Song of the Baby]. While the narrative is objectified as what he calls there a 'moral fable', it retains the vestiges of poetic intoxication, or 'Rausch', in a sort of dialogical relationship with the more impersonal narrative structure. While the structures of control and containment represent the sort of masculine bearing which Aschenbach sees as continuing a patriarchal legacy, the vestiges of the 'drunken song' sustain a more uncontrolled sense of the seductive dangers of the homoerotic. The sea bears both the poetry and the desire in the overdetermined confusion of 'Rauschen' and 'Rausch', and, as in the earlier narratives, it does so through a compulsive rhythm of repetition. The push and pull of the sea voyage is extrapolated into the rhythmic draw of the sea for the protagonist, the underlying beat of the 'drunken song'. If the homoerotic hymn is subjected to the moral regulation of narrative form, then the sea, as 'unarticulated space' ('ungegliederter Raum', VIII, 461), represents both the morally unspeakable and a radical poetic resistance to articulate discourse.

This conflation of Nietzschean intoxication with Freudian dream logic is the poetic counterforce not only to the narrative regulation of the text, but also to another generic voice which stands in tension with both, that of burlesque theatre. While the intoxication of Nietzsche's Dionysus is designed to work dialectically with the Apollonian mask, here it is harnessed instead to the masquerade of aberrant sexuality. The burlesque theatre of sexual performance produces a series of repetitive acts which correspond to, but also parodically contaminate, the rhythm of 'Meerrausch'. The sexual 'acts' already witnessed on board ship deteriorate into a more general sort of burlesque sexuality which is correlated with the 'mask' of the plague. The lip-licking masquerader on the ship is repeated in the lip-licking ambiguities of the street singer, who also masquerades as the wanderer figure from the start of the narrative. The street singer's theatrical song is a grotesque anti-form to the 'drunken song' which Mann originally envisaged, one which collapses articulate verse into the contagious rhythm of laughter. The laughing song mimics the anti-social contagion of the plague as a form of performance which demands the performative mimicry of its audience. Aschenbach's own part in this contagious performance is to succumb to the repetitive travesty of gender and sexuality. His 'Rausch' adopts the mask not of tragedy but

of the satyr play as he is made up for his homosexual adventure with the cosmetics and the costume (the red cravat and the coloured hat-band) of the masquerader on the ship. He becomes, in his turn, a false 'blossoming youth' (VIII, 519), a grotesquely made-up version of his object of desire.

As such, Aschenbach's final performance is a characteristically double one, at once a sort of hymnic repeat of classical models of homoerotic love, and a repeat of a more burlesque spectacle of abject and anomalous desire. When Aschenbach goes down to the seaside, in his act of repetition, for the final time, he shares the beach not only with Tadzio and his playmates, but also with an abandoned camera. The camera, on the one hand, stands as an apparatus of voyeurism, representing the narrative's attachment to the erotics of the gaze. It also seems to be an emblem of mechanical reproducibility, of the sort of repetition of scene which has structured the narrative and will, indeed, project beyond it into subsequent works. The abandonment of this apparatus of reproduction suggests an aporia of the work of representation, in a repetition of the scene earlier in the narrative where the Russian painter despairs of capturing the sea on canvas. Not only is a camera inherently incommensurate with the constant mobility of the sea, but it represents, by extension, the incommensurability of this archetypal object with any act of representation.

The abandonment of the apparatus of simulation also reflects the narrative's depiction of a breakdown in incommensurate relations between males. However, even as the symbolic object of the sea and its 'Rausch' elude representation, the narrative nonetheless returns to the project of representation of the artist's object of desire. The choreographic representation of Tadzio's movement seems to recuperate something of what was abandoned. It makes speakable an unspeakable desire and it symbolically articulates the disarticulated experience of 'Rausch'. While the sea as 'das Ungegliederte' ('the unarticulated') (VIII, 475) exceeds representation, its intoxicating disarticulation, the 'Gliederlösen' ('loosening of the limbs') which is the attribute of Dionysus,¹¹ is incorporated into the desired body. As they turn and then seem to loosen from each other – 'die Hand aus der Hüfte lösend' ('releasing his hand from his hip') (VIII, 525) – the body-parts gesture towards a vision of embodied disembodiment commensurate with 'Rausch'. Against the ironic emblem of the abandoned camera, Mann thus constructs a daring allegory of the representability of passion, one which has recognised the incommensurability of its constituent parts and yet constructs through the desired boy a bodily movement towards transcendence through 'Gleichmaß', which the desiring man moves to imitate. In spite of the ostentatiously ironic abandonment of his protagonist, Mann seems here to commit himself to the ultimate test of performing life through art. While *Death in Venice* exposes

the apparatus of performativity through false performances of gender and sexual identities, it also, at its end, gestures towards a truer act of performance beyond irony.

As Mann recognises in his letter to Carl Maria Weber (4 July 1920) on *Death in Venice*, the text at once sublimates and pathologises ‘forbidden love’. Whatever it may achieve in terms of the representation of homosexual passion, it seems that it must follow the model of the mortification of that passion which was demanded of Hanno in *Buddenbrooks*. It can only be immortalised under the sign of sickness unto death. The narrative thus imposes a sort of sacrifice upon itself as compensation for what it has released. In his diary for 4 February 1935, Mann records, with an exclamation mark, proposals for an early film version of the story with Tadzio transformed into a girl, indicating the powerful censorship that acts on homosexual desire in a culture of compulsory heterosexuality. This censorship is perhaps inevitably internalised to the extent that Mann restricts any substantial depiction of homosexuality to the passing phase of first love or the terminal ‘amour fou’.

Homosexuality thus functions as an episode, or episodes, in the disparately projected lives of Mann’s men. In the novella form, the episode can approach the status of the whole story. In the economy of a narrative like *The Magic Mountain*, a mock version of the *Bildungsroman* genre, it is formulated as an episode, but one which is formative for the life story, formative in the sense that it sets up a performative logic for what comes after. A significant part of Hans Castorp’s formation is a sentimental education in gender and sexuality. The novel plays throughout with the possibility that intellectual and moral experience is ultimately reducible to the erotic, as informed by the (albeit ironically edged) presence of psychoanalysis. The explicitly sexual adventure with Clawdia Chauchat is part of a general network of more implicit passions which motivate the educational interests of Castorp’s progress. Late in the novel, when Castorp comes to the realisation that his masculinity is not routine, not inspired by the rivalry with other men over female objects which the social definition of masculinity would expect, his mentor Settembrini finds himself on slippery ground, recognising that his own masculinity also inverts the social order by engaging in jealous rivalry over Castorp (III, 812).

In spite of the focal female figure of Clawdia Chauchat or the female anatomy given to the allegory of life, *The Magic Mountain* is essentially a narrative between men. While the enchanted world of the novel creates opportunities for heterosexual licence, it also charges the educational and therapeutic relations between men with a sense of seduction. The ostentatious heterosexuality of Settembrini’s professions of interest in female patients or of Behrens’s exposures in the X-ray cabinet are shadowed by the pursuit and exposure by men of the male body and mind.

Hermann Kurzke has noted that *The Magic Mountain* is a novel full of male societies of various kinds.¹² It seems that these conform to the model set out by Hans Blüher in his influential book *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* [The Role of Eroticism in Male Society] (1917). Blüher's analysis of the erotic character of masculine social and political bodies, which Mann read and greatly admired, can be understood as an understanding *avant la lettre* of the homosocial. While this analysis is informed by an essentially conservative spirit, based on the male bonds of the patriarchal state, it does challenge predominant, essentialist views of sexual identity. The homosexual male is thus seen, not as a biological gender hybrid (as, for instance, in the theories of Weininger), but as an identity which can be fully masculine. Blüher thus prefers the term 'Sexualität' to 'Geschlechtlichkeit', as the former implies for him less the idea of subjective essence than that of object choice.¹³ It is perhaps under the influence of this more constructionist view of the relationship between gender and sexuality that Mann is able here partially to disengage the homoerotic from the burlesque theatre of gender role-play. As the letter to Weber shows, however, Mann's view of homosexuality is also informed by the flip-side of Blüher's argument, by the figure of the *typus invertus neuroticus*, the repressed 'invert' whose gender and sexual identity merge in the sort of third sex 'mimicry'¹⁴ which Blüher and Mann both abhor.

While the relationship between Hans Castorp and Clawdia Chauchat is, notwithstanding the narrative's decorous failure to show the scene where Hans returns the pencil to Clawdia, the most fully sexualised experience in Mann's writing up to that point, it is also a relationship which works through a logic of substitution. The lure of Clawdia Chauchat simulates not only the childhood passion for Pribislav Hippe, but also, intertextually, the concoction of orientalism and illness embodied by Tadzio (boy and plague both being identified as coming from the East). The relationship seems always to be marked with this homoerotic template. This works less through the strategy, employed elsewhere, of masculinising physical features of the female body (notably in *Felix Krull*), than through one at once more subtle and more crude: that of the fetish. In the encounter with Hippe, the extendable mechanism of the red propelling pencil is straight out of the Freudian dream-book. Indeed, the propelling pencil features as an especially appropriate phallic symbol in the dream section of Freud's *Introductory Lectures* (*SE* xv, 155). In the context of the dream where Castorp receives the pencil from Clawdia Chauchat, the heterosexual gift is transferred in classically, perhaps parodically, Freudian style into a more homosexual scenario, which ends in a clinch between the analyst Dr Krokowski and Hans Castorp's trouser-leg as the latter desperately seeks to climb a flag-pole (III, 130). While

Mann has a very erotic woman present the phallic object to Castorp, it is a fragile version of the original (half-length in the dream and barely usable in reality). As with that other classically Freudian object, the cigar, here known as Maria Mancini, female characterisation would appear to be a device for the more homoerotic desire of the phallic fetish. The fetish, as a part-object which inspires compulsive attachment, thus serves as an index of how the episode of first love can function as formative and return in a sequence of performative acts. The novel is accordingly structured around the fetish of homosexual passion.

In its ending, *The Magic Mountain* appears to envisage the collapse of a benevolent homosocial order into the self-destruction of the man's world. Here the narrator enters into the male bonding of the text in order to confess his own pedagogical interest in Hans Castorp, as represented by an imitation of the tear in Settembrini's eye. The gesture is characteristically performative, an archly ironic expression of love, but it seems to help the final line to gesture in its turn towards the tentative possibility of love surmounting violence. The historical reality of the First World War, however, clearly deals a blow to the ideology of male eros, and in subsequent works history intervenes insistently to distort and pervert the performances of gender and sexuality.

Thus, in the satirical story *Disorder and Early Sorrow*, the narrative oscillates between bewildered excitement at new sexual manners and a sense of more general historical anxiety and melancholy. Gender roles, as a paradigm for social behaviour at large, are in a condition of performative upheaval, allowing men to use make-up and to dance with other men. But, in accordance with Butler's theories, the performative character of gender is not simply a theatre of free choice, it is more fundamentally a system of constraint and hence of duplicity. In the context of this narrative, gender performance becomes a measure of a crisis in history. The two young children are at once similar in appearance and differentiated by their gender. While the older children experiment with the boundaries of gender, the young Beisser suffers from a precocious case of gender trouble. While he performs masculinity with an excess of gesture and diction, the masquerade is not fixed in his nature; as a child of 'desolate disturbed times' (VIII, 625), his gender performance is haunted by neurotic instability.

In *Mario and the Magician*, too, the march of history is enacted in the theatre of sexual identity. The vision of Blüher's masculine eros takes on a grotesque form here in the figure of the fascist illusionist and his sexually charged games with the young men of Torre de Venere. The showman makes a show of masculinity; as one who has failed to match up to the nationalist standards of manliness by fighting in the war, he overcompensates

in his taunting of the young men with their show of sexual prowess. The performativity of the earlier texts reaches a height of parodic intensity, as the histrionic magnetiser mimics the virile postures of his audience and has them expose the performative character of their own naturalised performances. The 'false youth' of *Death in Venice* is repeated here in the magician's grotesquely false performance of femininity, a performance which casts doubt on the most 'natural' of matters. Through his imposture as a woman, the illusionist lures Mario into a homosexual embrace, thereby showing the extent to which nature is susceptible to the powers of performance.

Cipolla, the master impersonator, figures at once as an allegorical embodiment of the spectacular lure of fascism and as its parodist. If this allegory has to work, for Mann, through a grotesque performance of homoerotic seduction, then he embraces a widespread model of mixing fascism with homosexuality, one which, at least in part, betrays homophobia.¹⁵ His suggestion that *Death in Venice* reads, in retrospect, as a prophetic vision of fascism (diary, 26 January 1938) seems to suggest a similar confusion, a confusion which also plays into the demonised depiction of male–male attachments in *Doctor Faustus*. Relationships between men become infected with fantasies of power and of death, and the self-destructive excesses of the homosocial order are projected onto that which is partially assimilated with that order but is also anathema to it, the homosexual.

It is only in *Felix Krull* that Mann seems able to envisage a more benignly satirical picture of dissident forms of sexual identity. Krull embodies the ultimate instance of performativity. He is perpetually 'in disguise', so that any sense of unmasked identity is 'in fact absent' (VII, 498). What Mann calls his 'homosexual novel' (diary, 25 November 1950) reads as a celebration of the flexibility which the performative character of sexuality can allow. Here, the protagonist is a consummate embodiment of both homoerotic 'symmetry' ('Ebenmaß', VII, 284) and performative variety and interchangeability, without the pathological symptoms, moral and political, which attach to this elsewhere. He is able to perform heterosexually and homosexually by turns, never more impassioned than by the sexual double act of the brother and sister at the Frankfurter Hof hotel. Ironically enough, it takes a picaresque confidence trickster as narrator to achieve the sort of healthy candour about sexual identity which so painfully eludes the earlier texts. The perverted magnetism of Cipolla is replaced here by a magnetic allure which can break down the most entrenched of heterosexuals (the General Manager of the hotel) and which can expose the sorts of repressed desires which sustain the homosocial authority of an institution like the army. The figure of Krull seems to allow Thomas Mann a confessional mask for coming to more balanced terms both with the forms of masquerade which operate in the construction of gender

and sexuality and with those which determine his project of aesthetic representation.

Given the trouble which has gone before in both aspects of Mann's world, it is hardly surprising that this valedictory vision should also have to incorporate, in the figure of Lord Kilmarnock, the melancholy of unfulfilled desire. The performance of sexual identity remains an ambiguous quantity, like the actor Herzl in *Disorder and Early Sorrow* a troubling hybrid of 'Schwermut' and 'Schminke' ('melancholy' and 'make-up', VIII, 637). This contradictory performance, at once essentially felt and ironically constructed, is of paradigmatic significance for Mann's man's world.

NOTES

- 1 T. J. Reed, *Thomas Mann: The Uses of Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 149.
- 2 Anthony Heilbut, *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1996).
- 3 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); *Epistemology of the Closet* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).
- 4 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).
- 5 The term first appeared in two pamphlets of 1869 attributed to Karl Maria Kertbeny.
- 6 For further discussion, see Elizabeth Boa, 'Buddenbrooks: Bourgeois Patriarchy and *fin-de-siècle* Eros', in Michael Minden (ed.), *Thomas Mann* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), pp. 125–42.
- 7 Mann corresponds here to a set of writers effecting revivals of the Romantic fantasy figure in the age of modernism, as discussed in my book *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- 8 'Gleichmaß' or 'Ebenmaß' are recurrent markers of the even measurement of the homoerotic object in Mann's writing. They sustain a fantasy of similitude for the desiring subject who gauges their symmetry but can never measure up to it himself.
- 9 While most commentators are reluctant to date any serious engagement with Freud to before the early twenties, there have been tantalising suggestions that the influence dates back to the composition of *Death in Venice*. See Manfred Dierks, 'Der Wahn und die Träume in "Der Tod in Venedig": Thomas Manns folgenreiche Freud-Lektüre im Jahr 1911', *Psyche* 44 (1990), 240–68.
- 10 It is perhaps symptomatic of the discursive confusion at work in this passage that the *Gesammelte Werke* text has 'Reden und Raunen' ('speaking and whispering') (VIII, 466) rather than the 'Reden und Rauschen' in, for instance, T. J. Reed's 1983 Hanser edition of the text. 'Raunen' has occurred elsewhere in the passage, and its more ready collocation with 'Reden' would seem to account for its appearance at this point in the *Gesammelte Werke*.

- 11 As described, for instance, by Friedrich Nietzsche in 'Die Geburt des tragischen Gedankens', in *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 1, 594.
- 12 Hermann Kurzke, *Thomas Mann: Epoche – Werk – Wirkung* (Munich: Beck, 1985), p. 178.
- 13 Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft: Eine Theorie der menschlichen Staatsbildung nach Wesen und Wert* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1962), p. 52.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 15 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

FURTHER READING

- Böhm, Karl Werner, *Zwischen Selbstzucht und Verlangen: Thomas Mann und das Stigma Homosexualität* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991)
- Feuerlicht, Ignace, 'Thomas Mann and Homoeroticism', *Germanic Review* 57 (1982), 89–97
- Heilbut, Anthony, *Thomas Mann: Eros and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1996)
- Woods, Gregory, *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998)